



Via Negativa

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Being a true record of the visit by
Childes Anissa and Nancy and Babies
Gary and Esterhazy
to Dorset in July 2015.

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Sometimes, when everything seems to have been lost,
something can still be found in the dust.



How big girls can save the day.

Once upon a time there were four cushions. No. No. No. They were cousins.

The two big girls were very big. Many years old. They were well established in themselves. They could tell when things weren't fair. They knew when they didn't want to eat horrid food. "I do not love spinach", they would cry. They were not babies. Even Baby Gary was self-reliant and could use a porty. [But Baby Esterhazy was still limited in every respect. Though she was loved to bits.]

The big girls knew how to sing and dance and make their parents cross. And they all knew how to eat bananas. Except Baby Esterhazy had to have hers supplied to her in a special format.

The big girls had already learnt that Boll Weevil was impossible to find. Now, one damp summer in Dorset, they learnt more about what is lost, what is absent, what is simply not there. They learnt, in short, to walk the *via negativa*.



Normally, when we go for a walk, we start somewhere and walk along the path and, sooner or later, we get somewhere else.

We might get to school or to the barnhaven. We might get to the park or to the beach or to the library. We might get to the shop or to the aquarium.



But if we walk along the *via negativa*, we don't get anywhere. In fact, we get nowhere. We walk away from somewhere and end up nowhere.

You could say that we disappear. We certainly get lost. We lose ourselves.

That may seem hard to understand but your father will be able to explain it. (There are other questions in this book that it will be better to ask your mother. But this one is for your father.)



Here you can see a normal walk. A walk along the *via positiva*.

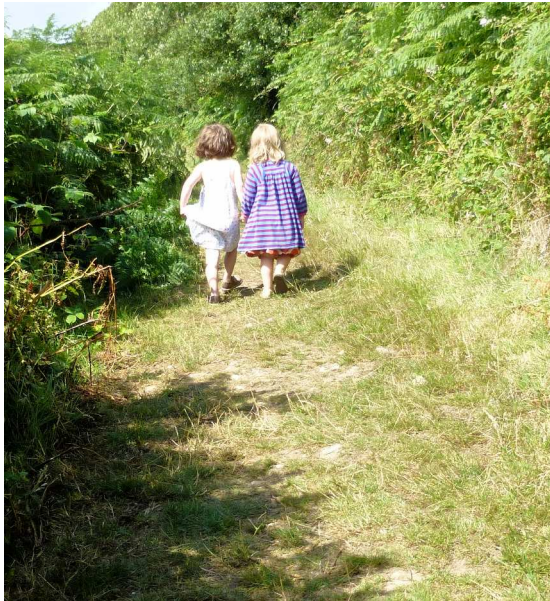
It starts with a small dance and a difficulty with holding hands.

In this case Anissa has lost her thumb. It has literally disappeared.

But then Nancy found it and that was great.

So they both started walking normally along the path past the rabbit warren and the foxgloves and towards the big gate.





But then, as Nancy and Anissa get further and further away, they get smaller and smaller.

Well, that's already interesting, isn't it?

Because if you go for walk you don't actually get smaller. But if you watch two people go for a walk and you stand still yourself, the two walking people will get smaller.

Well, they look as if they get smaller and if you measure them they are smaller. But they don't feel any smaller themselves.

You see. It's tricky, isn't it?

Here you can see another walk. Granny is very big and just here. She is wearing a yellow baseball cap, so she may have lost her sense of taste, of what is right and beautiful. But she is fully present in the here and now.

Nancy and Anissa, although they are big girls not little fidget-midgets, are actually tiny and hardly visible by the signpost.

(They have to stop at the signpost so that nothing bad will happen.)

Baby Gary is running towards them. He is already small and getting smaller as he runs. It's as if the faster he runs, the smaller he gets. The flesh falls off him.



So there's a sense of people getting smaller. Thumbs going missing. What else?

Well, at the Old Abbey, which is Very Old and has posh people living in it, Anissa was holding Arran, when suddenly her left leg fell off. It just disappeared.

Some people thought Arran Guv-Guv had eaten it, but he hadn't.

All we can say is that there is suddenly a loss of leg.

Her leg is absent.

She only has one leg. Look.



Then Arran Guv-Guv disappeared.

Some people said that Anissa had eaten him, but she hadn't.

All we can say is that there is suddenly a loss of dog.

Her dog is absent.

She has no dog. Look.



One morning, something like that had happened to Nancy.

She was walking across the troll bridge, looking out for the ugly troll.

Well, you can see she is hardly walking. She is standing quite still, just looking.

She is being really, really brave and clip-clopping like a billy-goat-gruff, when, all of a sudden,

BISH BASH BOSH



The bridge fell away beneath her feet.

But, luckily, it was only for a moment.

She held really tight with one hand and then, just as suddenly, the bridge was reinstated (ask your mother).

Phew.

It was such a strange feeling. The sense of loss. Of sudden absence.

And then, just as suddenly, back to normal.

She wondered if it had really happened.

It's just lucky that Grandpa Craiger was there to take the photo to prove it.



On another day, they went to the zoo. Nancy's parents were meant to be in charge, looking after all the cushions. No, cousins. They were meant to be sensible.

But all of a sudden they got on the sand diggers and started digging great holes. They were singing and seemed a bit mad.

They had, as we say, lost their marbles. They had taken leave of their senses.

There was, once again, a sense of loss. Of absence. As if the normal grown-ups had disappeared.



But not for long. Soon things were back to normal.

There was rain. (Uncle) Simo stood under the shelter with baby Esterhazy. (Aunty) Maddy took the big girls to see the Dalai Lamas and the Scrotum Piggies.

But, uh oh. All of a sudden she sat down on a chair that wasn't there.

Look the chair is not there. But she is sitting.

There is a loss of chair. An absence.

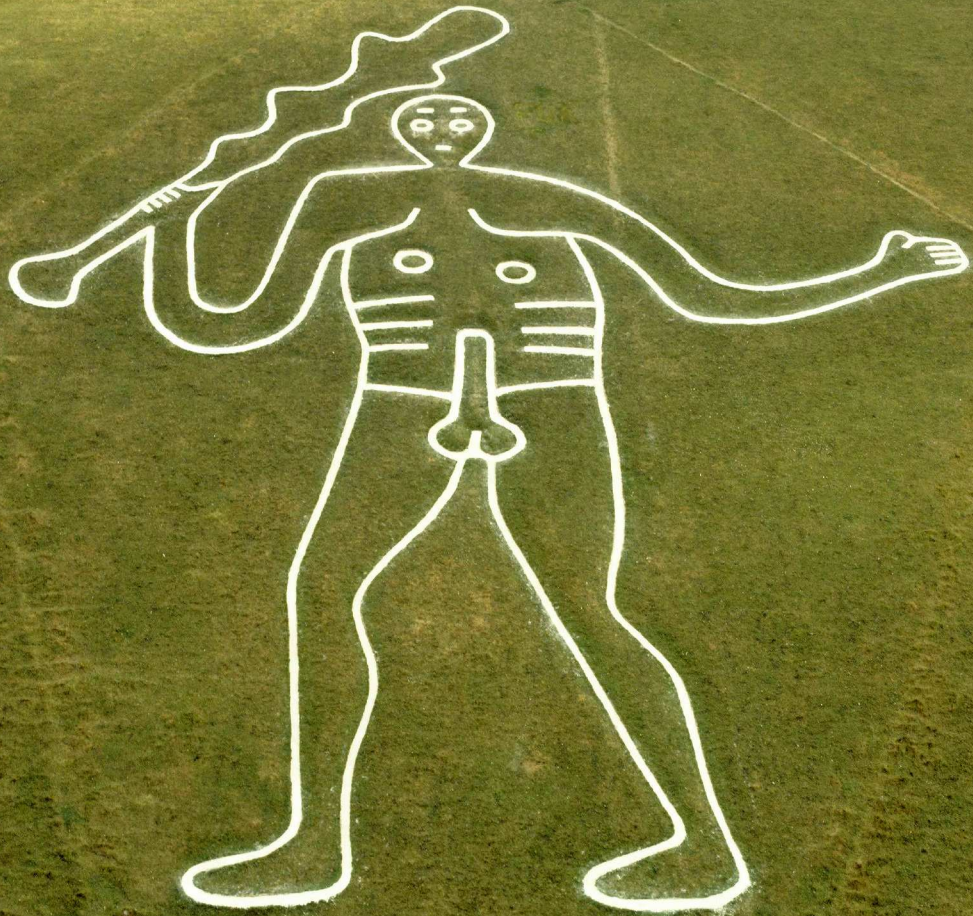
We can say that the chair is apophatic. (Ask your father.)



It happened again when they went visit the giant. The giant was hard to see. Almost invisible. There were some bits and pieces of him in the grass. But mainly he was lost.

There was a great sense of loss.

Here is what he should look like.

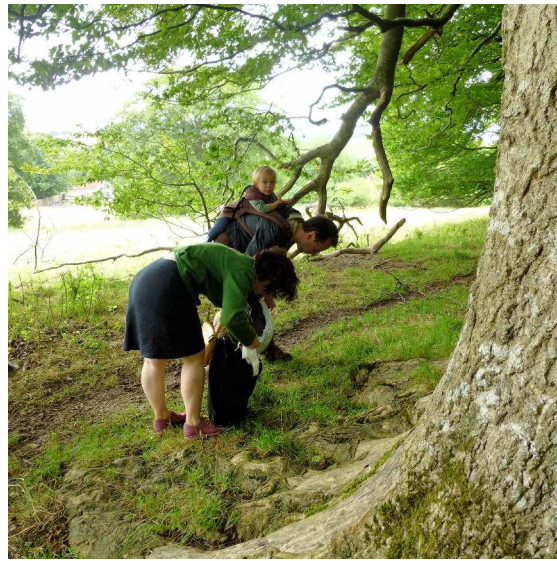


But a worse thing happened. (Aunty) Vera thought she had lost her dark Русская душа.

She looked for it in her bag. (Uncle) Matvey searched for it in the short grass under the tree.

But it was gone. Lost.

(Uncle) Matvey walked away in despair.



Luckily they saw it later on. (Uncle) Matvey ran after it, everyone joined in. Baby Gary was supporting. Anissa was bounding.

They caught mama's soul.

Phew.

There had been loss.

But could they keep hold of the dark Russian soul?

It had been lost once; would it be lost again?



It happened again on the Tuesday.

Nancy and Anissa were standing on the path with the big steps.
Everything was normal and quiet.

Then suddenly they began to eat their index fingers. At exactly the same time. For no reason at all.

Soon they each only had nine fingers.

Well they had seven fingers and two thumbs. That's nine digits.

But one was lost.



It happened again on the Wednesday.

Nancy found a long, snake-like cow pat. It wiggled and squiggled all the way to the edge of the cliff. But where was the cow?

The cow that had made the cowpat must have walked over the edge of the cliff while it was having a poo. The cow was lost.

Only the poo remained.

This can happen in life. Sometimes we can only see the poo.



Aunty Polly says there is a dog called a cockapoo.

Here is one about to bite the head off a guinea pig.

Sometimes nature looks very gentle and lovely.

Then a guinea can lose her head.





Loss can come in other ways.

One morning Baby Gary thought he had lost everyone. That he had been abandoned for ever.

Here you can see his sadness.

But in a minute, the girls appeared with a lorryload of goosegogs.

In fact it wasn't a lorryload it was a trugload.



As soon as he saw them, Baby Gary was happy again.

He lost his sense of loss. A kind of double loss.

Or may the second loss filled the emptiness created by the first loss.
Like pouring milk into a sadness glass.

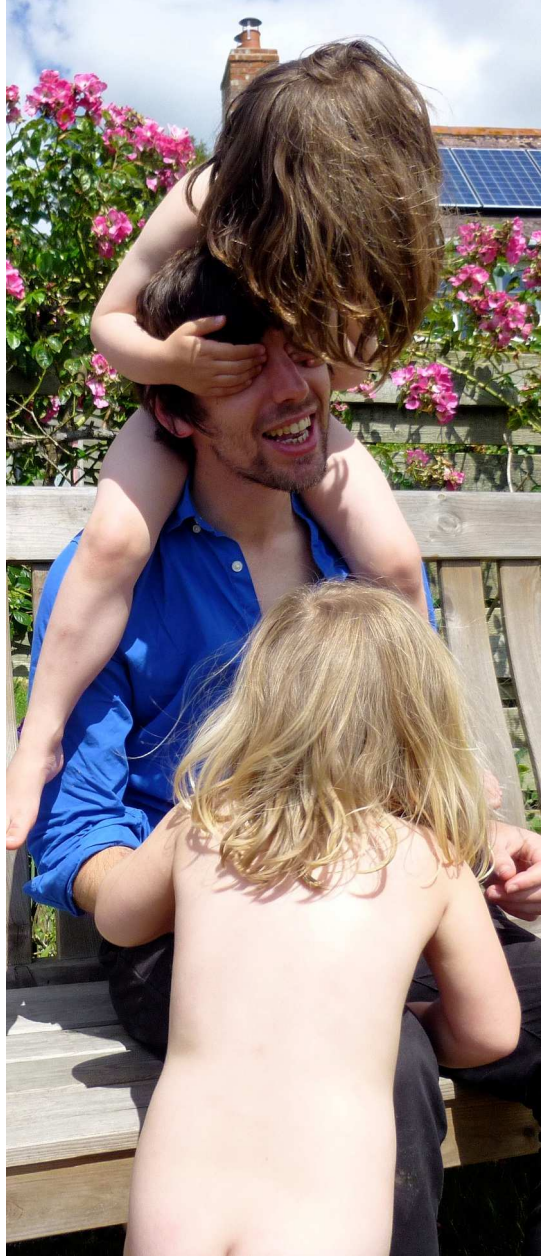
Anyway, they ran to the pool and flung off their clothes and danced and played.



They even played on Uncle Cholmondoley, who had only just arrived and was quite froighthoenaed.

Anissa blinded him so that he was like a character in a Greek tragedy. Then Nancy stole his glasses, his telephone and his wallet.

Poor Uncle Cholmondoley lost everything.



But the cushions didn't mind. They celebrated and Anissa wore the glasses and sang awful pop songs into the phone while Nancy and Gary stamped with joy.

Alone and sad, Cholmondeley cried tears of custard.



In the mean time, (Uncle) Matvey started a bonfire upon which Uncle Cholmondeley could be sacrificed.

He wore the tiny hat that Nancy had lost.

Things looked bleak for Uncle Cholmondeley.

He had lost everything.



Really only one thing could save Cholmondeley. Nancy and Anissa ran to the sea.

Hauling up their dresses, they cried out to Poseidon:

“Poseidon, Poseidon, lend us some of your magic kelp and meerschaum.”

As soon as they had it in their hands...



They ran back to the house with it...



...and got (Uncle) Matvey to chop it up very fast and finely while Grandpa watched. Then they scattered it all over everyone and slowly, slowly, things returned to normal.

But it had been very close and both girls vowed that they would never again follow the *via negativa*.



The whole party cried with gratitude and ate barbequeued sorsages, except for Granny, who repugned them.

The END.





