Sitting at the fly-tying bench encourages reflection in the same way smoking once did. You guess it has something to do with the stillness and closeness of the work. Winding the thread around and around the small piece of mallard feather to hold it in place and create the mayfly wing; peering through a magnifier at the size twenty hook; placing the thoughts that dart, fish-like, through your consciousness under the glass of introspection, trying to understand whether they, too, can be arranged into something that seems real.

The question is what can be made of them. You glance around the small, almost bare room. These flies you will take to Mike’s Sports, where you might get fifty cents apiece if Mike happens to be feeling the holiday spirit. The thoughts are another matter. Even if you get them all down on paper, to whom will you take these mixed up and out-of-sequence ruminations? They say thoughts are things, but no one has ever been willing to pay you for those precious possessions. They do not reflect back on the status of the purchaser in the same way other kinds of property do. Like, say, an automobile. Or a maidenhead. What a ridiculous word. The trophy of virginity it must be. Or perhaps it is merely pleasure: yours does not give enough of that, apparently, while for twenty? fifty? some slake the thirst for whatever it is temporarily until the next time so that the barter might recur again and again without anyone ever knowing the difference. Except when it comes to that, you are in unknown territory, wandering through a neighborhood you have read about but never visited and so consequently can never hope to begin to explain, which is perhaps the answer to the question you asked. Enough of that. Enough.