

C.S. GISCOMBE

Early Evening

ONE

Red-tail eating a plump squirrel in one
of the elm trees. I'd meditated already, had
a hedge on the night but owned nothing past
that. Surrounded by crows in three of the other elms—who
had come suddenly out of nowhere—shouting *Caw* as he
picked that squirrel to bits; “the most common hawk in North America.”
Early evening

at Penn State, still light and no leaves yet, or they'd already fallen off—
late autumn then or early spring, two thousand something, probably
two thousand three.

Off the hip of Old Main—ten crows, maybe
a dozen crows. One is a gun, Charlie Brown; after
all, one is a gun—a single
composition of many parts. Shadows
lengthen, Charlie Brown.

TWO

Where was I?

I remember what

happened to me and can grin about that up

to a certain point. Address could be bright

and vivid or it could just be To

Whom It May Concern, or the nickname

for a whispering daemon, orders

in his hand, Charlie Brown. You might

ask, How do you know?

I'd say, Push comes

in parts. Two is a shoe, meaning

we'll play both sides of the net, as it were—each

has its "natural boundaries," its neighbors and "partially

overlapping ranges." Knowledge seems easy, but who'm I to say? Swallows

and swifts, Charlie Brown, swallows and swifts. Pull

it apart: I'm who I say, I'm in town and the night's young—it's all doable
and I'm

at your service, Charlie Brown.

THREE

Nothing—no measure—held
back. Our work
was done and I crossed the bridges
home, sweet dinner.
Hell's part
of heaven in my
book—a common lattice, tree'd,
multiplied,
rife with example. Three
is a tree—
what might you
holler down from out
of the thatch, young man?
How unambiguously has luck
served you? Lady,
I paced white drivers in their cars.
It has seemed to me at various times that
you don't just happen
across a creek or even

a river in the country but that you need
to be looking for it—water
—deliberately. In town
it's different—I shrugged like
I was counted. Down
on the coast I
was different or had been. There
is a bear.
The countryside has
seemed to shrink and then
expand in size (as I remember it).

FOUR

Went downtown to see

the new *King Kong*. Lost track of time but I kept walking—

landmarks fell into order and I held my pace among them. Where do

you *go* to think about anything? Early show, just another

ten or fifteen minutes.

What was the Commonwealth to me?

(Twenty-five townships to Centre County—the lines

follow the contour of ridges and valleys—and therein the creeks are
runs; or

colored Bellefonte, above Spring Creek, which, in the borough, forms
the boundary

—colored Bellefonte on its hill facing Catholic

Bellefonte, across Spring Creek.) Coffee-town is burning down! Where
you been, Charlie Brown?

Skull Island.

Knock, knock!

Four is a door, some

sour pranks over and over again.

I'll go on ahead, I thought, after all I'm Mister Schism. Four's

the answer and the exit too.

FIVE

Or hell's in this one *particular* part of heaven, once you know
that you are, as it were, "in the car." A main street branches, typically,
in some towns, like a hand. Something I did, something
I can do. But five is a hive, baby—abuzz, bee-loud,
tingling with consequence, anything
you want. Where *was* I? Downtown. (Now you see it and then you're
there.) In spades, a measure parallel to everything—as though
there were a fête going on and we'd left the car
to flirt with the organizers. Where was I, Charlie Brown?
I've met the Catholics too and I've been to the rural campuses
of Penn State, small-town schools for the greatest part
devoid of black students. The main campus at University Park was
beautiful with
its walks shaded by the elm trees, the tops of which are lit and merge,
in early evening,
with roofs of the old stone buildings to make a single skyline. Where
had I been going? To a séance, apparently. It was dusk
when we set out.

SIX

Biggest battle, Charlie Brown, biggest battle ever.

You don't have to go far off-campus, I was warned. Centre County's
mid-state but

it gets bad in the Northern Tier, Charlie Brown—people there call

Potter County God's Country. Route 15 drops down from New York—
odd

numbers are north-south—and en route from that I stopped, June two

thousand ten, at English Center in Lycoming County

for a general repair—another low haunt, half

raining. Tioga County was made “from parts of Lycoming County.”
There's

a location for every need, brothers, black as that might be—step inside
it. Down-

loaded maps (or ones got from generous women

at Triple-A) show the Alleghenies *traversed* by Route 15, show PennDOT

having marked Bloss Mountain Summit in Tioga County—but Steam

Valley Mountain is in fact where the weather changes and then, south

toward Centre County, one follows the base of Bald Eagle Mountain

all the way down to Bellefonte—the county seat—and

Penn State's twelve miles past that. “Incompatible,”

lions were “extirpated” from Pennsylvania by 1874 but

by 1907 they were the school mascot. Went over the ridge
and found a “loose colony,” several crows, down
the valley: not constant noise but a chain with neither
drop-off nor peak. Harsh forest, Charlie Brown. Best
to return—be back by nightfall, baby—to the school walks
and the bait trees. (What do I represent to *you*, Charlie Brown? Can
you calculate my fate? Figure on me.)

A cartographer saw an m.l. at Black Moshannon, discussed
the sighting with me at Irving’s on College Ave., fall two thousand
or so—cat shape with a long heavy tail, opaque
meeting. Denied the oppositeness, tell-
tale, so everything counts—stumble through the laundry on the line,
Charlie

Brown, like a big bear loose in the yard, or yap
all about some Greek Revivals along
the Tioga Central, above Route 6 but
south of the border. “Prevalent” story
in Lycoming County—roadside plaque there—of Doctor Reinwald
being eaten by one—a lion—while on a mission of mercy back
in 1840 but the other argument’s that he died of *exposure*, lost

in the snow, died of common mistakes, after which “wolves,
panthers, and hawks picked his carcass, not knowing
enough to respect a human corpse,” Henry Shoemaker said, “but that
was the very worst.” Hit it with a stick, Charlie Brown,
go downtown, take it to the river! N.Y. border’s *paralleled* by Route 6—
wide
with good shoulders all the way through the Northern Tier and
the Endless Mountains. I crossed that
old road at Mansfield. Hit at it
with sticks, Charlie Brown, if sticks are what come to hand—the trick
too
is making yourself look bigger than you are—but
never “turn tail.” Sun came out at Steam Valley, fifteenth or sixteenth
June two thousand ten, stopped at the truck plaza, near Woolrich,
Clinton County, meditated there.

SEVEN

Sleep well, Charlie Brown. Pray for daylight and
the devil, pray for the Commonwealth, pray for
the busy world. Evening comes for you—ballads, show
tunes, “certain melodies.” Or, mouth distended, cry
all night, lurch through; or stay back, watch
out for rain and tempest. Wait, brother, wait—predation
is crepuscular!—or be prepared
to greet the white man’s handsome
woman in the backyard, the “old
gentleman” pacing beneath the laurel. You
could be fawn-colored. What’s your real name?
Somebody said talent comes like dogs—
stupid, noisy, familiar; on television
someone said even the devil can’t *fool* a dog—remember
brother that seven is heaven itself, “a concrete expression.” White
nights, Charlie Brown. You could haunt the campsites—
troubled life, baby, hushed world—like a fat man.

EIGHT

I had no business being *downtown*, not this
late in the low season. Your voice, reduced
to a measurement, like stains on a placemat—hit
or miss. River towns differ from
valley towns. Where you at? We could
go to the movies together, Charlie Brown, but sit
separately and compare later. I had
a date with a dish. Eight,
Charlie Brown? Nothing
but a gate, a furnace of the soul, a heyday, a concrete viaduct
in sections to jump between—who's there,
in the *other* devil's name? So-and-so, from down
by the *big* gate, or from down
in the valley. You *are* the awful shadow—in
a backyard the blind man *killed* a crow. In the borough
it was belts of neighborhood to work across, then a mean little hill up
to the stadium.

Where do *you* sit to think? I had taken the Endless Mountains
—which come as far west as Susquehanna County—for a doppelgänger
but
that was an academic location, one I knew too well.

NINE

Having built a bridge across the wide mouth of a creek (where
it entered the ocean) I stalked the parapets. Centre County was coastal
somehow and the mountain rose out of it—as it does, in fact—
but from the docks and from my bridge as well;
a seaside pocked with bays was, once again, my desire (in the dream)
as well as my instruction. But I remember considering what
I wanted time to tell me. Nine is wine, I could say, a sommelier's
unlikely arrival
(later on); or nine is mine, the remainder of my body at such an estu-
ary. There's
a water gap in Bald Eagle Mountain—it's *open*—called Tangletown. Hear
the wind, baby, there it comes down the alley long after the argument,
a second
thought, a little bump in the air. You are one jaunty animal, Michi
Banjo, but don't
you make a sound.

TEN

Ten is a hen, Charlie Brown, and all the deceptions
of the world. Carol such (if you like),
carol such as that. Hide your tail as you exit
the house. Do you know
where Canada is? It's the vexed
hive of my power—address
me there. In Centre County I was
a railroad bureaucrat (two thousand four, two
thousand five), my heart was black,
as “black as the ten of spades—ten *times*
blacker than the ace.” Manage
the sorrows, Charlie Brown—what
were you looking for down here
in the mountain of tears? Evade,
enclose—it's all thief
catch thief, brother. Mister
Fats, you're a lost bet, snow
on Steam Valley. Remember your likings,

Charlie Brown—bird

on a plate's an old practice. How's
your nerves?