

49 Miles  
(excerpt: Mile 30)

by

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MILE 30 ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND THE AIDS MEMORIAL IN G.G. PARK

"CONSTELLATIONS AND INTERCONNECTIONS"

A YOUNG WOMAN WEARING THICK GLASSES AND A BAGGY SWEATER STANDS AT A PODIUM INSIDE A PLANETARIUM. A STAR-FIELD EFFECT ILLUMINATES THE BACKGROUND BEHIND HER. SHE HOLDS UP A BOOK AND ADDRESSES THE CROWD.

BOOK AUTHOR

I'd like to thank you all for coming out to the Planetarium to hear my talk today and for buying a copy of my book "Hubble's Bubbles: Slippery metaphors for a chaotic existence."

A SECOND POOL OF LIGHT APPEARS ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE STAGE ILLUMINATING A MAN SITTING ON A BENCH IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AIDS MEMORIAL GROVE. A SUGGESTION OF TREES AND LEAVES OVERHEAD. THE MAN IS TALKING TO A STRANGER SOMEWHERE OFF STAGE THAT HE HAS JUST MET THERE. HE IS STACKING STONES ONE ON TOP OF ANOTHER AS HE RELATES THIS STORY.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

I was watching an old episode of Star Trek, the original series. With with my "Ex" once...

THE FOLLOWING DUET OCCURS WITH EACH SPEAKER UNAWARE OF THE OTHER'S EXISTENCE.

BOOK AUTHOR

I'd like to start with a tongue twister...

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

When he was in the hospital-

BOOK AUTHOR

You can join me if you want...

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Up there at the UC.

BOOK AUTHOR

Hubble's Bubbles Burst forth from the foamy froth. And get bigger and bigger. Before they burst.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

He was a huge closet case...

BOOK AUTHOR

So... bubbles... why bubbles?

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Closet trekie I mean.

BOOK AUTHOR

God knows.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

It was during visiting hours...

BOOK AUTHOR

But that's what the universe looks like at every level. From the quantum foam we can see at the smallest level to the large scale structure of space-time.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

I'd be there... but we never talked.

BOOK AUTHOR

Science shows us that there are patterns in this chaos. We as a species see it and recognize it.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

He was so far gone that he would just lie there.

BOOK AUTHOR

Even though we are all just patterns in this chaos ourselves. Very short lived bubbles of consciousness-

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

In that "bent-bed" holding my hand.

BOOK AUTHOR

Floating on a turbulent sea.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

And watching T.V.

BOOK AUTHOR

We find structure because it does exist.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

I think he just didn't want to be alone.

BOOK AUTHOR

But we also create patterns where none exist. The constellations in the night sky for instance. Visible points of light. Random. We shape them into constellations. And create stories, myths about what those shapes mean.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

So... it was the one where Kirk and Spock go back in time to Earth in the 1930's.

BOOK AUTHOR

Practical. Useful in navigation, in defining culture,

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

To bring McCoy back-

BOOK AUTHOR

Of having common ways of viewing the universe. Because we all see things a little differently.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Because he's altered history somehow.

BOOK AUTHOR

Some would say "Thank God" I'd like to. I'd like to meet him personally.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

He's all whacked up on drugs-

BOOK AUTHOR

Because he, she or it... is the ultimate physicist and creator.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

And he's delusional-

BOOK AUTHOR

We are all individuals.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

And he thinks everybody's out to kill him-

BOOK AUTHOR

We see the world through our own two eyes. If we're lucky. Our senses detect patterns and we attempt to apply meaning.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Doctor, McCoy on the show- not my "Ex".

BOOK AUTHOR

Take four people walking on the beach. A man, a woman a boy and a girl. Let's call that cluster... a family.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

So he jumps through an ancient time portal-

BOOK AUTHOR

No visible ties there just invisible connections. A relational matrix.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Left by some long gone civilization-

BOOK AUTHOR

If you wanted to be more accurate, but perhaps a little politically incorrect, you could call it a "nuclear family."

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

That destroyed itself.

BOOK AUTHOR

If there happened to be two point five children there.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

But this thing's still running..

BOOK AUTHOR

The particle physicists out there are probably sniggering. Because the analogy is so clumsy.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Don't look at me like that, I didn't write it.

BOOK AUTHOR

Metaphors are rusty tools.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Anyway...

BOOK AUTHOR

Trying to define something by saying it is something else..

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Like I was saying..

BOOK AUTHOR

Well, I'll leave that to the poets.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

William Shatner falls in love-

BOOK AUTHOR

So, this is a human tendency-

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

With Joan Collins.

BOOK AUTHOR

Probably hard-wired.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

And he saves her life.

BOOK AUTHOR

To look for structure and to expect to find it.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

But in order for everything-

BOOK AUTHOR

To ascribe meaning to the meaninglessness.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

To happen the way it's supposed to,

BOOK AUTHOR

To look for the light switch in this dark room called night.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Human history, you know...

BOOK AUTHOR

Each one of us is a part of the whole. A lone consciousness.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Spock tells him... "Edith Keiler Must Die."

BOOK AUTHOR

One point.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

So he goes-

BOOK AUTHOR

On one planet.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

And let's her get run over-

BOOK AUTHOR

Orbiting one star.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

By some old vintage truck.

BOOK AUTHOR

In one solar system.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

It was pretty hokey.

BOOK AUTHOR

In one galaxy.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

I was laughing...

In one local group. BOOK AUTHOR

I was tired. MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

In one supercluster. BOOK AUTHOR

I'd been there all day. MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

In one mega-structure. BOOK AUTHOR

I was the only one. MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Forming part of a wall- BOOK AUTHOR

There toward the end... MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Made up of billions of galaxies. BOOK AUTHOR

When the lesions were the worst- MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

A giant latticework of matter... BOOK AUTHOR

His parents- MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Separated by unimaginable voids. BOOK AUTHOR

Never came to see him. MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

With gulfs of virtually nothing in between. BOOK AUTHOR

And I thought- MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Like the "empty space" in soap bubbles. BOOK AUTHOR

Well, I thought it was funny. MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

BOOK AUTHOR

The same structure but on a universal scale.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

I mean... try saying-

BOOK AUTHOR

One universe in a multiverse of infinite possibilities.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

That line with a straight face... "Edith Keiler Must Die."

BOOK AUTHOR

Large distances, with mostly nothing between points.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

(LAUGHS) But then I looked over at him. And he was sobbing.

BOOK AUTHOR

But even the widest void, billions of light years across.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Like it was the end of Gone with the Wind. Or Casablanca...

BOOK AUTHOR

It's not nearly as wide as the gulf that exists between people.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

That's when I knew it was over...

BOOK AUTHOR

With different points of view.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

That was the last time I went to visit.

BOOK AUTHOR

This difference is what defines us as individuals.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

The last time I saw him...

BOOK AUTHOR

Or at least defines our individual consciousness. We are each in our own little universe... of one.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

I saw his quilt. One of the girls helped him sew it. Yeah, sparkly Star Trek shit all over it. At least he finally came out about that.

BOOK AUTHOR

The insurmountable gap-

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

You know, none of my friends have died from... those four letters...

BOOK AUTHOR

Between how you perceive the world-

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Sure they died of Pneumonia, (HE STACKS A ROCK)

BOOK AUTHOR

And how I perceive-

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Infections, (STACKS A ROCK)

BOOK AUTHOR

The universe.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Complications, (STACKS A ROCK)

BOOK AUTHOR

Cannot be bridged.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Jumping off a bridge, (STACKS A ROCK)

BOOK AUTHOR

But this irreconcilable difference-

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Overdoses, (STACKS A ROCK)

BOOK AUTHOR

Should not be seen-

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

And gunshot wounds... (STACKS A ROCK)

BOOK AUTHOR

In a negative light.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

But not that.

BOOK AUTHOR

It should be cherished.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

Never that.

BOOK AUTHOR

Though we may each be only one of countless others..

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

I guess I just don't have anything to say anymore.

BOOK AUTHOR

Defined by our place in a larger structure.

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

I'm still negative...

BOOK AUTHOR

We are each only one tiny being. But for some of us-

MIDDLE AGED GAY MAN

What could I say?

HE FINISHES TURNS AND WALKS AWAY. HE  
HAS STACKED SEVEN STONES.

BOOK AUTHOR

That is enough.

SHE SMILES AND CLOSES HER BOOK AS THE  
LIGHTS FADE THE STARS SHINE BRIGHTLY  
BEHIND HER SILHOUETTE.

BLACKOUT