1980

Trying

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That night, he had a vision. He was in Heaven. The ground was a field of flowers, unending in duration and beauty both; even the fleshy orchids, even the tulips’ flambeaux: were sized to queen anne’s lace and baby’s breath, evenly as teeth. Everyone flew. The wings were simple, like hands of cards of down, but efficacious. No more preparation, huff or flex or long upgathering, than the casual shrugging off of Earth a wood dove shows: and whole congregations performed their alleluias by the easy dip and rise of the wren or the swallowtail. And, like birds, they’d marry in the air. The women moved their bodies in and out with the smoothness and music of concertinas. The men were hard-buttocked. Legs opened lazily overhead and made circles for hours like ceiling fans. Sometimes, at night, what seemed a kind of atmospheric energy gathered around somebody’s skull, then crackled in great charged worms of light, and somebody else perhaps a mile off would lean like a typesetter’s slant-mark in the sky and softly go, Ah. So this was thinking in Heaven. The only sign of what he supposed to be age was a kind of accumulated grace, a swan’s or diamond cutter’s, in certain turns of neck and wrist. The food was just there, on shelves of leaves, as were reed-plaited kits of pen nibs, bits of wire, yarn, penny nails.
But these went mostly untouched. There was no need; and no effort. Nobody tried, though he may have watched days. The weather, always, was blank-paper perfect. And he woke weeping, with a shiver even
December air couldn’t cause, and paced the stained oak floor he’d laid himself, paced maybe an hour, until the morning fully filled its first thin skin of light, and his gristmill circling had ground the fear down. He’d need to get moving. He cracked the ice in the porcelain wash-basin, splashed the last of it off. The basin and matching pitcher, flower decorated: tiny intricate blooms a British ceramicist set regularly on the surfaces, beautiful, almost the small near-uniform dots of a tabloid photograph forming, for the proper distance, a well-snapped scene: some tinkerer straining a biplane together, some sleepless shlep over something just this side of a workable phonograph: news from the music world, from the flying. Trying.