

*Invocation:*

O Flow! O Flow! Where did you go?  
*Look inbetween the To and Fro.*

O Flow! O Flow! Are you all right?  
*Use vision other than eyesight.*

O Flow! O Flow! Will you return?  
*The universe must be unlearned.*

O Flow! O Flow! How do you start?  
*A seed exists inside the heart.*

O Flow! O Flow! Is there an end?  
*Each idea wants us to pretend.*

O Flow! O Flow! Explain some more.  
*To suffer is to seek the cure.*

O Flow! O Flow! Who can assist?  
*All twisted things at last untwist.*

There once was a little boy with an unusual name. It was Flow. On the day he was born, his parents looked at each other and began to laugh. They could not think of what to call him. Not at all. They had talked about it many times during the pregnancy, but somehow the conversation never resolved, trailing off into laughter. Flow's father would smile at Flow's mother and Flow's mother would smile at Flow's father, but neither his mother nor his father came up with a convincing suggestion. In fact, they did not come up with any suggestions at all.

On the night before Flow was born, his mother said to his father, "Dear, we had better come up with something, because this little rascal is coming tomorrow. I can feel him getting ready." But Flow's father only shook his head and grinned. "I feel it too," he admitted, putting his hand over his wife's extended belly, "but I don't know his name yet." Flow's mother admitted she didn't know either. The next morning she packed a little suitcase for the hospital and, without waiting for any particular sign that Flow was definitely coming, directed her husband to the car.

On the ride to the hospital they decided what both of them knew all along: they would not choose a name until a name chose itself. They did not know how the name might do that, but they agreed it would have to. "We are terrible parents!" Flow's mother joked as they pulled into the hospital parking lot. "Monsters!" agreed Flow's father, who put the car in park and giggled. "I don't know if he'll ever forgive us." The couple took a moment to think about that pronouncement and laughed.

Then Flow's father let himself out of the car and walked around the vehicle to the passenger side. He opened the door for his wife and helped her swivel her swollen body so she could arise from her seat more comfortably. She nodded her head appreciatively

and accepted her husband's arm for support. "Let's not say anything to the doctors," she suggested. "I don't want them to know." Her husband patted her on the shoulder and assisted her as she stood up. He said, "We can tell them it's a secret and we don't dare break it because we're very superstitious."

As it turned out, nobody asked. Unlike so many births in this challenging world, Flow came out very easily, as soon as the doctor finished saying, "Now let's see." He was a quiet baby, who did not cry or gasp for air. He seemed to understand right away that a great many people needed to hold him for one reason or another before giving him to his mother, and he submitted to this routine very peacefully, rolling in whichever direction made it easiest to cut the umbilical cord, wash away the juices of birth, or take a first weight and measurement reading. Throughout these proceedings, he stared without blinking at whoever was holding him, and he smiled.

It was this general agreeableness on Flow's part that kept anyone in the room from carrying on at all about what his name was. The hospital was a very busy place with a great many people to look after, and most of them were not nearly so cooperative as Flow. In fact, being sick, they were usually more feisty and demanding, and often hogged the limited attention of their caregivers. That behavior had the inevitable effect of eclipsing the sparse needs of anyone who was simple to take care of, and so Flow took his place in his mother's arms without further ministrations.

He was happy there. He looked into his mother's eyes and smiled his biggest smile yet, but still made no sounds. His mother looked back at him with great love in her eyes. She did not look away for some time, as if she were receiving a message. When she finally looked up at her husband again, she said, "He will tell us what his name is.

He's the only one who knows." The husband began to laugh. "At least one of us does!" he exclaimed. The husband and wife laughed and embraced.

"Don't you think he wants to tell us?" Flow's mother asked, inviting her husband to study the baby for confirmation. Looking into his newborn son's eyes, he said suddenly, "Actually, yes. Why don't you tell us, little fellow?" He leaned forward and gave the boy a soft kiss on the forehead.

It is true that the direct application of love in the form of a kiss will often precipitate a miracle, although one must not be counting on that result. There is no question that Flow's father was not. He stood up from the hospital bed and smiled at the baby, fully expecting to wait several years for a name. His patience was obvious. There was no need to rush things. The method of naming the baby was now decided, having decided itself, as originally hoped. But Flow's little brain was awash in his father's tender affection.

"Flow," the baby said.

The husband and wife looked at him for a moment and then at each other.

The baby repeated himself: "Flow." He did not say anything else. Nothing to explain what he meant. Nothing to explain that he meant. Nothing at all. He laid quietly within the cradle of his mother's arms and smiled widely.

"He just said Flow," said Flow's mother, eyeing the boy curiously.

"He said it twice," the father noted.

"Should we tell anyone?"

The question was hardly out of her mouth when the door to the hospital room opened and a nurse walked in with a chart. She congratulated Flow's mother and father

and leaned over to enjoy the cute newborn baby. “Isn’t he adorable?” she said, staring into his eyes, which never blinked. “We’ll need his name for the birth certificate,” she said, continuing to look at him.

Flow’s mother and father half-expected him to pronounce it a third time, but the boy spoke no more. He stared up at the nurse with his mouth open wide, smiling, and then he shook all his limbs as if for a moment he were dancing. He leaned his head back against his mother and rapidly opened and closed his mouth several times, but no words came out, only windows of shining saliva.

“His name is Flow,” his mother said. The nurse took her pen from the clipboard and began to write the information down.

“With a w?” the nurse asked.

“With a w,” said Flow’s parents.

Flow’s first days at school were very enjoyable for him. Surrounded by other children he seemed to smile all the time, as if he already saw friendships before he knew anything about anyone. Nor was his teacher, Miss Green, excluded from this easy acceptance, and as a result she found herself immediately asking him if there was anything specific he might like to do.

Flow was sitting at a tiny table with three other children, who appeared to be a little uneasy in their new environment, which was very different than being home. He looked at each of them carefully before answering. The girl on his left was wearing a pretty red dress with matching red bands in her pigtails. She kicked the leg of the table over and over without knowing it. The boy across from him was squeezing his face into

a tiger growl and sometimes grumbled. His hands clenched the edge of the table like two tiny claws. The boy beside Flow held the spent end of a green crayon in his hand and liked to look at it in his palm now and then to see if maybe it was going to change colors or do a trick of some kind.

“Drawing,” Flow said.

Miss Green approved, but invited him to move to the drawing table, where the paper and markers were kept. Flow agreed and stood up. The other children stood up too. They walked with him to the table and began to draw. They made tigers and houses and families and lots of green clouds in the sky and the little girl with the red dress and red bands in hair drew a unicorn that was crying.

To Miss Green’s surprise Flow did not draw anything at all. He sat with a yellow marker in his hand and smiled at all the other children at the table as they scribbled on one paper after another, which he gathered neatly together and put beside his own blank sheet. When he wasn’t gathering papers, he simply moved the yellow marker in the air and carefully watched it wherever it went, never blinking.

Miss Green was tempted to correct Flow, but never did. She watched him trace an invisible yellow design in the sky and sometimes she believed she understood what he was making without actually seeing it. She recognized stars and the sun and a whole ring of planets and space creatures and she felt very lovely inside about being a teacher and doing her best to help children, who were clearly very special. The thought that this one child in particular was not drawing correctly simply vanished from her mind and because she was free to daydream for a moment she let herself sketch an invisible drawing of her own with her finger in front of her eyes.

As the drawing session continued, Miss Green came out of her daydreaming and walked over to the table where Flow and the other children were working. She knelt down beside Flow and asked him if she could look at the pictures, which were now in a pile. He did not say yes or no, but smiled at her very agreeably, so Miss Green helped herself to all the new art, remarking favorably over the terrific details in each and every drawing. She especially liked the crying unicorn because it reminded her of a fairy tale, and the girl with the red dress and red bands in her hair said, "I like school very much, Miss Green."

Miss Green told the girl she was happy she liked school. The two boys piped up that they liked school too, and asked if they could come back tomorrow for more school, which they liked very much, they repeated. Miss Green said they could definitely come back and the boys both cheered. "I'm a tiger!" declared the boy across Flow, and he growled very bravely. "I'm a tiger too!" the other boy said. Then he started to growl, but stopped right away. "I'm a magician!" he corrected. Then he opened his palm and held out half a crayon that was not green anymore, but red.

Although she had not seen the original crayon, Miss Green feigned amazement over this sudden transformation. She complimented the boy that before long he would pull a rabbit from a hat or turn a stone into a bird. These ideas made a bright light shine in his eyes and he shook the red crayon eagerly.

"But what did you draw?" Miss Green asked Flow, looking at his paper with a willingness to pretend it contained something.

"Flow," he replied, holding the paper up for her.

“Is it you?” Miss Green asked, studying the likeness. Flow looked at the paper for a moment and smiled at its perfect whiteness, which he seemed to absorb with eyes. When he turned them toward Miss Green, she could almost believe they contained the missing pictures.

Over the next few years Flow engaged in his school life very successfully. His teachers consistently remarked to his parents that Flow was a strong student who wanted to learn whatever was learnable. Many of them even expressed spontaneous surprise, once the meeting with Flow’s parents was taking place, that come to think of it, the boy never seemed to prefer one activity over another, but always concentrated very intently on whatever was put before him, no matter what it might be. Then a few revised the idea by saying that things were never exactly put before Flow at all, but rather ended up there as if by chance, and he studied them willingly. All of them. It was as if their arrival were all the reason in the world.

Of course, Flow’s parents had become somewhat accustomed to this behavior in their son, having seen it for many years. They themselves were hardly surprised, for instance, to find out he behaved the same way at school as he behaved absolutely every day in their home since they brought him back from the hospital. In fact, they often remarked to each other that Flow had been behaving this way, if it were possible, since before they brought him back.

It was a curious sentiment, but they both believed it more and more the more closely they looked at it. Why had they not been able to come up with a name for him? Why at that time did they feel no concern about it whatsoever, even as they arrived at the

hospital parking lot to bring Flow into the world? In light of Flow's nature, there was only one convincing explanation. As unlikely as it sounded, somehow Flow had been affecting things at least nine months before he was born, maybe more.

His parents advanced toward this mysterious conclusion with great wonder. They were not the kind of people who looked for implausible answers. They made choices for Flow's education that were based on very sound reasoning about what a boy needs from the world to find his place in it comfortably and succeed. From the very beginning, they put away money in small increments that would accumulate over time into the equivalent of a full college tuition, as predicted eighteen years into the future, including inflation. Yet for all the fine and sober leanings of their general thinking in regard to their son, they could not shake the notion that one way or another he definitely existed before the day on his birth certificate or the day of his conception.

But what to do with this thought? There was no one to confide it to, no particular specialist of whom Flow's parents might avail themselves. They occasionally laughed at the reactions they would receive from other parents about the subject. Flow's father, in particular, liked to pretend he was the father of one of Flow's friends after receiving the news about Flow's special presence. "Yes, John, of course," he liked to say, pacing the carpet very pensively, scratching his chin, pretending to respond to himself. "Now that you mention it, little Bulwinkle exhibits that same exact quality. What did you call it? Pre-influence? Only," he liked to add, winking at his wife, "in Bulwinkle it is far more pronounced!" And here Flow's mother usually cut her husband off, slapping him on the shoulder playfully and shaking her head.

Still, she agreed with him that telling other people, for all the reactions the notion might provoke, was not very likely to elicit unbiased support, which was mostly what they wanted. That desire was the most curious part of the experience for them. It seemed to propel itself forward like a misplaced sea squid, seeking deeper waters in which to disappear, and finding them only when Flow was in the room. It was a long time before Flow's parents figured this correlation out, and they puzzled over it greatly when they finally did.

"How come," Flow's mother began to ask, "we get worried about Flow when he isn't around? But," she continued, waving off John's premature response, "when Flow is around, we forget to worry at all?"

"Vera, let's ask Flow," John replied.

"Ask me what?" Flow inevitably said, having slipped into the room on some secret mission of his own, finding his parents in the dialogue.

"Put down that house plant," John instructed him.

"I'm not holding any," Flow stated innocently, having put down the plant, or whatever object was involved.

"Your father and I love you very much," explained Vera.

"Yes," said Flow's father, staring into the boy's wide eyes, looking into them for an answer to a question he never asked. The staring was enough. The boy was totally open to any question and therefore no question ever came.

"We should eat dinner," Vera said.

"Flow is hungry," Flow agreed.

One day Flow returned from school very early. He went into his room and pulled down the shades. The room became dark. Sunlight came through the narrow slits between the blinds and made a pattern of horizontal stripes on the wall. Flow sat down under the window with his back against the wall underneath. He was still a small boy and his head did not reach the window sill yet. He crossed his little legs and adopted a posture of patient waiting. Was he waiting for his height to increase and his head to appear in the stripes on the opposite wall, like a planet in eclipse?

He began to breath very gently. After a while his breathing became so soft that he hardly heard anything else. It was a curious phenomenon, a kind of opposite he was not able to explain, not even to himself. But explanations were also unnecessary. The effect of noticing more on account of reducing what there was to be noticed was sufficient in itself and Flow enjoyed the contradiction, trying his best not to move a muscle, to let his breathing breath itself. He slipped out of the process completely, watching the stripes on the wall as they climbed imperceptibly to the ceiling. The shadow spaces between them became wider and wider. He believed they were like him.

At dinner that evening he told his parents there was more where there was nothing than where everything else seemed to be. He made the pronouncement very naturally, as if it were a normal round of dinner conversation. "That's how come," he suggested, but in reference to what?

The next day Flow went to school in his normal way. He arrived in the kitchen at precisely the moment his mother snapped the lock shut on his lunch box, which had a cartoon elf on it. His mother's hand reached downward with the lunch box and Flow's

hand reached upward to receive it, like a baton passed by runners. Vera did not even look for the boy first. Instead she turned away from him and playfully ran around the far end of the kitchen to meet Flow at the front door, where he arrived with a kiss that landed on his kneeling mother's cheek.

"You be a good boy," she said, waving from the front door as Flow walked across the front yard, not looking back. He reached the street and a station wagon glided to a stop right in front of him. The door popped open and Flow climbed into the back without breaking his stride.

On the ride to school Jason's mother asked Flow several times where his backwards clothes were. Jason was wearing his pants inside out. His shirt and coat were on backwards with the zippers and buttons behind him. "It's backwards day," Jason's mother said cheerfully. Jason giggled.

"I'm sad," he announced playfully, interpreting his laughter.

Flow also laughed. He loved Jason, who believed he was a tiger no matter how often Mr. Yarrow explained it was not recess time anymore. Jason was therefore a tiger, because he could not be told otherwise. On this unusual morning, Flow asked him what was the backwards of a tiger.

"There isn't one," Jason said firmly.

"That's right, Flow," Jason's mother confirmed, pulling the station wagon into the school parking lot and stopping beside the walking path in front of the building. "Have a terrible day," she told the boys as they stepped from the car.

Over the years Jason had come to consider Flow's opinion very valuable. As the two friends walked toward the front door of the school, he mulled it over a bit that maybe there was a backwards of a tiger.

"Is it a lion?" he asked.

"Flow doesn't know," Flow reported.

"Is it a snake? It's a snake!" decided Jason.

"A backwards is usually what most wants to be."

This was a cryptic remark and Jason processed it the best he could. His little fists tightened and he banged them against his sides.

"I most want to be a tiger!" he exclaimed.

"You're its backwards," Flow agreed.

Happy about this outcome, Jason chirped several times, jumping up and down on the walking path. Then he regained his composure with a deep growl.

When the school day began all the children sat with their backs to the front of the room and laughed uncontrollably as Mr. Yarrow repeatedly objected, arguing over and over again that they were taking backwards day much too far. At times he walked into the middle of the room and turned some of the children's chairs around to face the front of the room, but once he returned to the blackboard, those children turned in the other direction again and faced away from him.

Mr. Yarrow did not like backwards day. He was the only teacher who opposed it and he made a point of saying so on every occasion when the theme interrupted things,

which it frequently did. In his opinion, which he stated several times, only Flow was acting sensibly.

“Sit like Flow does,” he said, singling Flow out as a model student for the day with all his clothes on correctly and his eyes on the teacher. In fact, it was strange how Flow watched him, never looking anywhere else, never blinking. After a few attempts to make the other students do the same, Mr. Yarrow finally gave up, happy enough to give instructions to one ideal pupil instead of none.

That morning the math lesson was very difficult, but it went very smoothly, as Flow answered all the questions, raising his hand and waiting his turn, although no one else wanted one. At recess this exclusive participation backfired on Flow, and for the first time in his life he became the object of abuse by the other children, many of whom were never at a loss to create one. They teased him mercilessly for having his clothes on correctly and eventually formed a circle around him to disrobe him as punishment. He submitted to this treatment without complaining. Before long he was naked from the waist up and about to lose his sneakers.

“You’re not backwards!” shouted a boy named Clifford, who liked to play the bully because he was big for his age. Flow was small for his age. He was a thin child with fine hair and all his baby teeth. “We’re not giving your clothes back unless you put them on backwards!”

Flow bent forward and unlaced his sneakers, which were tied with elegant knots that slipped free with surprising ease. Once his shoes were untied, he pulled them off and handed them to Clifford.

“You can’t give them to us,” Clifford objected. The other children were losing interest in the game.

“It’s the backwards thing to do,” Flow replied.

“He is backwards!” Jason shouted, defending his friend. Then he growled at a Clifford like a ferocious tiger, curling his claws.

The rest of the day Flow persisted in listening to the teacher when no one else did. He sat with his face toward the blackboard and learned things about all the units of measurement and sometimes he asked why a quart was called a quart and a gallon was called a gallon and each time Mr. Yarrow explained the reasons Flow looked into his eyes very deeply and never blinked or said a word.

It seemed to inspire Mr. Yarrow that all this good information was coming out of him and he decided to outsmart backwards day by rolling a free-standing blackboard to the back of room so it would face the students who were looking in that direction. As he got their attention in this manner and demonstrated all the conversion principles for the many units of measurements, Flow stood up from his chair and walked to the front of the room, which was now empty. He approached the blackboard there and found a small corner without any writing and picked up some chalk.

It was a long time before Mr. Yarrow finished reiterating his presentation on pints, quarts, and gallons, and Flow spent all that time scratching something on his small area of blackboard, frequently erasing it and refilling it with new ideas. It would be impossible to recover them and perhaps Flow intended it that way. When Mr. Yarrow concluded the second attempt at his lesson plan, he told the children there was really no

use facing this way or that way, since now there was a blackboard at both ends of the room, so why not face forward after all? The children did as they were told and turned their chairs around to face Flow.

Flow discontinued his writing. One by one he looked into the eyes of his classmates, smiling at all of them as friends, including Clifford. He never blinked or broke eye-contact with anyone, but waited for them to look away first. When the last child did so, Flow put his small piece of chalk on the tray underneath the blackboard and picked up the eraser, which was larger than his hand. He stared at it for a few seconds, as if reading all the smeared words it now contained as meaningful dust. Then he pushed the eraser against the surface of the blackboard and, starting from the last letter first, erased the single word “wolf.”

That evening Flow decided to shave off all his hair. It was an idea favored by chance, not premeditation. As it happened, Flow’s fine black hair was becoming rather long at this time, longer than usual. It covered his ears almost completely so that they poked through the way an elf’s might. The style was not bothersome to Flow, who liked to listen to his hair, which sometimes sounded like the ocean, sometimes like a miniature harp. He was very happy to hear his hair tell stories of its journey from his scalp and all the steps along the way until becoming long enough to speak to him.

It was the hair growing over his eyes that initiated the haircut. The bangs were growing very quickly, weaving into his sparse eyebrows. At a certain point they broke their bounds and dropped directly into Flow’s field of vision, never leaving it completely. Flow sat for hours in his room, studying the hair, observing the visible tips of it, each of

which was unique. There were some that split in two like the tongue of a serpent, while others bore the slightest hint of retreating into incipient curls. Still others, especially when natural light struck them indirectly, betrayed a tendency to fade from black to shades of rust and light pink. Yes, light pink.

From behind the hair, it was sometimes hard for Flow to tell what was true observation and what was the effect of his eyes deceiving him. This possibility of a discrepancy between the real and the perceived was very engaging for Flow, who liked to see things as they were, his faculties of apprehension notwithstanding. His interest perked so much that his ears poked through his hair very noticeably.

To resolve the riddle, Flow sat down at his little desk and felt around beneath the desktop for the circular knob on the primary drawer. Once found, he slid the drawer open and wriggled his hand into the far corner beyond a collection of rubber stamps, ink pads, foil wrappers, and compasses. When he pulled his hand out of the drawer, it held a tiny pair of scissors with rounded tips and aquamarine finger holes. Throughout this scavenge he kept his eyes fixed on his bangs, never blinking.

Flow slid his thumb and index finger into the holes in the scissors and lifted it up to the area of hair he was reviewing. At this point the scissors became visible to Flow and upon seeing it he worked the blades a few times as if they were the lips of a grazing animal. “Snip, snip!” Flow said, although on whose behalf he was speaking, whether his own or the scissors, was impossible to tell.

At first Flow collected his specimen very delicately, although systematically as well. He decided it was best to take a sampling of hair, but also to leave some at the original length as a means of comparison. He closed his left eye for a moment and tried

to take a reading from the inside of how sharply his right eye, the open one, functioned on its own. Satisfied with the measurement, he proceeded to open his left and close the right one, repeating the inner assessment, this time for the other side. The results were not clear in one test, so Flow repeated the procedure three times, confident afterwards that his right eye was definitely less effective at close range.

That determination reached, Flow directed the scissors to the tips of hair hanging over his right eye, the weaker one, which took its last inquisitive peek before the cutting began. Ever gracious, Flow permitted the weaker eye a generous portion of parting study time as a sort of farewell, and also for targeting purposes. Although the right eye was weaker, it was pivotal for launching the experiment, an empirical irony that was not lost on Flow, who may have been pausing only to savor it.

Resuming, Flow gripped all the hair that was hanging over his right eye and slid the blades of the scissors around it, also sliding his fingers in such a way that they held the strands absolutely at the bottom. Because his hair was so fine, it was easy enough to slice an inch of it free without any strain. The severed lock fanned out between his thumb and forefinger like a bouquet of flower stems. It was an interesting reaction, and for a second Flow studied it, noting the unexpected increase in rigidity in the hair once it was free of his head. He decided to return to this surprising property change later if time permitted, as it wasn't his original subject.

In fact, Flow was not originally interested in the top end of the extracted hair at all, but only by happenstance. As a boy who was interested in just about everything, Flow was accustomed to these eruptions of peripheral interest, and liked to catalog them

as challenges to his memory, which was full of many things. He made a note to himself to remember the top ends and photographed them with his eyes.

The next thing to do was turn them over and embark on the real meat of the experiment. From his new vantage point over the bottom ends of the hair, Flow immediately observed that they did in fact have a curious rust and pink luster at the furthest tips, not to mention the confirmation of the incipient curling and the splits in some of the ends. Still, it was the coloration that made Flow's young mind really swim, and he darted all around the room, exposing the extracted hair to a variety of light sources, natural and artificial.

He also held the hair sample at every possible distance from his eyes, up close against the left eye, the stronger one, and also far, far away, so that it looked like he was offering the hair very warily to a dangerous barber. He tried as many distances between these two extremes as he could and in every case the results were the same: the tips of the hair contained a definite pink hue. At last Flow put the hair on his desk beneath the circular lighting cast downward by his lamp and walked across the room until his back was against the door and his head against the doorknob. Again he observed the subtle pinkness like a trace of radioactivity.

Flow stood at this distance for quite some time, considering these findings, but uncertain what they meant. He had expected the pinkness to disappear as soon as he had the clipped hair in his hands, supporting the predictable conclusion that sometimes the limitations of human eyesight will affect what one sees. In this case, a pink residue caused by myopic observational proximity. Yet the facts argued otherwise. There was more than a phantom. There was actual pink.

Committed to experimental method, Flow decided to conduct the final stages of his observations even though they no longer seemed pivotal. He returned to his desk and tipped the top of the lamp so it shined against his forehead, where an undisturbed sheet of longer hair continued to hang over his left eye, the stronger one. He closed the right eye and started intently at the remaining portion of his bangs, looking for a pinkness to match the pinkness of the hair on his desk.

It was not hard to find. In fact, it was plainer than day, which was why Flow had conducted the experiment in the first place. He stared from the hair in front of his eye to the hair on his desk and adjusted to the inevitable conclusion that the pinkness was real and what he originally saw was a fact, not an illusion. This admission arose in him with an accompanying feeling of grave responsibility, which he could not put into words, not even silently. He did not know how to explain it or further unravel the idea, but it persisted for a long time.

At last it gave way to a great rush of curiosity and, forgetting all about the larger implications, Flow took the scissors into his hand and began to snip away at the section of hair above his left eye. Having seen its peripheral pinkness, Flow was not surprised to observe that characteristic again with the hair in his hand. Nor was observing it the true purpose of his resumed chopping, which did not relent. In a matter of minutes, Flow cut off upward of fifty snippets of hair from all quarters of his scalp, holding each one under the lamp, in front of the window, beside his motor-cross nightlight. He dipped several specimens into a glass of water on his nightstand, held a few in front of the slight gleam from his digital clock, put a couple in his CD radio, where an internal light stayed on if

the disk tray was open. In every case the latest clump contained the same pink sheen at the tip, never varying.

Then Flow began applying the laws of probability. It seemed to him, as he sat in his room among so many liberated tufts of his own fur, that certainly one of them, and more likely quite a few, were not actually tips in the formal sense, but rather middle portions transformed into tips when the hair below them was removed. If so, how was Flow to explain that they too, once cut free, contained the same pink highlighting that the real tips contained? There was no way around it. No matter where the hair came from, whether the bottom, the middle, or the top of his original hairdo, the ends of the hair were indescribably pink.

Flow confirmed this universal result by chopping off his hair all the way to the scalp so that only the scruffiest dander remained. He was mystified, electrified. There was something entirely thrilling about stumbling onto a dormant puzzle in the depths of his own familiar body. As he ran his hand over his butchered head, it disappointed him that there was nothing left to harvest.

Which is when his former mental note resurfaced and he remembered his intention to examine the tops of each extracted clump of hair at a later time. There was no better time than now, since his head was bereft of covering. In fact, now was the most appropriate and perfect of times.

Flow recognized very naturally when one thing led seamlessly to another. It was the one quality about him that defined the shape of his life. In this instance, as in all the others, the habit took hold of him quite innocently, and he turned to his desk to look at the first clump of hair he had cut, which rested alone on the base of the lamp. He picked

it up and looked at the end with the pink twinkle, wondering what he would find when he turned it upside down for further scrutiny. At the same time he knew he would find the exact same pigmentation.

Turning it over, Flow was right. If examined carefully, the opposite end of the clump was as pink as its sister side. There was pink on both ends. Flow remarked again that the hair had a funny rigidity now that it was reduced to a length of an inch, but that detail was hardly the special one and Flow let it go easily. It was only a stepping stone on the longer path of intuition, which has no map.

Flow's examination was over. He sat still for a long time, letting the quizzical results seep inside him, never fighting them. He collected all his hair and lovingly swept it into a pile on his desktop, observing sudden glints of pink at every point, like a model of all the dancing activity in his mind. How very strange it was to see the two processes mirror each other in this way, with no possible witnesses but himself. He smiled at the secret correlation of inner and outer worlds and turned off the light.

When he appeared at the dinner table that evening, his parents were somewhat surprised at this latest twist in his explorations. They asked him what he had been doing and he said simply, "Cutting off Flow's hair," which was true. Then he said all the work made Flow hungry and he sat down to eat. It was not until after the meal was over that his father took him aside and suggested they finish the job more neatly, with an electric razor. Flow consented, but insisted he retain the clippings. As John mowed off the last ragged stripe so that his son was utterly bald, he called his wife into the living room and expressed very genuine surprise.

"Flow," he said pensively, "your whole head is pink!"

Flow stood before the mirror for a long time, examining his pink head, but a whole lot more besides. He was fascinated by the branching nature of his body, which had a central trunk, but then split off at the top and bottom into arms and legs, which again split off into fingers and toes. He wondered did the fingers and toes branch off into anything too microscopic for his eyes to be aware of. He was hardly surprised to imagine that level as becoming so finely pink that eventually it became invisible. The idea was in keeping with the actual color of his extremities.

Of course, arms and legs and fingers and toes were not all the branching of the central trunk of his body. There was also his privates and his neck and head, both of which were also rather pink at their furthest reaches. Flow connected all these dots and began to wonder how different all these visible end points of his body really were, and if maybe they were more similar than people think. He was not yet overly accustomed to putting his center of awareness in his head, as most adults are, so he was able to slip into his chest without any difficulty. Once there it was very clear to him that human beings are like stars with light streaming out from the center. It was the center where the power supply was, not on the top, or any of the outgoing rays.

Flow curled his toes and dug them into the shag carpet. He began to realize that trees are not what we see, because we are only seeing the top half. In his mind the word tree and the mental association that went with it suddenly transformed, as if the missing parts on the bottom had erupted into place. Now when he imagined a tree, Flow saw a picture in his mind of a central trunk that a giant might grab like the handle of a dumbbell with thick tangles of branches at both ends for the weights. As he shaped this new form,

it became harder and harder to tell which end was the top of the tree and which was the bottom. What was the difference between branches and roots? How could you call one end up and one end down anyway? Anywhere.

The effects of these thoughts were far-reaching, dismantling most of what Flow had learned in his formal lessons at school. The rules of mathematics, writing, human behavior, were all utterly arbitrary, unquestioned by most, but also highly questionable. Flow did not resist the cascade of this insight throughout his brain from one area of learning to another so that nowhere escaped deconstruction. He could not resist because the process was organic. He stood in front of the mirror, watching his little body tremble and his wide eyes bulge, straining to see more.

It was then that Flow irreversibly violated the laws of the human universe and stepped into his own reflection in the mirror. It was the last false division left in his mind. He now understood on a much deeper level that he and the image before him were not two, but one thing, as all things were one thing. He reached out his hand to himself and the act of taking it from the other side resulted in the sudden disappearance of the hand in favor of two wrists that now joined at the forearm. He stretched forward the other hand and the other wrists united in the same way.

Trusting this seamless grip of himself, Flow inched his feet forward until the toes met at the mirror, which was full-length. The sensation of his reflected toes against his real ones tickled Flow and he laughed. His wide smile appeared in the mirror and then grew wider on his faces. Flow inched his feet further and his toes disappeared. Where

before there were twenty, now there were none. His feet became joined like his wrists and they merged into a pair with ankles at both ends.

Joined to himself in this manner, Flow leaned backward, not because he was afraid or hoping to sever the connection, but rather to make use of it. In the mirror his reflection leaned backward as well, pulling him inward. He felt his own strength of resistance work against itself as attraction. The more weight he devoted to leaning away, the more force he generated for leaning forward. It was a perfect balance of opposites, slowly approaching their center.

Soon Flow was pressed against the glass. His small chest, breathing smoothly, touched its reflection and withdrew from it. He repeated this cycle of contact and separation many times, staring into his eyes, which gazed over a single tiny nose not distinct from its reflection. It did not have four nostrils, but two, which were serving both versions of Flow, the inner and outer. He pushed his forehead into the mirror and the front lobes of his brain, used for higher reasoning, merged. He was no longer thinking, but acting without intention.

There was not much of Flow left that was not united with its reflection in the mirror. His lower back was connected to its image at the hips so that no legs remained in the world beyond the glass. His arms were connected almost to the shoulder, likewise erased from the world of having arms. His head sunk into itself with the chin thrust forward so that his mouth would have been giving itself a permanent kiss had its final expression been other than a smile.

It was only Flow's eyes that remained momentarily in the room outside the mirror, staring forward without ever blinking. Flow looked into them in the reflection

and wondered what strange visions awaited them after they disappeared into themselves. Nothing stranger than what he had seen in his short life until that point, he imagined. The outer world with its myriad, kaleidoscopic details was itself an endless source of surprise and impossibility, when viewed without filters of lethargy and craving or aversion. He had never gotten used to its ways.

Flow paused for a moment to look back upon that world while he was still partially within it. He widened his eyes and studied its full reflection in the mirror, observing the empty room, the uneven red rocking chair in the corner, the interrupted knitting on the patterned bedspread, which was too long for what it covered, trailing onto the floor. He saw how the floor and the bedspread were not separate, but one unbroken tapestry that ran out of the room as a carpet and became the remainders of the house, which became the neighborhood, which became the whole town, which became the entire world, which became too big to know. It was no use remaining. His parting nostalgia was itself prone to moving on.

Flow restored his gaze onto its own reflection and moved forward for the final unification. As his eyes approached themselves, both pairs grew wider and wider until they locked together with a popping sound much like suction. Flow was gone. The disappearance was complete. When Flow's parents came to get him, they found the room completely empty, although it was also rather full. In the corner was an uneven red rocking chair with a worn wicker seat, whose broken twines resembled a balding porcupine. On the bed sat an interrupted knitting project, from the edge of which emerged the long handles of two diverging needles like the antennae of a snail or crustacean. In the mirror was a reflection of all of it.

Flow's parents, John and Vera, sat on the edge of the undersized bed with their feet on the extra lip of bedspread and for a long time they said nothing, understanding without words that which words cannot express. After a long silence John reached for Vera's hand at the same moment Vera reached for John's. They wove their fingers together very naturally and continued to sit. Soon, in one movement, they stood up and walked to the mirror, staring at the reflection of their timid, marveling approach. They knew where Flow had last been without having to say it. The glass contained an especial glimmer, faintly pink.