

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

overlying 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 deceits  
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?