

The man Slupchik picked me up and carried me up to a small hovel. “Just calm down,” he said. “It’s no use.”

He set me down in the cave, then walked outside. He came back a little while later with another of the derelicts. He had the derelict sit next to me.

“Now,” Slupchik said, very sternly. “I’m going to leave this one here with you, because I think you need it. But there is no use,” he said, even more critically, “there is no *use* in trying to judge everything by the condition you are in right now. You are absolutely delusional if you think that you know anything right now.” He said goodbye and left.

The man sat next to me. I had him pull me up against the wall and we both slept against the wall. As he slept, I secretly took his hand and held it tight. As I did so, I felt a slender instrument in his hand, a tiny flute. I felt its edges, it was not a flute, it was a pencil, a light, hexagonal tube. I felt along the shaft for the golden words.

“THIS IS,” I cried, softly, trembling, unable to take the pencil from him, but unable to let it go, I cried all the tears that I had and I resolved to say it with conviction, “THIS IS TIME WELL SPENT,” I said and, biting my lip, tasting my own salt, at that point, I must have died.