

brought with some mix from the motel cooler. It goes down slowly and agreeably. A cool night wind rattles the leaves of the cottonwoods along the road.

Chris wonders what we should do next. Nothing fires this kid. The newness and strangeness of the motel surroundings excite him and he wants us to sing songs as they did at camp.

"We're not very good at songs," John says.

"Let's tell stories then," Chris says. He thinks for a while. "Do you know any good ghost stories? All the kids in our cabin used to tell ghost stories at night."

"You tell us some," John says.

And he does. They are kind of fun to hear. Some of them I haven't heard since I was his age. I tell him so, and Chris wants to hear some of mine, but I can't remember any.

After a while he says, "Do you believe in ghosts?"

"No," I say.

"Why not?"

"Because they are *un-sci-en-ti-fic*."

The way I say this makes John smile. "They contain no matter," I continue, "and have no energy and therefore, according to the laws of science, do not exist except in people's minds."

The whiskey, the fatigue and the wind in the trees start mixing in my mind. "Of course," I add, "the laws of science contain no matter and have no energy either and therefore do not exist except in people's minds. It's best to be completely scientific about the whole thing and refuse to believe in either ghosts or the laws of science. That way you're safe. That doesn't leave you very much to believe in, but that's scientific too."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Chris says.

"I'm being kind of facetious."

Chris gets frustrated when I talk like this, but I don't think it hurts him.

"One of the kids at YMCA camp says he believes in ghosts."

"He was just spoofing you."

"No, he wasn't. He said that when people haven't been buried right, their ghosts came back to haunt people. He really believes in that."

"He was just spoofing you," I repeat.

"What's his name?" Sylvia says.

"Tom White Bear."

John and I exchange looks, suddenly recognizing the same thing.

"Ohhh, *Indians!*" he says.

I laugh. "I guess I'm going to have to take that back a little," I say. "I was thinking of European ghosts."

"What's the difference?"

John roars with laughter. "He's got you," he says.

I think a little and say, "Well, Indians sometimes have a different way of looking at things, which I'm not saying is completely wrong. Science isn't part of the Indian tradition."

"Tom White Bear said his mother and dad told him not to believe all that stuff. But he said his grandmother whispered it was true anyway, so he believes it."

He looks at me pleadingly. He really *does* want to know things sometimes. Being facetious is not being a very good father. "Sure," I say, reversing myself, "I believe in ghosts too."

Now John and Sylvia look at me peculiarly. I see I'm not going to get out of this one easily and brace myself for a long explanation.

"It's completely natural," I say, "to think of Europeans who believed in ghosts or Indians who believed in ghosts as ignorant. The scientific point of view has wiped out every other view to a point where they all seem primitive, so that if a person today talks about ghosts or spirits he is considered ignorant or maybe nutty. It's just all but completely impossible to imagine a world where ghosts can actually exist."

John nods affirmatively and I continue.

"My own opinion is that the intellect of modern man isn't that superior. IQs aren't that much different. Those Indians and medieval men were just as intelligent as we are, but the context in which they thought was completely different. Within that *context* of thought, ghosts and spirits are quite as real as atoms, particles, photons and quants are to a modern man. In *that* sense I believe in ghosts. Modern man has his ghosts and spirits too, you know."

"What?"

"Oh, the laws of physics and of logic . . . the num-

ber system . . . the principle of algebraic substitution. These are ghosts. We just believe in them so thoroughly they seem real."

"They seem real to me," John says.

"I don't get it," says Chris.

So I go on. "For example, it seems completely natural to presume that gravitation and the law of gravitation existed before Isaac Newton. It would sound nutty to think that until the seventeenth century there was no gravity."

"Of course."

"So when did this law start? Has it always existed?" John is frowning, wondering what I am getting at.

"What I'm driving at," I say, "is the notion that before the beginning of the earth, before the sun and the stars were formed, before the primal generation of anything, the law of gravity existed."

"Sure."

"Sitting there, having no mass of its own, no energy of its own, not in anyone's mind because there wasn't any, not in space because there was no space either, not anywhere—this law of gravity still existed?"

Now John seems not so sure.

"If that law of gravity existed," I say, "I honestly don't know what a thing has to do to be nonexistent. It seems to me that law of gravity has passed every test of nonexistence there is. You cannot think of a single attribute of nonexistence that that law of gravity didn't have. Or a single scientific attribute of existence it did have. And yet it is still 'common sense' to believe that it existed."

John says, "I guess I'd have to think about it."

"Well, I predict that if you think about it long enough you will find yourself going round and round and round and round until you finally reach only one possible, rational, intelligent conclusion. The law of gravity and gravity itself *did not exist* before Isaac Newton. No other conclusion makes sense.

"And what that means," I say before he can interrupt, "and what that means is that that law of gravity exists *nowhere* except in people's heads! It's a ghost! We are all of us very arrogant and conceited about running down other people's ghosts but just as ignorant and barbaric and superstitious about our own."

"Why does everybody believe in the law of gravity then?"

"Mass hypnosis. In a very orthodox form known as 'education.'"

"You mean the teacher is hypnotizing the kids into believing the law of gravity?"

"Sure."

"That's absurd."

"You've heard of the importance of eye contact in the classroom? Every educationist emphasizes it. No educationist explains it."

John shakes his head and pours me another drink. He puts his hand over his mouth and in a mock aside says to Sylvia, "You know, most of the time he seems like such a normal guy."

I counter, "That's the first normal thing I've said in weeks. The rest of the time I'm feigning twentieth-century lunacy just like you are. So as not to draw attention to myself."

"But I'll repeat it for you," I say. "We believe the disembodied words of Sir Isaac Newton were sitting in the middle of nowhere billions of years before he was born and that magically be *discovered* these words. They were always there, even when they applied to nothing. Gradually the world came into being and then they applied to it. In fact, those words themselves were what formed the world. That, John, is ridiculous."

"The problem, the contradiction the scientists are stuck with, is that of *mind*. Mind has no matter or energy but they can't escape its predominance over everything they do. Logic exists in the mind. Numbers exist only in the mind. I don't get upset when scientists say that ghosts exist in the mind. It's that *only* that gets me. Science is *only* in your mind too, it's just that that doesn't make it bad. Or ghosts either."

They are just looking at me so I continue: "Laws of nature are human *inventions*, like ghosts. Laws of logic, of mathematics are also human inventions, like ghosts. The whole blessed thing is a human invention, including the idea that it *isn't* a human invention. The world has no existence whatsoever outside the human imagination. It's all a ghost, and in antiquity was so recognized as a ghost, the whole blessed world we live in. It's run-by ghosts. We see what we see because these ghosts *show* it to us, ghosts of Moses and Christ and the Buddha, and Plato, and Descartes, and Rousseau and Jefferson and Lincoln, on and

on and on. Isaac Newton is a very good ghost. One of the best. Your common sense is nothing more than the voices of thousands and thousands of these ghosts from the past. Ghost and more ghosts. Ghosts trying to find their place among the living."

John looks too much in thought to speak. But Sylvia is excited. "Where do you get all these ideas?" she asks.

I am about to answer them but then do not. I have a feeling of having already pushed it to the limit, maybe beyond, and it is time to drop it.

After a while John says, "It'll be good to see the mountains again."

"Yes, it will," I agree. "One last drink to that!"

We finish it and are off to our rooms.

I see that Chris brushes his teeth, and let him get by with a promise that he'll shower in the morning. I pull seniority and take the bed by the window. After the lights are out he says, "Now, tell me a ghost story."

"I just did, out there."

"I mean a *real* ghost story."

"That was the realest ghost story you'll ever hear."

"You know what I mean. The other kind."

I try to think of some conventional ones. "I used to know so many of them when I was a kid, Chris, but they're all forgotten," I say. "It's time to go to sleep. We've all got to get up early tomorrow."

Except for the wind through the screens of the motel window it is quiet. The thought of all that wind sweeping toward us across the open fields of the prairie is a tranquil one and I feel lulled by it.

The wind rises and then falls, then rises and sighs, and falls again . . . from so many miles away.

"Did you ever know a ghost?" Chris asks.

I am half asleep. "Chris," I say, "I knew a fellow once who spent all his whole life doing nothing but hunting for a ghost, and it was just a waste of time. So go to sleep."

I realize my mistake too late.

"Did he find him?"

"Yes, he found him, Chris."

I keep wishing Chris would just listen to the wind and not ask questions.

"What did he do then?"

"He thrashed him good."

"Then what?"

"Then he became a ghost himself." Somehow I had the thought this was going to put Chris to sleep, but it's not and it's just waking me up.

"What is his name?"

"No one you know."

"But what is it?"

"It doesn't matter."

"Well, what is it anyway?"

"His name, Chris, since it doesn't matter, is Phaedrus. It's not a name you know."

"Did you see him on the motorcycle in the storm?"

"What makes you say *that*?"

"Sylvia said she thought you saw a ghost."

"That's just an expression."

"Dad?"

"This had better be the last question, Chris, or I'm going to become angry."

"I was just going to say you sure don't talk like anyone else."

"Yes, Chris, I know that," I say. "It's a problem. Now go to sleep."

"Good night, Dad."

"Good night."

A half hour later he is breathing sleepfully, and the wind is still strong as ever and I am wide-awake. There, out the window in the dark—this cold wind crossing the road into the trees, the leaves shimmering flecks of moonlight—there is no question about it, Phaedrus saw all of this. What he was doing here I have no idea. Why he came this way I will probably never know. But he has been here, steered us onto this strange road, has been with us all along. There is no escape.

I wish I could say that I don't know why he is here, but I'm afraid I must now confess that I do. The ideas, the things I was saying about science and ghosts, and even that idea this afternoon about caring and technology—they are not my own. I haven't really had a new idea in years. They are stolen from him. And he has been watching. And that is why he is here.

With that confession, I hope he will now allow me some sleep.