

[Home](#)

[Current Issue
\(Winter/Spring 2008\)](#)

[Autumn 2007](#)

[Summer 2007](#)

[Spring 2007](#)

[Winter 2007](#)

[Autumn 2006](#)

[Summer 2006](#)

[Spring 2006](#)

[Winter 2006](#)

[Fall 2005](#)

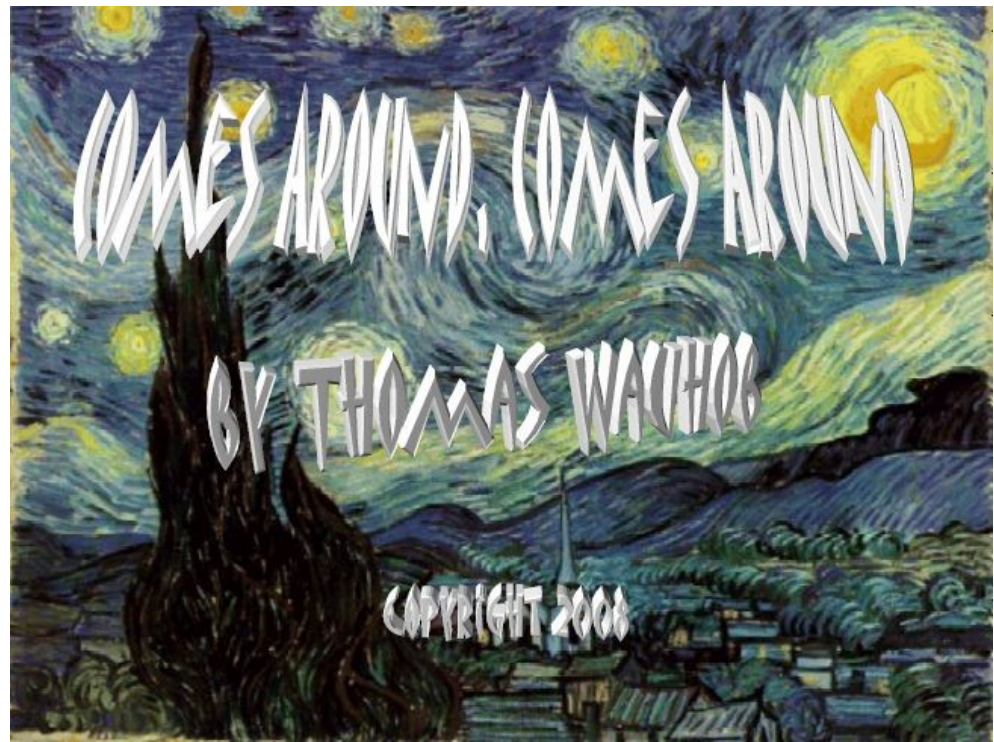
[Summer 2005](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[SNR's Writers](#)

[Contact](#)



My paternal grandfather had died of his own cooking. So went the true deadpan that passed for family legend. This was back in the early days of socially acceptable divorce, when one had to change church service whether or not he moved. The day after my grandmother walked, he tried to cook some sausage and contracted *Trichinosis*, dying a month later. Hence sausage became a forbidden food in my household after my father's own divorce.

Mornings, in the school cafeteria, the popular as well as unpopular children spent their last precious moments working on a glorious and government-issued breakfast. After so many Tuesdays and Thursdays, when breakfast was a sausage and egg biscuit, I became one of the unpopular children. The only person I could sit by was Tobias Bergowitz. This is how began my long friendship with Tobias.

Now I must tell you how Tobias came to the sport of Frisbee golf, for which he would win the Professional Disc Golf Association Tournament as those of us hardened by loss, debt and missed opportunity cheered him in the sunny sidelines.

It was 1989, and I was coming off my first divorce. Also the Berlin Wall fell. The people in the tech office Tobias and I worked in were excited. We had seen the end of the Cold War, the earth had not been inherited by cockroaches, and as long as you hadn't heard of the Middle East or South America, America was the fair winner. Cheers. Our foes at Apple were communists and would soon truckle under the mighty hand of fate. Free market was light and technology the future, and there was constantly a new era around the corner, one that we had been chosen by the light to usher in. A new life, cheers.

Tobias and his wife knew of my depression. Most people around me at the time knew of it. According to accounts, heart loss was coming through my pores. For instance, the tobacconist I purchased my newspaper from. One day I gave him seventy-five cents and he pressed the paper into my hands. Before he let go, he looked at me over his dirty reading glasses and said, "Max, life goes on." Walking away, I silently listed the things the tobacconist knew about me. He knew my name was Max, that I worked in technology, and that I liked sunny days. I considered he might have been merely speaking his mind until I got to the parking lot and a purple bookmark-sized flyer dropped out of my paper and softly landed next to the other litter. I stooped to retrieve and discovered it to be an advertisement for the opening of another singles bar. I sulkily disposed of it and sulked in my car. Not all the extras in my daily existence could give me advertisements of this kind. I would not stand to compile a section for the yellow pages.

Three months on, nothing was different. Tobias and his wife were having a dinner party and insisted I be there. For wife he had taken a doll of an Orthodox. Ellena was five years his senior, thirty-two, and still shapely, with always curled hair draped over her heart-shaped head, spilling over the olives of her eyes. They had been at it several years and no children, which he did not talk about. To all appearances it was the secret to their success. They took trips out of the country, went to concerts, festivals, and I had never seen a spat. Tobias did not even show post-spat feelings at work. It was like a perfect semi-conductor, work then play with no loss to friction, or disputes about when the baby was old enough for daycare, etc., etc. With an eight-year old I was allowed to see weekends, I could see the beauty of it. My first marriage had not been a perfect semiconductor.

At least it was not a big surprise. Aside from the building, immitigable tensions Allegra and I knew, there was my family fortune. My mother's side was as capable of making divorce a convention as my father's. She defended it, while my father insisted that each generation started over, the clock reset. When I was twelve my mother told me it takes a village to raise a child, just that in my village everyone had married everyone else. Sarcasm almost got the upper hand the day I proposed to Allegra when I almost asked, "would you be my first wife?"

At the dinner party, our hosts indulged the vestiges of their taste and travel to the extremes of middle-age show and tell. There was an element of release to it. Ellena had long unveiled her fennel and stuffed meats which were to our erstwhile lament in the dining room. The aroma floated down every hall, walked down the stairs and meandered by our noses in the den while Tobias related the Pacific legend behind a wooden turtle that stretched out on the wall before him. The narratives, either from the indigenous people themselves or a funny story that took place somewhere close to their decimated land, did not really end but splashed into one another as Ellena and Tobias continued to notice precious objects around them. To those of us used to hearing Tobias reply with a nonspecific murmur or sheer meditation, enthusiasm seemed to leap off him like sparks. His wife's assertions seemed to make him go faster, as if there were a preternatural stake in his telling of the important tales.

There were three of us in attendance including myself. I didn't know much about Jeremiah but I suspected he was from Synagogue. Mark on the other hand was a good friend Tobias and I had formed in college, who worked for the NSA and traveled most of his life. When he came to his hometown to visit we felt in no vague terms obliged to entertain him, hence the current evening.

When the fennel and stuffed meats finished getting cold we ascended the stairs and found a comparatively sparse dining room with white walls and a white table cloth. The dinnerware was silver and old-looking, but none of us asked anything. When Mark went into his own flourishes Tobias seemed to become conscious of his candor, rubbing the collar of his shirt as if to assuage a rawness in his throat. We were accustomed to Mark's complicated anecdotes. He was a translator of three languages and knew smatterings of all the others. His adventures in Pakistan took us into the later night. When Jeremiah had to leave and the table wine's glow was beginning to fade, Mark brought up that he was leaving town in a few days and Tobias and I instantly began to come up with things to do. Ellena, visibly worn out, began to clear the table. Over the clang of the silverware and hiss of kitchen faucet we decided the best thing would be a round of golf. Not that any of us at the table knew the first thing about it. We didn't watch it, our fathers didn't play it -- I, myself, didn't know how it was scored. Maybe Tobias knew, but I didn't. But Mark was leaving soon, and we missed him, the weekend would be upon us. Plus everyone at work who could give Tobias and I promotions was a golfer. As Ellena leaned in to take Tobias' goblet, I caught his eye, and there was an agreement between us that it was a step in our natural maturity. It was high time to grow up, and wear liveries.

That Saturday we showed up at the most elite golf course in southern California and were nearly arrested. We used the car phone to contact the fifth or sixth most elite course in southern California and were roundly scorned for misjudging our rank in the world. The guy on the other end was like an upset geometry teacher. So we went to the course that was nearest Tobias' neighborhood and had our reservations preempted by a press team we later reconstructed was working for Lou Diamond Phillips. Almost audibly our spirits dropped with each denial. Mark would be back in a different hemisphere in two days and we had nothing

to offer on a glorious Saturday morning but our awkward, stunted speech. This is when the spurious concept of including Jeremiah in our misunderstandings paid off, and he introduced the next best thing.

"You boys have heard of Frisbee golf?"

"Frisbee golf?" Tobias aped.

I could tell he was intrigued. There was something missing in his voice that revealed his emotion. Tobias was a modicum of shrewdness, always planning, estimating, getting things done on time. The interests of our youth consisted of what I could drag him into, like firing model rockets. When I was sixteen and trying to convince him that assembling a symbol of the threat to civilization, with explosive chemicals in it, would be worthwhile I had mine as well have been homeless and telling him I had a radio transmitter under my tongue. It was not until several of our excursions to the environs of crowded football stadiums that he seemed to have any of the thrill we paid money for. But here outside Mark's Buick, our rented golf bags in the trunk, Tobias had tuned his ear to the new experience. A passion was born the instant.

After explaining the premise of the alternative sport, Jeremiah gave us directions to a park that had a course and suggested we reconvene in more casual clothes.

"How casual?" Mark asked with sincerity.

"You should dress pretty casual."

The rest of us were undeniably disappointed about not getting to use our clubs, which were made of iron. Perhaps wielding iron shapes and wedges for control and victory is something built into the dream-imagery of money making man. Jeremiah was the last to pull into the crowded dirt lot of the park where the gays hooked up, and Mark and I shared a mournful air as he gave us 'discs' out of his 'disc carrier.'

"No, no, Jeremiah," I told him. "I only want one Frisbee."

"You see, it's just like golf. There's drivers, putters --"

"Enough. I'm sure your sport is good, but I can only carry one Frisbee."

"Fine," he said sullenly and selected a red driver called the Cobra. There was a graphic of a Cobra on it. "But be careful with it," he added. "And don't lose it."

Whatever Jeremiah was at dinner parties and Synagogue, he was much more liberated on the Frisbee golf course. In a holey T-shirt and cut off jean shorts, he brought in tow his friend Gary, the potbellied postman, and his friend the forty oz. Budweiser. I meant to ask Tobias if that was kosher but forgot. I observed my environment then to find I was surrounded by tie-died college kids and shirtless fat guys and, beyond that, the woods where the gays hooked up. Mark charitably agreed to take the first shot. He had once spent three months in a Balkan village with no electricity and was always the first to adapt. Relieved by this, Tobias and I could visualize, however foolishly, controlling our Frisbees.

Mark and Jeremiah landed their Frisbees in almost exactly the same spot sixty feet shy of the basket. Jeremiah's postman friend almost handled a hole-in-one. Tobias did not strike his nearly so far but it was on an easily imagined line that would go the basket. Then my turn. I could feel failure coming to me in vibrations. It was certain. I fought against it by running up to the concrete throwing pad as fast as possible and putting all possible strength into the hurl. I ripped the Cobra from my chest and the Cobra sliced to the right, and kept slicing and kept slicing, going behind me, until it eventually landed next to the course's last basket. If the first basket was at twelve o' clock I had managed my projectile to the time I usually get off work. Doing my best to invite laughter at the deed I turned on heel and began a solemn march to Jeremiah's badly used loaner.

On the sixth basket or so *I lost the Cobra*. It was particularly upsetting to me for it was just the previous shot I had sunk a ten-footer as the others were capable of. I'm not sure what my logic is, but when I play this game I think I'm on the cusp of mastering it just before I let go, and I'm sorely disappointed almost each separate time. Perhaps because I have a long list of successes -- walking, riding a bike, using a corkscrew -- accrued to this side of the brain that figures the Frisbee out. It's an acquired, though unconscious, skill, meaning I shouldn't have to worry about it consciously. At any rate, the situation becomes obscene when you actually lose a Frisbee. At this point the laws of physics have turned on you as well.

Because how can you lose a Frisbee? It's a fairly big object. Jeremiah said something to the same effect and noticed that in my case the object was also red.

"I saw it hit the ground," I snapped, unsure of what I was arguing.

My group spent fifteen minutes imitating pigeons before the parties behind us became a presence and I concluded there was a small black hole somewhere under the leaves and offered to pay for Jeremiah's disc.

"It's okay," he said. But how he said it I was sure he would never believe it was okay.

In fact, Gary offered to spot me another disc, but by upbrining I desired penance, and haunted the rest of the game with my arms folded, lingering through the oaks. By the end of the game shame had turned to vengeance, and I vowed to destroy Jeremiah in Frisbee golf.

But first I had to destroy Tobias. Knowing he and I would sharpen each other's skills, I suggested to him we meet at the first basket every Friday afternoon. He acquiesced without second thought and we were off to the sporting goods store for discs. Succumbing to the insanity of a shared enthusiasm, Tobias and I purchased any number of discs specialized beyond practical value. How can I explain? We were wiled by a sales representative who kept showing us discs with magical powers. What's not thrilling about magical powers? To this day I own a Frisbee you're supposed to throw at the ground so that it bounces toward its destination.

Despite what you are at throwing the Frisbee, Frisbee golf is ultimately and literally, a walk in the park. The obstacles drawn into the course to raise the difficulty of a given shot are always highly esthetic and endeared Tobias and I to the game. Hills, streams, the serried oaks -- these were things we didn't see every weekend, as we felt fishing was mean. Even the athletic contestant whose first sport was clearly not the Frisbee golf, with his holes-in-two and holes-in-one, was forced by the sheer distance between events to take it easy and apprehend the birds singing. All of it notwithstanding, I maintained a competitive nature during our promenades. After grasping the concept of par I kept count to myself each week, however Tobias and I were apparently equals. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to who got the lower digits. Making this depressing was the fact that Friday was not my only day at the course. Unknown to my dear Tobias, I was practicing my Frisbees Mondays and Tuesdays after work, and sometimes Thursdays as well.

To my mystification, I was watching Tobias get better while my own progress remained contentious. On some days I had a faintly detectable proficiency inside thirty feet, but the first shot could appear anywhere in time and space including the background of a 1932 photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge. But Tobias' arm was taking the practice. After three short weeks he was making par. He had formed a bond with a yellow driver called the Invasion, which had on it a picture of flying saucers beaming down on the city skyline. He preferred using a putter at mid-range and his driver again in short range, whipping it aggressively into the basket's chains, sending a portentous clink into the air.

Meanwhile, my spirits were lifted by a damsel named Judith. I met her at one of the singles bars. The pollen in the air or perhaps all the perambulating raised something canine in my blood, and I began to make free of the pubs. To my grace Judith was not the girl I was afraid of meeting at the bar. She was a career woman who wore women's slacks and very little

hairspray considering the times. Breathily and open-hearted, she liked red wine and Schubert, and I found in her a companion and grateful outlet to my frustrations on the disc golf course. It was during still the first episodes of our budding romance that she desired to join me on what in her presence I smoothly called, the course.

Our schedules arranged for it on a Thursday, and it was innocent enough, but something strange happened that day.

That day it was overcast and still there were hordes of after work joggers and various age groups taking their ease, an occasional sighting of the newfangled rollerbladers, photography students headed to the duck pond, barefooted amblers from the adjacent RV park. Judith and I were glib with the stresses of work fresh on our minds, and so there was an uneasy retraction of speech that surrounded my first throws that reminded me of my first sexual experience. Neither of us knew where my Frisbee would go when I was to release it, especially me, but to my delight, the added feminine attention proved good for my game.

To get to the fourth hole we had to cross a ravine with a slow braid of water in it. We stepped gingerly over the water and clambered up some rocks when, just before we came to the top of a hill, a blanket of purple haze wafted over us. There is nothing strange about a purple haze in a Frisbee golf course, but when you ascend the hill to find your childhood friend Tobias smiling wanly at you, you only wonder, what's the deal?

He and Jeremiah's postman friend were treading the course. I've gone over this point with him after the fact and apparently this was their first round and, unlike me, he had never suffered the compulsion of covert practice. But one will always have questions.

"How are you, Tobias?" I said darkly.

He sniggered to the postman and, high, turned around, rushed to the launching pad and chunked a hole-in-one.

"Hey," said Judith. "There's a winner."

While I was courting Judith Tobias had overstepped Jeremiah's prowess and was keeping up with the postman. He was beyond the postman. He was a Frisbee fable hero now, the Paul Bunyan of disc golf. I didn't know what to say. My girlfriend walked ahead of me and introduced herself.

The pros allowed us to join their fare, though I secretly rathered that they not. Judith was wealthily entertained we had run into friends here of all places, and she took a disc out of my carrier. At least I did better than Judith. It took us generally three tosses for every one of theirs to keep up, which, to her, was a lot of fun. But I felt a veneer of superiority coming off my friend and the potbelly. We brought a slowness to their recreation by way of nothing we could help. Simply some are born with it and some not. They could feel gut-wrenched by each other's near misses while we felt they were pretty lucky they knew approximately where their Frisbees would land. There were jokes they couldn't share with us because of always being ninety feet ahead of us. Everything remained amicable, but I couldn't help noticing any attention to our inglorious assails on the basket were, to them, uncomfortable reminders that genetics plays cruel dice games.

It set me in a low mood, which Judith seemed to be disappointed about. When I dropped her off at her duplex, and she asked me why I wasn't saying anything, I was afraid she could tell I was pining to dominate in a sport that's never been televised, not even on cable. Strategically, I told her there was a lot going on at work, even though we were in a lull, and drove back to my house where the next strange thing was to go on.

Strangely, my ex-wife's Subaru was in the driveway. The suddenness of these things causes the mind to race. Somewhere behind the heavy clouds the sun had sunk and the rain was beginning to pelt down. It seemed like the perfect night to be told my son had been

kidnapped. I darted inside and perceived Allegra on the couch drinking a glass of milk.

"What's wrong?" I gasped.

"Why does anything have to be wrong?"

"Where's Cole?"

She shrugged her shoulder and took another sip of the improbable drink. "He's at the babysitter's. Don't sound frantic."

I closed the door on the hissing rain and swept the moisture off my hair. Allegra was still posted in the middle of my couch, silent, inviting.

What was this?

She turned on the lamp next to her and the light crawled through her sweater, illumining her breathing mass. Her straight black hair had been cut to chin-length to her advantage. Her pert chin and narrow cheeks were part of a very expressive face. Allegra was always doing something with her hands and seeming to have a clear emotion about it, whether it was dialing her mother's phone number or folding corners of a page. She would tear unimportant papers into progressively smaller pieces while talking; her small green eyes almost never stopped moving. She was interesting to anyone around -- Allegra was the girl your eyes would always come back to in line at the grocery store, partly because she was attractive and partly because you wondered, is something wrong? Why is she moving her face like that? But if you couldn't keep pace with her shifting prejudices she would look past you. I fell into that category. She was a different species, either created for my admiration or to notice my species every now and then with trivial amusement. It was always somehow sexy.

She stopped wheeling the rim of the glass, which she took out of my cupboard, in her palms and looked ahead as I clomped toward the couch. I was feeling more like eighteen years of age with the addition of each wet footprint. I took a seat next to her on the vintage furniture, not feeling imprudent--because it was my couch--but a little self-conscious as its old springs croaked with my faintest readjustments.

I said something about Cole, our common interest, and we moved into small talk. Then that and the next two evenings became a confusing mess. I didn't *score* with my ex-wife that evening, but did the next, and didn't the night after that but we did fight.

When I came back to sanity it was with an unexplainable feeling of loss. Judith, in my mind's eye, appeared seraphic. I went to her duplex forthwith and unannounced, my tires squealing at turns. I wondered, though only peripherally, whether or not two weeks with someone was enough time to show up without appointment. It was a contradiction. It meant things were going more full steam ahead than they were if Judith were to discover my sleeping with girls other than her. But I wasn't sleeping *around*, I wouldn't say. Who knows what that was. I'm allowed to do this, I told myself. I'm doing this, I told myself.

I arrived and her vehicle was nowhere to be seen. Out of hopeful idiocy I knocked upon the door, and again and again. In 1989 there were just no cell phones. I was a time when you had to plod over the St. Augustine, just past the sidewalk, and take a seat on the curb.

This was also the time at the tail-end of rush hour when the road exhales the heat it's been storing in its black coat. Despite the visually open street, the heat and humidity worked against me, making me feel as if in a soup pan. The neighbors flew by, the weight of their cars suddenly tangible behind a blast of sound and exhaust. Often they span their heads over their steering wheels to acknowledge the profanity of my presence in their community. It was a decent neighborhood. Overall, I am glad Judith lives in a decent neighborhood, but I regretted it that day for why did they have to look on me like I was a leper?

After an hour I began to comb my hands through my hair, feeling the oils spread into the

surfaces of my fingers, and piecing together fragments of dialogue we had shared, before my thoughts dissolved with the heat and I was left in a kind of suburban hypnosis, with my trousers riding above my ankles and sweat rings spelling themselves in my shirt.

I had not thought of what to say when Judith arrived, but noting her blank face when her headlights bounced back against the windshield, I decided best was to show that I wasn't angry. She got out of the car -- no groceries -- and kept her distance.

"Hey, hey," I said wearily.

"How long have you been sitting there?"

I was glad of her concern but she wasn't getting any closer.

"Not too long." I suddenly had nothing to say. All I wanted was to get in close, I needed to see what she smelled like. As I approached she wobbled uncertainly and I chanced it, blocking her like a defensive lineman and bargaining a kiss from her -- her pomegranate shampoo, fabric softener and something that I was familiar with, but not through Judith. This last element teased my memory.

"Max," she said with less disappointment than I would have thought, "you've been drinking."

I decided to treat her observation as a question. "In point of fact, Judith, I have not been drinking," I said.

In point of fact, a double-scotch had walked me along in my return to sanity, but that was hours ago. I had no reason to apologize.

"I'm sorry," I sighed tearfully.

Judith put on her business face and told me not to get upset. A statue in her front lawn, I understood that she did not want me to feel awkward after my troubles, but it was not the same as inviting me in. She ventured to call me sweet for waiting up and, then, I knew I had run out of stock. Sweet is not the quality of an individual who is capable of dominating nor worthy of being dominated. It is a synonym for useless. I had to flee before she had a chance to call me useless again, and tried turning into a bat that moment, though to no avail. I instead bade her goodnight and she said she would call the next day.

In the genius I have for these things, I did not answer the phone the next day. I instead was using the bathroom, and waddled ineffectively to the phone, clutching my trousers around my waist. I designed to return her call but abandoned the thought while dialing her number -- it wasn't my fault for using the bathroom.

Next day, no call. Somewhat piously, I took up my disc carrier and trundled up to the park. It was a brilliant day and I came to the first throwing pad at the same time as some lads. There were four of them and with their lank and vitality they should have been at a rugby match. Noticing, however astutely, the difference in our numbers, they offered to let me go first, but I generously declined, wishing harm to them. As their drivers sailed the limpid air I contemplated taking protein supplements. I was well aware that the trick was in the wrist, but with more power I could have taken the young blood's offer and wiled them, rather than waiting dreamily for all signs of life to divagate so I could unload my errant munitions in relative privacy. Walking then throwing, walking then throwing, I proceeded in my meditation.

I was emptying my mind before a shot into the valley, through a network of cringing branches and leaves, when something caught my nose. On the slope a swath of wildflowers was sending up its aerosols. The aroma, vaguely of soap and sawdust, was light but I had seen people's allergies overtake them in this particular spot. And, stupendously, it was Judith -- the missing fragrance coming off her shirt and hair and mingling with my own contributions of scotch and perspiration the fateful night we lost our connection. I wandered

the remainder of the course in a state of enigma. Judith, nature, my ex-wife, polyvinyl throwing discs -- what did it all add up to?

Lamentably, these and more did add up when I returned to the parking lot and saw such things as my eyes could not believe. I recognized more cars: Judith's hatchback and, slotted next to it, my friend Tobias' Volkswagen. Tobias.

I gave up and went home.

*

One night, a long time later, Tobias and I were talking on his back porch.

"If man's value for concrete associations was extrinsic, and his situocuity was fatally determined," -- Tobias nodded his head -- "then all of his conclusions are mistaken, and the nature of thinking is fundamentally hopeless."

Tobias stroked his beard and took the stars in with a cautious glare. "But doesn't this contradict your first syllogism that the statement, 'all abstract associations are not born of normal causation' cannot be known *a priori*?"

"How do you mean?"

"I'm saying if there were a link between an epistemological certainty and a predetermined possibility -- and there is, at least positively -- then the verification of an hypothesis could be given before the formation of the hypothesis. That's nonsense."

Perhaps it was. "Look, I can't perfectly sketch this out right now, which is why I was reluctant to pivot an argument on it, but I really think if concrete associations were intrinsically valuable then the whole process of forming an hypothesis and verifying it would not, eh, be of any use."

"That might be enough for you to persuade yourself, but driving an argument on a fallible premise doesn't clench it. It doesn't win the debate."

It perhaps didn't. I was losing as usual. We continued sipping the Chai tea Ellena graciously prepared for us and studying the Milky Way from our table. It was a cleverly designed table, with a triangular length of PVC supporting it. Tobias had put it together one weekend in the distant past. The surface was an odd circular slab of some kind of polymer, which I had never discovered the origin of. It skirted the edge of the wooden deck behind some hanging plants that --

"Did you see that?" he said excitedly.

I looked around and Tobias was stretching his index finger to the horizon. "A shooting star just went by."

"I wanted to see a shooting star," I explained to myself.

The crickets and passing cars filled the darkened lawn with sound.

"So, Max," he began anew, "you know, tomorrow's the big tournament."

"I've been told," I said factually. "Don't worry, I'll be there."

Tobias darted a fearful moue over his shoulder at the glass door, the light falling through it and landing on the deck in a smothered mandala of shadows and bars. "Judith, is going to be there, also."

"Oh well."

My arms were folded; I was miffed. I really wanted to see a shooting star.

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