What does it mean, Bob asked himself, to cleave some thing asunder? To split something open while clinging to it? To foster distance and proximity in the swathe of a cut? In this question, he was sure, there was a riddle, perpetually undecidable. He sweetly cursed IRB for planting the Tina T earworm in his brain. The BIG question colored every tendril of cleaving.

If one was “to cleave” as in doing as a verb does, what’s the past tense? How does cleaving clove? He looked it up and found different conjugations in different dictionaries. “To stick to” is to have cleaved, clove, and clave according to some. Like “Non-binary Infrared Betty clave (or clove) to their Bob.” To split a thing in two is to have cleaved, cleft, or cloven. Like “Infrared Betty’s affections were cloven in two, cleft inexorably apart.” This example frightened him.

Shaking off his inability to think clearly through the problem, he thought to give diagramming a try. He remembered he sucked at this as a kid.
The drawing didn’t satisfy in the way a Feynman diagram might. He needed squiggles. The all-important verb stands caught between a wall and a fence.

Now cloven the adjective is pretty unambiguous. Bob immediately conjures the cloven hoof of a deer, or Pan the goat-fucker piper or yeah, even the dancing Devil. And not to forget the auspiciously sexy facial cleft. He’d heard it said about Travolta a gazillion times. “What a fucking chin.”
The Thing Bifurcated Immediately Morphed