The Captive

by Jorge Luis Borges (from *The Maker*, 1960)

In Junín or Tapalquén, they tell the story. A young boy disappeared in an Indian raid; people said the Indians had kidnapped him. His parents searched for him without success. Many years went by, and a soldier coming into town from the interior told them about an Indian with sky blue eyes who might well be their son.

They finally managed to find this Indian (the story has lost many of its details, and I don’t want to invent what I don’t know) and thought they recognized him. Shaped by the wilderness and his barbaric life, the man could no longer understand the words of his mother tongue, but he allowed himself to be led—indifferently, docilely—back to the house. There, he stopped (perhaps because the others stopped). He looked at the door, almost uncomprehendingly. Then suddenly he bowed his head, gave an odd cry, rushed down the entryway and through the two long patios, and ran into the kitchen. He thrust his arm unhesitatingly up into the blackened chimney of the stove and took out the little horn-handled knife he had hidden there when he was a boy. His eyes gleamed with happiness and his parents wept, because they had found their son.

That memory may have been followed by others, but the Indian could not live a life that was hemmed about by walls, and one day he went off in search of his wilderness. I would like to know what he felt in that moment of vertigo when past and present intermingled; I would like to know whether the lost son was reborn and died in that ecstatic moment, and whether he ever managed to recognize, even as little as a baby or a dog might, his parents and the house.