

A GRASSHOPPER'S LAMENT

RICHARD LEE FULGHAM

WHAT HAPPENS TO A GRASSHOPPER when his master dies?

I can't speak for all grasshoppers but when my master died someone asked me to write a tribute.

At first I refused because so many other grasshoppers had been physically closer to him than I. Norman Mailer and I were pen pals for thirty-six years, from 1971 to 2007. Only then was I invited to the manor. Did I have the right to write a tribute in a literary journal devoted to him?

But then a light flickered in the gloomy grottoes of my gutted green grasshopper's mind—(forgive me that indulgence. I couldn't resist.)—and I thought to myself,

"Asking me to write a tribute is not without reason, though there must have been ten thousand grasshoppers who also studied at the Master's feet and who also aspired to become masterful writers.

"Nevertheless, there is only one grasshopper today that has the courage to take a truly awful and over-used metaphor like 'grasshopper' and carry it this far without embarrassment—and that grasshopper is me. Only this grasshopper could deliberately be that bad.

"And who but me would have the courage to write, 'gloomy grottoes of my gutted green grasshopper's mind'? Mailer would be proud! Not of my ability but of my utter gall. Who but this grasshopper would have the brass it takes to intentionally make his readers go 'awwwwww ... ?'

"Who but I—and Norman Mailer!"

At this point I am going to stop being silly and tell you how huge was Norman Mailer's heart. He was being magnanimous and generous when he chose to correspond with me as his literary apprentice for thirty-seven years. I shall always remember the swapping of long letters about the things we loved in common: writing, writers, how to write, living, life and how to live.

I want to tell you also of the encouraging words that kept me literarily alive and hopeful through some truly awful times. There were heart-grabbing mystical sparks that often erupted in our odd-fellow, pen-pal relationship. Believe that and you will have a small, slight understanding of the spiritual phenomena that cemented our souls together.

There were times long ago that I thought perhaps all these things were in my imagination and I was silly indeed to believe Norman Mailer was the near giant I believed—or had indeed created. I no longer have such doubts for reasons I cannot yet divulge. He really was a giant among us.

So I ask again, what does the grasshopper do when his master dies? I can tell you, my friends, I can tell you. You try your best to meet your master's expectations of you. You try your best to understand that you were not special to him; you were merely one segment of the great "All and Everything," which he so deeply loved and was part of.

And last, you blow his horn. You trumpet to the world that, yes! I knew this man!