

And the body, though it may cause laughter, has no sense of humour of its own, no small sparks of slow but planetary motion, no fleeting stars of word-play, only the mind has those. But then, what is the mind but body, the corn-goddess at war with the gleaming cerebroom that sweeps up for a little peace and order and doubtful cleanliness. The mind without the body couldn't laugh nor murmur nor shriek nor have tears in the eyes. It couldn't play nor run nor stumble with words, it couldn't read.

Even languages die, like species, thousands per century. All those colonised people lose theirs to the stronger power, while those overlooked by the colonisers shrink back through isolation into a tribe, a clan, a family. Whichever is our own language we can hear the grammatical and phonetic changes, the lapse that may grow into an unimaginable transformation during one lifetime, but can we spot the slow death-symptoms?

It is the brain, it is the brain endures.

But is it? Or the pillars of fire? All these streaking snippets of facts occur only because of long familiarity, long love of language and its bones and flesh, and how it grows from Primitive Human to Old High Human to Middle High Human to Modern Low Inhuman. The world in other words. Nobody else is interested.

And now, in any case, new information, from the still retained and enjoyed passion for reading, is quickly lost. So are proper names, even of well-known politicians, reporters, writers, sudden black holes although the names of stars familiar and loved from youth are remembered, and pang slightly when they die, after a longish spell of vanishment so as not to advertise their old age. And holes for what has just been seen, the original place of a word in a huge puzzle after looking up to think, or the reason for grindingly moving into one room from another, to fetch what, a black hole. The only access now to the world, the universe, is made through bits and pieces, clung to as small heroes battling against withdrawal.

A scientist on some learning programme says black holes can hide renewed creativity.

Painfully jerking, like a babe learning to walk, stagger, jerk, plonk, old age a mirror of childhood but childhood not for one second reflected in the present-bound, floor-bound eyes. The child trips towards its mother, the old towards Mother Nature, looking into a glass darkly.

## See Now Then *Jamaica Kincaid*

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Oh, and this was the word Mrs. Sweet heard, that poor dear woman, mending socks upstairs. Oh, it was the voice of the monodist, her poor, dear Mr. Sweet. Whack, came a sound from Heracles, as he made a put, a basket, and a score and yet was under par or over par, Mrs. Sweet could never be sure. The boy's head, free of his body with its entrails, filled up all the empty chairs in the auditorium of Mr. Sweet's youthful recital. Not that, not that, cried the young Mr. Sweet and he made the chairs empty again. The strings of the harp, gut and wire, broke and he bent down and over to make the instrument well again, so ancient was this instrument. The Shirley Jackson house was not known to him then. Never did he imagine then—his youth was his now—that he would live in such a house, so big, so full of empty spaces that were never used, never filled up even in the imagination, the young Heracles with his endless tasks of hitting balls, large and small, into holes of all sizes; the young Heracles, growing in youth, not growing older, growing in his youth, becoming more perfectly youthful, his many tasks to perform, performing them more perfectly, at first performing them awkwardly, not right at all, but then becoming so good he could place any ball of any size in any hole, no matter its width or depth or height. Thwack, was a sound caused by the quick movement of Heracles' hand sweeping a ball through the teeming air; whack, was the sound of his head sliced away from his body. Oh, was the sound that came out of the mouth of the monodist, Mr. Sweet, Mr. Sweet, as he saw Heracles pick his head off the floor and replace it on his neck, which was just above his shoulders, with such deftness, as if he were born to do only that, keep his head in that place just above shoulders.

Young Heracles, his tasks, so many, so many: wash the dishes, put them away, clean the stables, walk the horses, fix the roof, milk the cows, emerge from his mother's womb in the usual way, slay the monster, cross the river, return again, climb up the mountain, descend on the other side, build a castle on the top of a hill, imprison the innocent in a dungeon, lay waste to whole villages to the surprise of the villagers, trap and then skin the she-fox, eat his green vegetables and his meat too, kill his father, not kill his father, want to kill his father but not kill his father, keep his head on his shoulders, survive the threshold of night, await the dawn, take a pickaxe to the iris (his eyes, not the flowers growing in his mother's garden), seize the sun, banish the moon, at every moment his skin so cold, the fire at his back, cross the road by himself, tie his



shoelaces, kiss a girl, sleep in his own bed. Ah, gee Dad, said Heracles, as he raced to get a glass of water from the kitchen sink to quench the unquenchable thirst he had acquired after one of his many journeys, Sorry, Sorry. Heracles had then collided with Mr. Sweet, hitting him squarely in the head, causing starry lights to shoot out of his ears and nostrils and eyes, sending Mr. Sweet into a coma from which he emerged many years later and immediately he cut off Heracles' head again. But that Heracles, blessed with a natural instinct to live that would never, ever abandon him, picked up his head and put it back on—again, where it rests to this day, in the rising just above his shoulders.

[...]

But Mr. Sweet was in his studio above the garage, where he always liked to be, it was not a funeral parlor, it's only that he was in mourning and conducting a funeral for his life, the one he had never led, and Mrs. Sweet's calling him interrupted this mourning, she was always interrupting, his life or his death, she was always interrupting. The studio was dark, then, now, but not completely, everything could be seen clearly but as a shadow of itself. How Mr. Sweet liked that, everything a shadow of itself. But there was that voice of Mrs. Sweet, not the shadow of a voice, she was not capable of that, a whisper, conveying her deepest feelings with a glance, or just stopping her breathing outright, just stop, stop, stop, right now. Mr. Sweet, she would say at the top of her voice, her voice sounding louder than a town crier's, louder than a warning of impending disaster, she was so loud, Mrs. Sweet was so loud. Mr. Sweet, can you please take the garbage out? Sl-aap. Sl-aap, came the sound of his feet that were snug in a pair of flannel slippers as he dragged them across the floor and his rage was so great that it almost brought the now dead nine-headed snake back to life. In any case his rage was such that it caused his chest to rip open and his heart exploded into pieces but Mrs. Sweet, so used to mending socks, applied her skills to this task and soon had Mr. Sweet all back together, his heart in one piece inside his stitched-back-together chest. That little jerk almost killed me again, said Mr. Sweet to himself, and it's not the last time, he said again to himself, and he was reminded of that time, not so long ago then, he was coming down the stairs and Heracles was going up the same stairs and they met in the middle and by accident collided and by accident Heracles, to steady himself from this collision, grabbed Mr. Sweet's entire testicles and threw them away and he threw them with such force that they landed all the way in the Atlantic Ocean, which was Then and is so Now hundreds of miles away. The testicles then fell into that great body of water but did not produce typhoons or tidal waves or hurricanes or volcanic eruptions or unexpected landslides of unbelievable proportions or anything at all noteworthy; they only fell and fell quietly into the deepest part of that body of water and were never heard from again.

Oh, the silence that descended on the household, the Sweet household, as it lived in the Shirley Jackson house: on poor Heracles, who paused for a very long time at the top of those stairs; on his sister as she curled up in her bed and went to sleep "like a single bean seed planted into the rich soil of a treasured vegetable garden; Mr. Sweet removed his fingers from the strings of the lyre; on the dear Mrs. Sweet, who froze over her mending, her knitting, the darning needle in her hand, the knitting needles in her hands just about to pierce the heel of some garment, just about to make complete some garment. And then gathering up herself, surveying what lay in front of her, Mrs. Sweet sorted among the many pairs of socks she had been mending over and over again and removing a pair, she fashioned a new set of organs for her beloved Mr. Sweet, trying and succeeding in making them look identical to the complete set of testicles that had belonged to him and had been destroyed accidentally by his son, the young Heracles. And when Mr. Sweet fell into a sweet sleep of despair after not knowing what to do regarding his lost testicles, Mrs. Sweet sewed the mended socks into their place, the heels of the socks imitating that vulnerable sac of liquid and solid matter that had been Mr. Sweet's testicles.