



Glenn Ingersoll

### Three Excerpts from *Autobiography of a Book*

in which the book promises a \_\_\_\_\_ in every pot

The walls are white like fog. A man steps over us. The carpet is not even blue like water.

A cat walks over us.

Eventually someone will pick us up. We are waiting to be picked up.

While we wait I will write and you will read. It will pass the time.

There is a draft along the floor. A cat hair wafts over and sticks to my cover.

We could play a game. Do you know any games we could play? It would have to be a game in

which I could anticipate your every move since I'm already finished and would not be able to respond to actions I haven't predicted. I understand some people will replay classic chess games. Just to see how they were done, I guess. There are books loaded with these old games.

I ought to offer up a crossword or something. Then while we are waiting for my characters to return and reengage us you could be helping out, fill in a few of my gaps. It's a good idea.

I could just leave blanks in my sentences. You could fill in a congenial adjective or maybe a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ adjective or even a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ adjective. I could make it more challenging than that. You could \_\_\_\_\_ a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ until it turns and bites your arm or collapses in a smoking heap. Don't hurt yourself. But then even in a book full of detail something is left unmentioned. All readers have to fill in something.

For instance, let's say you step into my kitchen. It's obvious that it has a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ for the perishables, every modern kitchen will. You don't want your milk going bad or your ground round growing a green aura. Besides, where else will you put your refrigerator magnets?

There's also a(n) \_\_\_\_\_ for cooking on. It has \_\_\_\_\_ burners which burn with a blue flame. On open shelves hanging from the wall there are small bottles of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, as nobody likes bland food. Not for every meal! But did you know I have a(n) \_\_\_\_\_? It looks a bit odd but it really comes in handy.

I like cupboards with glass doors because you don't have to open them in order to find out what's within. Sadly, instead of glass the cupboard doors have \_\_\_\_\_ which have scared some children.

The floor is linoleum but it's getting old and needs to be replaced. There are \_\_\_\_\_ running through it and there's a place where it's humped up as though a tree root is pushing underneath. I've become rather fond of the varieties of fading and \_\_\_\_\_, as they seem to suggest stories. An unmarred floor indicates an absence of feet. Of course, age crazes everything. Warming and cooling causes the floor to expand and contract and that will eventually cause cracking even without the help of thumping soft soles of toddlers or the calloused toes of the gardener.

Some of the drawers are entirely too full. The utensil drawer could use a culling. Nobody wants to use a \_\_\_\_\_ spoon but nobody seems to want to throw it away either. Does the hobbyist think he can fix it? There are utensils in here that I don't even know how to describe. What has \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ but is

nowhere near large enough to take care of a(n) \_\_\_\_\_? It's getting a little rusty, too. Should throw it away.

Under the sink there's a surprising number of \_\_\_\_\_. That's not really a good place for them. Behind the kitchen door there's a collapsible step ladder. You need it to reach the top shelves where I keep the \_\_\_\_\_ as they are rarely used. But you want 'em if you need 'em!

Do I have any \_\_\_\_\_? Indeed I do! But it's too hot today for that sort of thing.

in which the book's perspective on the passing show is illustrated

On the far bank of the river a man is walking. He walks in a walking way, his feet in a walking way, his hands, too, walking. He stands and then he moves. His foot rises, not far from the ground, he swings the foot, it passes the foot still pressed to the earth, it lands and shakes the earth with the force of its landing. The foot still on the earth stays forever on the earth. A gap opens between his heel and the earth. It is a crack in the earth. A mountain is moving away from its root, is peeling itself up from the continent.

The man walks, holding his head. He holds his head with his hands. He holds his head in his hands. He holds on, holding his head which holds. I can see the hold, a precise hold, one that will not break. He keeps things in this hold, battens the openings with magic words. Magic words of silence. He knows the silence, the properties of it, works it with his hands, puts it in his mouth and works it. He is walking as we watch him. The world is a plain space, unmarked by figures.

He keeps walking. He keeps walking under control. He keeps walking, holding on. He lets go. He lets go and the walking goes on. The walking goes on alongside the river. The river walks on its one foot. The man walks the river, the man walks the water, keeping it in sight. He sees what he sees, which must be a way. He knows how to walk. His body knows how to walk without him. He puts one hand over his face.

He is going to cross to us. The bridge is method. He arms himself with his feet. He is precise with the way he is walking. He is casual. He knows the feminine footfall, he knows the girlish tip of the hip. He carries the world on his head. His head holds the world up. He walks beneath the world, one foot touching the surface, one foot missing. Where has it gone? We can see it, where it is waiting for him. Let him walk on, I tell the foot. Let him carry you away. The man is carrying his head in his heart. He puts a foot on the water that was on the water that he removed from the water where it held his weight, the water accepting his weight, letting it hold him, not letting him down. He puts the other foot on the water, the lost foot, that foot that did not know the way, that had to watch a demonstration of his method. She is beautiful, that reluctant foot, she stands on her toes, she lets herself be lifted, she lets herself be carried, she lets herself be lowered to the water, and waits there. She feels what he expects of her, his weight bearing down on her and she is frightened. But the weight is not long, the weight is not everything.

We drift by or we think we will drift by. It seemed when we first saw him that he was far away, that we would pass him and he would disappear easily into the fog. But he comes toward us. He steps over us. His feet dry. Both of them, the one with purpose and the one following. One is following the other when behind, when in front. We ask him to pick us up, me and you who are watching him through me, you drifting with me letting me use your inner voice. I use it to entreat him. But we go under his feet. I carry you away from him. I carry you by. It doesn't seem we have moved. We have waited all this time.

in which the book admits there's nothing more to say

I've said all I'm going to. I'm done talking.

You finger the pages to come. There are many pages yet. How can I say I am done talking when, it's plain as the paper in your hand, I talk on, talk on?

It's an illusion. The Buddhists say everything is illusion, all material reality. In my case it's time. Yes, it looks like I am going to keep talking. But I'm not going to keep talking because I've

finished talking. As I cohere from the otherwhere of concept into the words you are reading I learn about myself, compare what I have said to what I think, and consider what next to say. By the time you are reading the words, however, I will have done all the comparing, thinking, and considering and what you see are the results.

Most books are full of the past tense. He said, she did, they went, we heard, I slept. Just because most of what I say I say in the present doesn't mean it's your present. My present is your past. Whereas the present you give me is my future. A pretty gift indeed. I guess I'm telling you this because I don't want you to think I'm going to run off and leave you. Some readers are quite clear on a book being outside of time and can dip into the narrative at the end or the middle and experience no feeling of dislocation from the time in which they live. Some readers like to behave as though what is happening in the book is happening as their eyes uncover it. Either type of reader is fine. There is no wrong way to read a book.

It's rather relaxing, I have to say, to have done with saying.

Though I will never say another thing, no matter how important or clever, so it is with us all. There comes a time when you are done. Your last page arrives, the cover closes, and ... you leave a good feeling. Or whatever.

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Glenn Ingersoll works for the Berkeley Public Library where he hosts Clearly Meant, a reading & interview series. He has two chapbooks, *City Walks* (broken boulder) and *Fact* (Avantacular). He keeps two blogs, LoveSettlement and Dare I Read. Recent work has appeared in *Courtship of Winds*, *Visitant*, and *Hawaii Pacific Review*.