



The Fourth  
**OMNI**  
Book Of  
Science Fiction

**Edited By Ellen Datlow**

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# Introduction

By now, OMNI doesn't have to prove itself to anybody. But when OMNI was the new kid on the block in 1978, the established science fiction magazines scoffed—who was Bob Guccione to come out of nowhere and dare to start a science magazine *with fiction*? What did he know of science fiction? Well, he had the acumen to hire Ben Bova, award-winning editor of *Analog* as OMNI's first fiction editor. Bova immediately made his mark on the magazine, initiating a policy of publishing original, exciting and thought-provoking fiction. This tradition continues six years later. OMNI's science fiction has influenced the field since the first issue hit the stands October 1978. In this anthology, almost half the stories are award finalists and/or were chosen for "Best of the Year" anthologies.

The humor story poses great difficulty for a science fiction editor in that it is hard to find. Possibly because humor is so hard to write well and because what one finds humorous is so subjective. Or maybe it's because the future just doesn't seem funny any more. In any case, OMNI has published its share of humorous stories and several of these are reprinted here. A few will provide belly laughs, some have a nasty little edge, and most are concerned, under the chuckles, with deadly serious themes.

Ian Watson's "The Thousand Cuts" plays wickedly with time while the British protagonists characteristically agonize about what exactly is going on, keeping a stiff upper lip all the while. Robert Silverberg's 1980 Hugo finalist "Our Lady of the Sauropods" starts off playfully on a planetoid inhabited by cloned dinosaurs, lulling the reader with the humor of the protagonist's situation, as it quietly and subtly becomes a kind of a horror tale. A central character in Jack Dann's 1981 Nebula finalist "Going Under" is a meddling talking head. And charming Dr. Freud makes a dramatic appearance to deal with a space crew's mass psychosis in Barry Malzberg's "Sigmund in Space." Two less familiar names, Tom Sullivan and Kathleen V. Westfall take pot shots at Soviet-American Olympic rivalry and American bureaucracy in, respectively, "The Mickey Mouse Olympics" and "Easy Points."

In addition, this volume contains fine stories by Harlan Ellison, Orson Scott Card, Spider Robinson, George R.R. Martin, Melisa Michaels, and William Gibson and strong novelettes by Nancy Kress and Suzy McKee Charnas.

To round out the collection three original pieces are included. The first is "The Invitation," a charming mystery by Paul J. Nahin. The other two original pieces are by Gene Wolfe. For OMNI's November 1983 issue I commissioned six humorous short shorts. One was "Creation," by Gene. Gene later submitted two companion stories, "Re-Creation" and "The Sister's Account." In this volume, for the first time, the full triptych, entitled "Procreation."

*Ellen Datlow*  
Fiction Editor

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# THE WAY OF CROSS AND DRAGON

*George R. R. Martin*

“Heresy,” he told me. The brackish waters of his pool sloshed gently.

“Another one?” I said wearily. “There are so many these days.”

My Lord Commander was displeased by that comment. He shifted position heavily, sending ripples up and down the pool. One broke over the side, and a sheet of water slid across the tiles of the receiving chamber. My boots were soaked yet again. I accepted that philosophically. I had worn my worst boots, well aware that wet feet were among the inescapable consequences of paying call on Torgathon Nine-Klariis Tûn, elder of the ka-Thane people, and also Archbishop of Vess, Most Holy Father of the Four Vows, Grand Inquisitor of the Order Militant of the Knights of Jesus Christ, and counselor to His Holiness Pope Daryn XXI of New Rome.

“Be there as many heresies as stars in the sky, each single one is no less dangerous, Father,” the archbishop said solemnly. “As Knights of Christ, it is our ordained task to fight them one and all. And I must add that this new heresy is particularly foul.”

“Yes, my Lord Commander,” I replied. “I did not intend to make light of it. You have my apologies. The mission to Finnegan was most taxing. I had hoped to ask you for a leave of absence from my duties. I need rest, a time for thought and restoration.”

“Rest?” The archbishop moved again in his pool, only a slight shift of his immense bulk, but it was enough to send a fresh sheet of water across the floor. His black, pupilless eyes blinked at me. “No, Father, I am afraid that is out of the question. Your skills and your experience are vital for this new mission.” His bass tones seemed to soften somewhat then. “I have not had time to go over your reports on Finnegan,” he said. “How did your work go?”

“Badly,” I told him, “though ultimately I think we will prevail. The Church is strong on Finnegan. When our attempts at reconciliation were rebuffed, I put some standards into the right hands, and we were able to shut down the heretics’ newspaper and broadcasting facilities. Our friends also made certain that their legal actions came to nothing.”

“That is not *badly*,” the archbishop said. “You won a considerable victory for the Lord and the Church.”

“There were riots, my Lord Commander,” I said. “More than a hundred of the heretics were killed, and a dozen of our own people. I fear there will be more violence before the matter is finished. Our priests are attacked if they so much as enter the city where the heresy has taken root. Their leaders risk their lives if they leave that city. I had hoped to avoid such hatreds, such bloodshed.”

“Commendable, but not realistic,” said Archbishop Torgathon. He blinked at me again, and I remembered that among people of his race blinking is a sign of impatience. “The blood of martyrs must sometimes be spilled, and the blood of heretics as well. What matters it if a being surrenders his life, so long as his soul is saved?”

“Indeed,” I agreed. Despite his impatience, Torgathon would lecture me for another hour if given a chance. That prospect dismayed me. The receiving chamber was not designed for human comfort, and I did not wish to remain any longer than necessary. The walls were damp and moldy, the air hot and humid and thick with the rancid-butter smell characteristic of the ka-Thane. My collar was chafing my neck raw. I was sweating beneath my cassock, my feet were thoroughly soaked, and my stomach was beginning to churn.

I pushed ahead to the business at hand. “You say this new heresy is unusually foul, my Lord Commander?”

“It is,” he said.

“Where has it started?”

“On Arion, a world some three weeks’ distance from Vess. A human world entirely. I cannot understand why you humans are so easily corrupted. Once a ka-Thane has found the faith, he would scarcely abandon it.”

“That is well known,” I replied politely. I did not mention that the number of ka-Thane to find the faith was vanishingly small. They were a slow, ponderous people, and most of their vast millions showed no interest in learning any ways other than their own, or following any creed but their own ancient religion. Torgathon Nine-Klariis Tûn was an anomaly. He had been among the first converts almost two centuries ago, when Pope Vidas



L had ruled that nonhumans might serve as clergy. Given his great life span and the iron certainty of his belief, it was no wonder that Torgathon had risen as far as he had, despite the fact that fewer than a thousand of his race had followed him into the Church. He had at least a century of life remaining to him. No doubt he would someday be Torgathon Cardinal Tûn, should he squelch enough heresies. The times are like that.

“We have little influence on Arion,” the archbishop was saying. His arms moved as he spoke, four ponderous clubs of mottled green-gray flesh churning the water, and the dirty white cilia around his breathing hole trembled with each word. “A few priests, a few churches, some believers, but no power to speak of. The heretics already outnumber us on this world. I rely on your intellect, your shrewdness. Turn this calamity into an opportunity. This heresy is so palpable that you can easily disprove it. Perhaps some of the deluded will turn to the true way.”

“Certainly,” I said. “And the nature of this heresy? What must I disprove?” It is a sad indication of my own troubled faith to add that I did not really care. I have dealt with too many heresies. Their beliefs and their questionings echo in my head and trouble my dreams at night. How can I be sure of my own faith? The very edict that had admitted Torgathon into the clergy had caused a half-dozen worlds to repudiate the Bishop of New Rome, and those who had followed that path would find a particularly ugly heresy in the massive naked (save for a damp Roman collar) alien who floated before me and wielded the authority of the Church in four great webbed hands. Christianity is the greatest single human religion, but that means little. The non-Christians outnumber us five to one, and there are well over seven hundred Christian sects, some almost as large as the One True Interstellar Catholic Church of Earth and the Thousand Worlds. Even Daryn XXI, powerful as he is, is only one of seven to claim the title of Pope. My own belief was strong once, but I have moved too long among heretics and nonbelievers, and even my prayers do not make the doubts go away now. So it was that I felt no horror—only a sudden intellectual interest—when the archbishop told me the nature of the heresy on Arion.

“They have made a saint,” he said, “out of Judas Iscariot.”

As a senior in the Knights Inquisitor, I command my own star-ship, which it pleases me to call *Truth of Christ*. Before the craft was assigned to me, it was named the *St. Thomas*, after the apostle, but I did not feel a saint notorious for doubting was an appropriate patron for a ship enlisted in the fight against heresy. I have no duties aboard the *Truth*, which is crewed by six brothers and sisters of the Order of St. Christopher the Far-Traveling

and captained by a young woman I hired away from a merchant trader.

I was therefore able to devote the entire three-week voyage from Vess to Arion to a study of the heretical Bible, a copy of which had been given to me by the archbishop's administrative assistant. It was a thick, heavy, handsome book, bound in dark leather, its pages edged with gold leaf, with many splendid interior illustrations in full color with holographic enhancement. Remarkable work, clearly done by someone who loved the all-but-forgotten art of bookmaking. The paintings reproduced inside—the originals were to be found on the walls of the House of St. Judas on Arion, I gathered—were masterful, if blasphemous, as much high art as the Tammerwens and RoHallidays that adorn the Great Cathedral of St. John on New Rome.

Inside, the book bore an imprimatur indicating that it had been approved by Lukyan Judasson, First Scholar of the Order of St. Judas Iscariot.

It was called *The Way of Cross and Dragon*.

I read it as the *Truth of Christ* slid between the stars, at first taking copious notes to better understand the heresy that I must fight, but later simply absorbed by the strange, convoluted, grotesque story it told. The words of the text had passion and power and poetry.

Thus it was that I first encountered the striking figure of St. Judas Iscariot, a complex, ambitious, contradictory, and altogether extraordinary human being.

He was born of a whore in the fabled ancient city-state of Babylon on the same day that the Savior was born in Bethlehem, and he spent his childhood in alleys and gutters, selling his own body when he had to, pimping when he became older. As a youth, he began to experiment with the dark arts, and before the age of twenty he was a skilled necromancer. That was when he became Judas the Dragon-Tamer, the first and only man to bend to his will the most fearsome of God's creatures, the great winged fire lizards of Old Earth. The book held a marvelous painting of Judas in some great dank cavern, his eyes aflame as he wielded a glowing lash to keep at bay a mountainous green-gold dragon. Beneath his arm is a woven basket, its lid slightly ajar, and the tiny scaled heads of three dragon chicks are peering from within. A fourth infant dragon is crawling up his sleeve. That was in the first chapter of his life.

In the second, he was Judas the Conqueror, Judas the Dragon-King,

Judas of Babylon, the Great Usurper. Astride the greatest of his dragons, with an iron crown on his head and a sword in his hand, he made Babylon the capital of the greatest empire Old Earth had ever known, a realm that stretched from Spain to India. He reigned from a dragon throne amid the Hanging Gardens he had caused to be constructed, and it was there he sat when he tried Jesus of Nazareth, the troublemaking prophet who had been dragged before him bound and bleeding. Judas was not a patient man, and he made Christ bleed still more before he was through with Him. And when Jesus would not answer his questions, Judas—contemptuous—had Him cast back out into the streets. But first Judas ordered his guards to cut off Christ's legs. "Healer," he said, "heal thyself."

Then came the Repentance, the vision in the night, and Judas Iscariot gave up his crown and his dark arts and his riches, to follow the man he had crippled. Despised and taunted by those he had tyrannized, Judas became the Legs of the Lord, and for a year he carried Jesus on his back to the far corners of the realm he had once ruled. When Jesus did finally heal Himself, then Judas walked at His side, and from that time forth he was Jesus' trusted friend and counselor, the first and foremost of the Twelve. Finally, Jesus gave Judas the gift of tongues, recalled and sanctified the dragons that Judas had sent away, and sent his disciple forth on a solitary ministry across the oceans, "to spread My Word where I cannot go."

There came a day when the sun went dark at noon and the ground trembled, and Judas swung his dragon around on ponderous wings and flew back across the raging seas. But when he reached the city of Jerusalem, he found Christ dead on the cross.

In that moment his faith faltered, and for the next three days the Great Wrath of Judas was like a storm across the ancient world. His dragons razed the Temple in Jerusalem and drove the people from the city and struck as well at the great seats of power in Rome and Babylon. And when he found the others of the Twelve and questioned them and learned of how the one named Simon-called-Peter had three times betrayed the Lord, he strangled Peter with his own hands and fed the corpse to his dragons. Then he sent those dragons forth to start fires throughout the world, funeral pyres for Jesus of Nazareth.

And Jesus rose on the third day, and Judas wept, but his tears could not turn Christ's anger, for in his wrath he had betrayed all of Christ's teachings.

So Jesus called back the dragons, and they came, and everywhere the fires went out. And from their bellies he called forth Peter and made him

whole again, and gave him dominion over the Church.

Then the dragons died, and so, too, did all dragons everywhere, for they were the living sigil of the power and wisdom of Judas Iscariot, who had sinned greatly. And He took from Judas the gift of tongues and the power of healing He had given, and even his eyesight, for Judas had acted as a man blind (there was a fine painting of the blinded Judas weeping over the bodies of his dragons). And He told Judas that for long ages he would be remembered only as Betrayer, and people would curse his name, and all that he had been and done would be forgotten.

But then, because Judas had loved Him so, Christ gave him a boon, an extended life, during which he might travel and think on his sins and finally come to forgiveness, and only then die.

And that was the beginning of the last chapter in the life of Judas Iscariot, but it was a very long chapter indeed. Once Dragon-King, once the friend of Christ, now he became only a blind traveler, outcast and friendless, wandering all the cold roads of the earth, living even when all the cities and people and things he had known were dead. And Peter, the first Pope and ever his enemy, spread far and wide the tale of how Judas had sold Christ for thirty pieces of silver, until Judas dared not even use his true name. For a time he called himself just Wandering Ju', and afterward many other names.

He lived more than a thousand years, and became a preacher, and a healer, and a lover of animals, and was hunted and persecuted when the Church that Peter had founded became bloated and corrupt. But he had a great deal of time, and at last he found wisdom and a sense of peace, and finally Jesus came to him on a long-postponed deathbed, and they were reconciled, and Judas wept once again. And before he died, Christ promised that He would permit a few to remember who and what Judas had been, and that with the passage of centuries the news would spread, until finally Peter's Lie was displaced and forgotten.

Such was the life of St. Judas Iscariot, as related in *The Way of Cross and Dragon*. His teachings were there as well, and the apocryphal books that he had allegedly written.

When I had finished the volume, I lent it to Arla-k-Bau, the captain of the *Truth of Christ*. Arla was a gaunt, pragmatic woman of no particular faith, but I valued her opinion. The others of my crew, the good sisters and brothers of St. Christopher, would only have echoed the archbishop's religious horror.

“Interesting,” Arla said when she returned the book to me.

I chuckled. “Is that all?”

She shrugged. “It makes a nice story. An easier read than your Bible, Damien, and more dramatic as well.”

“True,” I admitted. “But it’s absurd. An unbelievable tangle of doctrine, apocrypha, mythology, and superstition. Entertaining, yes, certainly. Imaginative, even daring. But ridiculous, don’t you think? How can you credit dragons? A legless Christ? Peter being pieced together after being devoured by four monsters?”

Arla’s grin was taunting. “Is that any sillier than water changing into wine, or Christ walking on the waves, or a man living in the belly of a fish?” Arla-k-Bau liked to jab at me. It had been a scandal when I selected a nonbeliever as my captain, but she was very good at her job, and I liked her around to keep me sharp. She had a good mind, Arla did, and I valued that more than blind obedience. Perhaps that was a sin in me.

“There is a difference,” I said.

“Is there?” she snapped back. Her eyes saw through my masks. “Ah, Damien, admit it. You rather liked this book.”

I cleared my throat. “It piqued my interest,” I acknowledged. I had to justify myself. “You know the kind of matter I deal with ordinarily. Dreary little doctrinal deviations, obscure quibblings on theology somehow blown all out of proportion, bald-faced political maneuverings designed to set some ambitious planetary bishop up as a new Pope, or to wring some concession or other from New Rome or Vess. The war is endless, but the battles are dull and dirty. They exhaust me, spiritually, emotionally, physically. Afterward I feel drained and guilty.” I tapped the book’s leather cover. “This is different. The heresy must be crushed, of course, but I admit that I am anxious to meet this Lukyan Judasson.”

“The artwork is lovely as well,” Arla said, flipping through the pages of *The Way of Cross and Dragon* and stopping to study one especially striking plate. Judas weeping over his dragons, I think. I smiled to see that it had affected her as much as me. Then I frowned.

That was the first inkling I had of the difficulties ahead.

So it was that the *Truth of Christ* came to the porcelain city Ammadon on the world of Arion, where the Order of St. Judas Iscariot kept its House.

Arion was a pleasant, gentle world, inhabited for these past three centuries. Its population was under nine million; Ammadon, the only real city, was home to two of those millions. The technological level was medium-high, but chiefly imported. Arion had little industry and was not an innovative world, except perhaps artistically. The arts were quite important here, flourishing and vital. Religious freedom was a basic tenet of the society, but Arion was not a religious world either, and the majority of the populace lived devoutly secular lives. The most popular religion was Aestheticism, which hardly counts as a religion at all. There were also Taoists, Erikaners, Old True Christers, and Children of the Dreamer, along with a dozen lesser sects.

And finally there were nine churches of the One True Interstellar Catholic faith. There had been twelve.

The three others were now houses of Arion's fastest-growing faith, the Order of St. Judas Iscariot, which also had a dozen newly built churches of its own.

The bishop of Arion was a dark, severe man with close-cropped black hair who was not at all happy to see me. "Damien Har Veris!" he exclaimed in some wonder when I called on him at his residence. "We have heard of you, of course, but I never thought to meet or host you. Our numbers are small here—"

"And growing smaller," I said. "A matter of some concern to my Lord Commander, Archbishop Torgathon. Apparently you are less troubled, Excellency, since you did not see fit to report the activities of this sect of Judas worshipers."

He looked briefly angry at the rebuke, but quickly he swallowed his temper. Even a bishop can fear a Knight Inquisitor. "We are concerned, of course," he said. "We do all we can to combat the heresy. If you have advice that will help us, I will be more than glad to listen."

"I am an Inquisitor of the Order Militant of the Knights of Jesus Christ," I said bluntly. "I do not give advice, Excellency. I take action. To that end I was sent to Arion, and that is what I shall do. Now tell me what you know about this heresy and this First Scholar, this Lukyan Judasson."

“Of course, Father Damien,” the bishop began. He signaled for a servant to bring us a tray of wine and cheese, and began to summarize the short, but explosive, history of the Judas cult. I listened, polishing my nails on the crimson lapel of my jacket, until the black paint gleamed brilliantly, interrupting from time to time with a question. Before he had half-finished, I was determined to visit Lukyan personally. It seemed the best course of action. And I had wanted to do it all along.

Appearances were important on Arion, I gathered, and I deemed it necessary to impress Lukyan with my self and my station. I wore my best boots, sleek dark handmade boots of Roman leather that had never seen the inside of Torgathon’s receiving chamber, and a severe black suit with deep burgundy lapels and stiff collar. From around my neck hung a splendid crucifix of pure gold; my collar pin was a matching golden sword, the sigil of the Knights Inquisitor. Brother Denis painted my nails carefully, all black as ebony, and darkened my eyes as well, and used a fine white powder on my face. When I glanced in the mirror, I frightened even myself. I smiled, but only briefly. It ruined the effect.

I walked to the House of St. Judas Iscariot. The streets of Ammadon were wide and spacious and golden, lined by scarlet trees called whisperwinds, whose long, drooping tendrils did indeed seem to whisper secrets to the gentle breeze. Sister Judith came with me. She is a small woman, slight of build even in the cowled coveralls of the Order of St. Christopher. Her face is meek and kind, her eyes wide and youthful and innocent. I find her useful. Four times now she has killed those who attempted to assault me.

The House itself was newly built. Rambling and stately, it rose from amid gardens of small bright flowers and seas of golden grass, and the gardens were surrounded by a high wall. Murals covered both the outer wall around the property and the exterior of the building itself. I recognized a few of them from *The Way of Cross and Dragon* and stopped briefly to admire them before walking on through the main gate. No one tried to stop us. There were no guards, not even a receptionist. Within the walls, men and women strolled languidly through the flowers, or sat on benches beneath silverwoods and whisperwinds.

Sister Judith and I paused, then made our way directly to the House itself.

We had just started up the steps when a man appeared from within; he stood waiting in the doorway. He was blond and fat, with a great wiry

beard that framed a slow smile, and he wore a flimsy robe that fell to his sandaled feet, and on the robe were dragons bearing the silhouette of a man holding a cross.

When I reached the top of the steps, the man bowed to me. “Father Damien Har Veris of the Knights Inquisitor,” he said. His smile widened. “I greet you in the name of Jesus, and St. Judas. I am Lukyan.”

I made a note to myself to find out which of the bishop’s staff was feeding information to the Judas cult, but my composure did not break. I have been a Knight Inquisitor for a long, long time. “Father Lukyan Mo,” I said, taking his hand, “I have questions to ask of you.” I did not smile.

He did. “I thought you might,” he said.

Lukyan’s office was large but spartan. Heretics often have a simplicity that the officers of the true Church seem to have lost. He did have one indulgence, however.

Dominating the wall behind his desk/console was the painting I had already fallen in love with, the blinded Judas weeping over his dragons.

Lukyan sat down heavily and motioned me to a second chair. We had left Sister Judith outside, in the waiting chamber. “I prefer to stand, Father Lukyan,” I said, knowing it gave me an advantage.

“Just Lukyan,” he said. “Or Luke, if you prefer. We have little use for titles here.”

“You are Father Lukyan Mo, born here on Arion, educated in the seminary on Cathaday, former priest of the One True Interstellar Catholic Church of Earth and the Thousand Worlds,” I said. “I will address you as befits your station, Father. I expect you to reciprocate. Is that understood?”

“Oh, yes,” he said amiably.

“I am empowered to strip you of your right to administer the sacraments, to order you shunned and excommunicated for this heresy you have formulated. On certain worlds I could even order your death.”

“But not on Arion,” Lukyan said quickly. “We’re very tolerant here. Besides, we outnumber you.” He smiled. “As for the rest, well, I don’t perform those sacraments much anyway, you know. Not for years. I’m First



Scholar now. A teacher, a thinker. I show others the way, help them find the faith. Excommunicate me if it will make you happy, Father Damien. Happiness is what all of us seek.”

“You have given up the faith, then, Father Lukyan?” I said. I deposited my copy of *The Way of Cross and Dragon* on his desk. “But I see you have found a new one.” Now I did smile, but it was all ice, all menace, all mockery. “A more ridiculous creed I have yet to encounter. I suppose you will tell me that you have spoken to God, that He trusted you with this new revelation, so that you might clear the good name, such that it is, of Holy Judas?”

Now Lukyan’s smile was very broad indeed. He picked up the book and beamed at me.

“Oh, no,” he said. “No, I made it all up.”

That stopped me. “What?”

“I made it all up,” he repeated. He hefted the book fondly. “I drew on many sources, of course, especially the Bible, but I do think of *Cross and Dragon* mostly as my own work. It’s rather good, don’t you agree? Of course, I could hardly put my name on it, proud as I am of it, but I did include my imprimatur. Did you notice that? It was the closest I dared come to a byline.”

I was speechless only for a moment. Then I grimaced. “You startle me,” I admitted. “I expected to find an inventive madman, some poor self-deluded fool firm in his belief that he had spoken to God. I’ve dealt with such fanatics before. Instead I find a cheerful cynic who has invented a religion for his own profit. I think I prefer the fanatics. You are beneath contempt, Father Lukyan. You will burn in hell for eternity.”

“I doubt it,” Lukyan said, “but you do mistake me, Father Damien. I am no cynic, nor do I profit from my dear St. Judas. Truthfully, I lived more comfortably as a priest of your own Church. I do this because it is my vocation.”

I sat down. “You confuse me,” I said. “Explain.”

“Now I am going to tell you the truth,” he said. He said it in an odd way, almost as a cant. “I am a Liar,” he added.

“You want to confuse me with child’s paradoxes,” I snapped.

“No, no,” he smiled. “A *Liar*. With a capital. It is an organization, Father Damien. A religion, you might call it. A great and powerful faith. And I am the smallest part of it.”

“I know of no such church,” I said.

“Oh, no, you wouldn’t. It’s secret. It has to be. You can understand that, can’t you? People don’t like being lied to.”

“I do not like being lied to,” I said.

Lukyan looked wounded. “I told you this would be the truth, didn’t I? When a Liar says that, you can believe him. How else could we trust each other?”

“There are many of you,” I said. I was starting to think that Lukyan was a madman after all, as fanatic as any heretic, but in a more complex way. Here was a heresy within a heresy, but I recognized my duty—to find the truth of things and set them right.

“Many of us,” Lukyan said, smiling. “You would be surprised, Father Damien, really you would. But there are some things I dare not tell you.”

“Tell me what you dare, then.”

“Happily,” said Lukyan Judasson. “We Liars, like all other religions, have several truths we take on faith. Faith is always required. There are some things that cannot be proved. We believe that life is worth living. That is an article of faith. The purpose of life is to live, to resist death, perhaps to defy entropy.”

“Go on,” I said, growing even more interested despite myself.

“We also believe that happiness is a good, something to be sought after.”

“The Church does not oppose happiness,” I said dryly.

“I wonder,” Lukyan said. “But let us not quibble. Whatever the Church’s position on happiness, it does preach belief in an afterlife, in a supreme being, and a complex moral code.”

“True.”

“The Liars believe in no afterlife, no God. We see the universe as it is, Father Damien, and these naked truths are cruel ones. We who believe in life, and treasure it, will die. Afterward there will be nothing, eternal emptiness, blackness, nonexistence. In our living there has been no purpose, no poetry, no meaning. Nor do our deaths possess these qualities. When we are gone, the universe will not long remember us, and shortly it will be as if we had never lived at all. Our worlds and our universe will not long outlive us. Ultimately entropy will consume all, and our puny efforts cannot stay that awful end. It will be gone. It has never been. It has never mattered. The universe itself is doomed, transitory, and certainly it is uncaring.”

I slid back in my chair, and a shiver went through me as I listened to poor Lukyan’s dark words. I found myself fingering my crucifix. “A bleak philosophy,” I said, “as well as a false one. I have had that fearful vision myself. I think all of us do, at some point. But it is not so, Father. My faith sustains me against such nihilism. Faith is a shield against despair.”

“Oh, I know that, my friend, my Knight Inquisitor,” Lukyan said. “I’m glad to see you understand so well. You are almost one of us already.”

I frowned.

“You’ve touched the heart of it,” Lukyan continued. “The truths, the great truths—and most of the lesser ones as well—they are unbearable for most men. We find our shield in faith. Your faith, my faith, any faith. It doesn’t matter, so long as we *believe*, really and truly believe, in whatever lie we cling to.” He fingered the ragged edges of his great blond beard. “Our psychs have always told us that believers are the happy ones, you know. They may believe in Christ or Buddha or Erika Stormjones, in reincarnation or immortality or nature, in the power of love or the platform of a political faction, but it all comes to the same thing. They believe. They are happy. It is the ones who have seen truth who despair, and kill themselves. The truths are so vast, the faiths so little, so poorly made, so riddled with errors and contradictions. We see around them and through them, and then we feel the weight of darkness on us, and we can no longer be happy.”

I am not a slow man. I knew, by then, where Lukyan Judasson was going. “Your Liars invent faiths.”

He smiled. “Of all sorts. Not only religious. Think of it. We know truth for the cruel instrument it is. Beauty is infinitely preferable to truth. We invent beauty. Faiths, political movements, high ideals, belief in love and fellowship. All of them are lies. We tell those lies, and others, endless others. We improve on history and myth and religion, make each more beautiful, better, easier to believe in. Our lies are not perfect, of course. The truths are too big. But perhaps someday we will find one great lie that all humanity can use. Until then, a thousand small lies will do.”

“I think I do not care for you Liars very much,” I said with a cold, even fervor. “My whole life has been a quest for truth.”

Lukyan was indulgent. “Father Damien Har Veris, Knight Inquisitor, I know you better than that. You are a Liar yourself. You do good work. You ship from world to world, and on each you destroy the foolish, the rebels, the questioners who would bring down the edifice of the vast lie that you serve.”

“If my lie is so admirable,” I said, “then why have you abandoned it?”

“A religion must fit its culture and society, work with them, not against them. If there is conflict, contradiction, then the lie breaks down, and the faith falters. Your Church is good for many worlds, Father, but not for Arion. Life is too kind here, and your faith is stern. Here we love beauty, and your faith offers too little. So we have improved it. We studied this world for a long time. We know its psychological profile. St. Judas will thrive here. He offers drama, and color, and much beauty—the aesthetics are admirable. His is a tragedy with a happy ending, and Arion dotes on such stories. And the dragons are a nice touch. I think your own Church ought to find a way to work in dragons. They are marvelous creatures.”

“Mythical,” I said.

“Hardly,” he replied. “Look it up.” He grinned at me. “You see, really, it all comes back to faith. Can you really know what happened three thousand years ago? You have one Judas, I have another. Both of us have books. Is yours true? Can you really believe that? I have been admitted only to the first circle of the Order of Liars. So I do not know all our secrets, but I know that we are very old. It would not surprise me to learn that the gospels were written by men very much like me. Perhaps there never was a Judas at all. Or a Jesus.”

“I have faith that that is not so,” I said.

“There are a hundred people in this building who have a deep and very real faith in St. Judas and the Way of Cross and Dragon,” Lukyan said. “Faith is a very good thing. Do you know that the suicide rate on Arion has decreased by almost a third since the Order of St. Judas was founded?”

I remember rising slowly from my chair. “You are as fanatical as any heretic I have ever met, Lukyan Judasson,” I told him. “I pity you the loss of your faith.”

Lukyan rose with me. “Pity yourself, Damien Har Veris,” he said. “I have found a new faith and a new cause, and I am a happy man. You, my dear friend, are tortured and miserable.”

“*That is a lie!*” I am afraid I screamed.

“Come with me,” Lukyan said. He touched a panel on his wall, and the great painting of Judas weeping over his dragons slid up out of sight, and there was a stairway leading down into the ground. “Follow me,” he said.

In the cellar was a great glass vat full of pale green fluid, and in it a *thing* was floating—a thing very like an ancient embryo, aged and infantile at the same time, naked, with a huge head and a tiny atrophied body. Tubes ran from its arms and legs and genitals, connecting it to the machinery that kept it alive.

When Lukyan turned on the lights, it opened its eyes. They were large and dark, and they looked into my soul.

“This is my colleague,” Lukyan said, patting the side of the vat. “Jon Azure Cross, a Liar of the fourth circle.”

“And a telepath,” I said with a sick certainty. I had led pogroms against other telepaths, children mostly, on other worlds. The Church teaches that the psionic powers are a trap of Satan’s. They are not mentioned in the Bible. I have never felt good about those killings.

“Jon read you the moment you entered the compound,” Lukyan said, “and notified me. Only a few of us know that he is here. He helps us lie most efficiently. He knows when faith is true and when it is feigned. I have an implant in my skull. Jon can talk to me at all times. It was he who initially recruited me into the Liars. He knew my faith was hollow. He felt the depth

of my despair.”

Then the thing in the tank spoke, its metallic voice coming from a speaker-grill in the base of the machine that nurtured it. *“And I feel yours, Damien Hars Veris, empty priest. Inquisitor, you have asked too many questions. You are sick at heart, and tired, and you do not believe. Join us, Damien. You have been a Liar for a long, long time!”*

For a moment I hesitated, looking deep into myself, wondering what it was I did believe. I searched for my faith, the fire that had once sustained me, the certainty in the teachings of the Church, the presence of Christ within me. I found none of it, none. I was empty inside, burned out, full of questions and pain. But as I was about to answer Jon Azure Cross and the smiling Lukyan Judasson, I found something else, something I *did* believe in, something I had always believed in.

Truth.

I believed in truth, even when it hurt. *“He is lost to us,”* said the telepath with the mocking name of Cross.

Lukyan’s smile faded. *“Oh, really? I had hoped you would be one of us, Damien. You seemed ready.”*

I was suddenly afraid, and I considered sprinting up the stairs to Sister Judith. Lukyan had told me so very much, and now I had rejected them.

The telepath felt my fear. *“You cannot hurt us, Damien,”* it said. *“Go in peace. Lukyan told you nothing.”*

Lukyan was frowning. *“I told him a good deal, Jon,”* he said.

*“Yes. But can he trust the words of such a Liar as you?”* The small misshapen mouth of the thing in the vat twitched in a smile, and its great eyes closed, and Lukyan Judasson sighed and led me up the stairs.

It was not until some years later that I realized it was Jon Azure Cross who was lying, and the victim of his lie was Lukyan. I *could* hurt them. I did.

It was almost simple. The bishop had friends in government and the media. With some money in the right places, I made some friends of my own. Then I exposed Cross in his cellar, charging that he had used his

psionic powers to tamper with the minds of Lukyan's followers. My friends were receptive to the charges. The guardians conducted a raid, took the telepath Cross into custody, and later tried him.

He was innocent, of course. My charge was nonsense; human telepaths can read minds in close proximity, but seldom anything more. But they are rare, and much feared, and Cross was hideous enough so that it was easy to make him a victim of superstition. In the end, he was acquitted, and he left the city of Ammadon and perhaps Arion itself, bound for regions unknown.

But it had never been my intention to convict him. The charge was enough. The cracks began to show in the lie that he and Lukyan had built together. Faith is hard to come by, and easy to lose, and the merest doubt can begin to erode even the strongest foundation of belief.

The bishop and I labored together to sow further doubts. It was not as easy as I might have thought. The Liars had done their work well. Ammadon, like most civilized cities, had a great pool of knowledge, a computer system that linked the schools and universities and libraries together, and made their combined wisdom available to any who needed it.

But, when I checked, I soon discovered that the histories of Rome and Babylon had been subtly reshaped, and there were three listings for Judas Iscariot—one for the Betrayer, one for the saint, and one of the conqueror-king of Babylon. His name was also mentioned in connection with the Hanging Gardens, and there is an entry for a so-called Codex Judas.

And according to the Ammadon library, dragons became extinct on Old Earth around the time of Christ.

We purged all those lies finally, wiped them from the memories of the computers, though we had to cite authorities on a half-dozen non-Christian worlds before the librarians and academics would credit that the differences were anything more than a question of religious preference.

By then the Order of St. Judas had withered in the glare of exposure. Lukyan Judasson had grown gaunt and angry, and at least half of his churches had closed.

The heresy never died completely, of course. There are always those who believe, no matter what. And so to this day *The Way of Cross and Dragon* is read on Arion, in the porcelain city Ammadon, amid murmuring

whisperwinds.

Arla-k-Bau and the *Truth of Christ* carried me back to Vess a year after my departure, and Archbishop Torgathon finally gave me the leave of absence I had asked for, before sending me out to fight still other heresies. So I had my victory, and the Church continued on much as before, and the Order of St. Judas Iscariot was thoroughly crushed. The telepath Jon Azure Cross had been wrong, I thought then. He had sadly underestimated the power of a Knight Inquisitor.

Later, though, I remembered his words.

*You cannot hurt us, Damien.*

Us?

The Order of St. Judas? Or the Liars?

He lied, I think, deliberately, knowing I would go forth and destroy the Way of Cross and Dragon, knowing, too, that I could not touch the Liars, would not even dare mention them. How could I? Who would credit it? A grand star-spanning conspiracy as old as history? It reeks of paranoia, and I had no proof at all.

The telepath lied for Lukyan's benefit so he would let me go. I am certain of that now. Cross risked much to ensnare me. Failing, he was willing to sacrifice Lukyan Judasson and his lie, pawns in some greater game.

So I left, and I carried within me the knowledge that I was empty of faith, but for a blind faith in truth—truth I could no longer find in my Church.

I grew certain of that in my year of rest, which I spent reading and studying on Vess and Cathaday and Celia's World. Finally I returned to the archbishop's receiving room, and stood again before Torgathon Nine-Klariis Tûn in my very worst pair of boots. "My Lord Commander," I said to him, "I can accept no further assignments. I ask that I be retired from active service."

"For what cause?" Torgathon rumbled, splashing feebly.

"I have lost the faith," I said to him, simply.

He regarded me for a long time, his pupilless eyes blinking. At last he



said, “Your faith is a matter between you and your confessor. I care only about your results. You have done good work, Damien. You may not retire, and we will not allow you to resign.”

The truth will set us free.

But freedom is cold, and empty, and frightening, and lies can often be warm and beautiful.

Last year the Church granted me a new ship. I named this one *Dragon*.

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# The Thousand Cuts

by Ian Watson

The *Petrushka* restaurant was a large dim cellar, with theirs the only table occupied. Ballet Russe murals writhed dimly on the walls: exotic ghosts.

As the waiter unloaded the chilled glasses of vodka, Don Kavanagh observed, "I don't think Russian restaurants are very popular these days."

"That's why we came," Hugh Carpenter said. "Bound to get a table."

"Don't blame me," said the waiter. "I'm a Londoner, born and bred."

"Maybe there's a good sketch there," suggested Martha Vine, who was the ugly sister of the team. "You know, restaurants run by the wrong sort of people. Such as an Eskimo Curry House — Or, wait a minute, how about a slaughterhouse for vegetables. Wait, I've got it, protests at *vegetable vivisection!*"

Hugh dismissed the notion, and the waiter, with the same toss of his head. The whole sparkle of their TV show relied on cultivating a blind spot for the *obvious*.

"Not quite mad enough, darling." He cocked his head. "What's that?"

Don listened.

"A car backfiring."

"That many times?"

"More like gunfire," said Alison Samuels, shaking her impeccably corn-rowed red hair. She was beauty, to Martha's beast.

"So it's somebody gunning their engine." Hugh grinned triumphantly. "Okay, where were we?"

Soon after, sounds of crashing and breakages, a woman's scream and incoherent shouting came from the upstairs vestibule of the *Petrushka*

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“This isn’t one of your practical jokes, is it, Hugh?” asked Martha anxiously. “Tape recorder upstairs? Is it?”

“No, it damn well —”

At that moment two brawny men wearing lumber jackets crowded down the stairs, thrusting the waiter, who was bleeding from the mouth, and the manager and his beige-blond receptionist ahead of them. A third man stayed up top. All three were armed with machine guns.

“Stay where you are!” The armed man’s accent was southern Irish. “You three, get to a table and sit down!”

The manager, cashier and waiter did so, quickly.

The momentary silence that followed was broken by the approaching wail of a police siren.

“I take it,” said Hugh loudly, “that we are all hostages in yet another bungled terrorist escapade?”

“Be quiet!”

Out of the corner of his mouth, Don murmured, “*Hush*. You’re most likely to get murdered in the first few minutes. Then rapport starts building up. Just — meditate. Do nothing.”

“Zen and the art of being a hostage, eh?” Hugh whispered. He sat still as a Buddhist monk.

A police loudspeaker spoke, close by —

“Don’t come any nearer!” cried the upstairs man. “We have hostages in here! We’ll kill them!”

Lumber jacket number two ran to the kitchen door and kicked it open

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Hugh’s tongue moved inside her mouth. His finger traced the curve of her hip.

He pulled away instantly. He was naked. So was Alison. They were on the bed in his Chelsea flat. Outside was bright with June sunlight.

Alison gazed at Hugh, wide-eyed.

“But,” she managed to say.

“But we’re in the *Petrushka*, Alison — I mean, correct me if I’m crazy, but I wasn’t aware that I’m subject to bouts of amnesia! I mean — how the hell did we get here? I mean, you *can* tell me, can’t you?”

“Hugh. I — I can’t tell you anything. We’re in the restaurant. Those IRA men are — at least — I suppose that’s what they were. But we aren’t. We’re here.”

Hugh sat up. Dumbly he stared at a newspaper lying on the yellow shag-piled carpet.

The headlines were: PETRUSHKA SIEGE ENDS PEACEFULLY.

He read the story, hardly understanding it. But he understood the accompanying photograph of himself with his arm wrapped round Alison’s shoulders, both of them grinning and waving.

“Just look at the date! June, the *ninth*. This is next week’s newspaper.”

“So we’re in the middle of next week.” Alison began to laugh hysterically, then with deliberate irony she slapped her own cheek. “I must remember this trick next time I visit the dentist’s.— Why can’t either of us remember a bloody thing?”

“I wish I could remember us making love.”

Alison started to dress.

“I always wanted us to get into bed,” Hugh went on. “It was one of my big ambitions. I suppose it still is! We must have been celebrating our freedom. Our release.—

“Gas,” he decided suddenly. “That’s it. They must have used some new kind of psychochemical to knock everybody unconscious or confuse us. This is a side effect.”

He studied the newspaper more carefully.

“Doesn’t say a thing about gas. It says the police talked the gunmen out. I suppose you can muzzle the press a little — no, this was all too public. The story has to be true as written.”

His telephone rang.

Hugh hurried naked into the next room to take the call.

Alison was sitting at the dressing table, concentrating on braiding her hair, when he returned. He noticed how she was trembling. His own body felt hollow and his skin was covered with goose bumps, though the air was warm.

“That was Don. He — he reacted very rationally, for a clown. He’s in the same fix we are. After Don hung up, I tried to phone Martha. But I can’t get through. All the lines are jammed. I tried to phone the police. I even tried to call — I tried to call the goddamn talking clock. Can’t get it either. Everybody is phoning to find out what the bloody time is! It isn’t just us, Alison. It’s got nothing specifically to do with the *Petrushka*. It’s everybody.”

“Where’s your radio? Switch it on.”

“Kitchen.”

Hugh fled, still naked, and she followed his bouncing rump.

A punk rock band was singing:

— they’ll bomb yer boobs!  
they’ll bomb yer brains!  
they’ll bomb yer bums!

The song faded.

The deejay said, “You’ve just heard the latest track from The Weasels. Hot stuff, eh? Like, *radio*-active — and that’s what a radio’s supposed to be: active. So I’m carrying straight on, even if you’re all as confused as I am. That’s right, loyal listeners, none of us here in the studio has any idea how we got here today. Or how it *got* to be today. But if you’re all feeling the way I’m feeling, I’ve got this word of advice for you: stay cool,

and carry on doing what you're doing. Keep on trucking that truck. Keep the traffic moving. Cook the lunch, Ma Jones, and don't set fire to the pan...the kids'll be home soon. And now to help you all, here comes a track from an old group, Traffic. It's called, *In a Chinese Noodle Factory* —"

Hugh turned across the dial. One station had simply gone off the air; on others only music was being broadcast.

"Try short-wave," urged Alison. "Abroad."

When he picked up a gabbled French-language broadcast from Cairo, he realized that whatever had happened, had maybe happened world-wide.

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Before the end of June, and during July and August, the effect repeated itself a dozen times. None of the subsequent "breaks" lasted as long as the first one had. Some swallowed up two or three days, and others only a few hours. But there was no sign that they were winding down.

Nor was there any conceivable explanation.

Nor could people get used to having their lives repeatedly broken at random.

For this was not simply like fainting or falling asleep. When awareness resumed...and who could promise that it would, next time?...all the world's activities were found to have flowed on as usual. Airplanes had jetted to and fro between London and New York. Contracts had been signed, and babies born. Newspapers had been printed...and the newsdealers' cry of "Read all about it!" was now an imperative, for how else could anyone find out in detail what had happened? A woman would find herself locked in a jail cell, but the police would have to consult their records before they could break the news to her that she had murdered, say, her husband...which raised strange new questions about guilt and innocence.—

Distressing it was indeed, to find oneself suddenly at the controls of a jumbo jet heading in to land at an unexpected airport, or lying in a hospital bed after a mysterious operation, or running down a street — for what reason?

. . . . .

“What if we find ourselves in the middle of a nuclear war, with all the sirens wailing?” asked Alison. “I can’t stand it. It’s driving me mad.” She poured herself another glass of gin.

“It’s driving everybody mad,” said Don. They were in Hugh’s flat. “It’s like that old Chinese torture.”

“Which, the water dripping down on your skull till it wears a hole in it?”

“No, I mean the Death of a Thousand Cuts. I always wondered if the poor victims died from loss of blood. But it must have been from the accumulated shock. One painful shock after another. One, you could survive. A dozen, you could survive. But a thousand? Never! That’s what’ll destroy the human race. This is the Life of a Thousand Cuts.”

“Good heavens,” said Hugh, “you’ve got it.” He rubbed his hands briskly. “*Cuts!* That’s brilliant.”

“It means we’re like robots,” Don went on, ignoring him. “We don’t *need* consciousness. We don’t need to be aware. A bird isn’t aware. But that doesn’t stop it from courting and raising young and migrating. Actually, it helps. No swallow with self-awareness would bother flying all the way to the tip of South Africa and back every year.”

“Do you mean we’ve evolved too much self-awareness, and it’s a dead end?” asked Alison.

“And now we’re going to become robots again, and the world will run a lot more smoothly. But we won’t know it. Any more than a sparrow or a mouse knows. They just *are*. Martha, you mentioned nuclear war. But have you realized how smoothly the Arms Limitation Talks are going all of a sudden?”

“That’s because both sides are more scared of an accident than they’ve ever been.”

“No, it isn’t. I’ve been checking back. All the significant advances have occurred during breaks.” Don chuckled softly. “Breakthroughs, during breaks! And remember, too, that the *Petrushka* siege ended peacefully...during a break.”

“During a cut,” Hugh corrected him.

“The *Petrushka* thing could so easily have ended in a bloody shoot-out, with the restaurant being stormed. But it didn’t happen that way.—”

Don was driving his red Metro along the elevated section of the motorway into Central London, in fast heavy traffic. Some distance behind, a Volkswagen failed to overtake a large tractor-trailer. The tractor-trailer rammed it, skidding and jackknifing. As following traffic slammed into the wreckage, a ball of flame rose up.

“Bloody hell!” Don glanced at the calendar watch he had thought to equip himself with in the aftermath of the first break, before stocks ran out. “Two days, this time.”

Alison was sitting next to him. Hugh was in the back seat. No sign of Martha. He hoped she was still alive.

“For Christ’s sake, get us *off* here!” begged Alison. “It’s a death trap.”

“More like a bloody buffalo stampede! Why don’t the idiots slow down?”

Somehow, Don reached the next exit ramp safely. The ramp was crowded with vehicles descending. Horns blared. Fenders and bumpers scraped and banged.

“Mustn’t forget what we were talking about,” Hugh reminded him, over his shoulder. “The life of a Thousand Cuts.”

“There’ll be a thousand cuts in the paintwork of this baby ...”

“Stop at the nearest pub, Don. We have to talk before we lose the continuity.”

“About cuts,” said Hugh, cradling a double Scotch.

The bar of the *Duke of Kent* was packed, but remarkably hushed as people waited for the filler music on the landlord’s radio to stop, and the first hastily assembled news to take its place. Many people were not drinking at all, but merely waiting.

“You mentioned the Death of a Thousand Cuts, and of course, those



were cuts in the flesh with a knife. But what do we mean by cuts?"

"A film," said Alison. "Editing. Switching scenes."

"Good girl!"

"I'm not a girl. Girls are twelve years old or less."

"Okay, *sorry*."

"That's why I wouldn't ever go to bed with you."

"Okay, okay. I prostrate myself. Now, that's it exactly, the editing of a film...the cutting from one scene to the next. You don't need to see your characters drive all the way from A to B. They just leave, then they arrive. Otherwise a film would last as long as real life. Or the director would be Andy Warhol."

"As long as real life *used* to last —"

"Quite. And what if reality itself is really a sort of film? A millennia-long Warhol movie with a cast of billions? Suppose, as holography is to flat photography, so to holography is — *solidography*. Suppose the world is being projected. It's a solid movie made of matter, not of light. We're an entry in the Film Festival of the Universe. *But* —" He paused emphatically.

"— Are we the completed masterpiece? Or are we the rushes on the cutting room floor — of reality? Because suddenly we've lost our own sense of continuity. Two days drop out. Three days drop out."

The music on the radio stopped.

"*Shush!*" hissed a roomful of snakes.

*This is the BBC Emergency Service and I am Robin Johnson. The date is September the first. The time is one-twenty-five in the afternoon. The most recent break measured approximately fifty hours. At the Helsinki disarmament talks, preliminary agreement has been reached on the reduction of —.*"

"Come on, we can read all that stuff later."

Don had not yet started the engine of the Metro. "Wouldn't it spoil the

natural flow of this film of yours if all the characters suddenly became aware that their lives are just a fiction?" he asked. "Maybe this is a very subtle, artistic touch. Maybe the director has suddenly gone into experimental cinema. He was making a realistic film before. But now he's into New Wave techniques... *meta*-film...like a French director. I still say we're all really living robots. But we never knew it before. Now we do," Don concluded.

"But that isn't a decline of awareness," Alison pointed out. "That's an increase in awareness."

"It's a bloody decline in our sense of control over what happens in the world. The important things are all happening offstage. They're happening off everybody's stage. Look at this progress in arms control — you heard Robin on the news."

"Maybe," said Alison, "God has decided to cut reality, and re-edit it. Because it wasn't working out. Or it didn't work out the first time. It bombed out, literally. We're in a remake of the film of the world."

Hugh teased her, saying, "Maybe these breaks are for advertisements. Only, we can't see them any more than the characters in a film can see the commercials!"

"Rubbish. When you have a commercial," said Alison, "the film just stops. Then it starts up again from the same moment."

"In that case, you're right. Something *must* be editing reality," Hugh acknowledged.

"How can I possibly agree with that? But I can't disagree, either. Lord knows, reality *needs* editing."

An ambulance wailed by, bearing someone from the motorway pile-up. A police car raced the other way, blue light flashing on its roof.

"It's the Thousand Cuts," said Don. "And it'll drive us mad with stress. Like rats in an electrified maze. We'll go catatonic. We'll become a planet of zombies...a world on autopilot. Like the birds and the bees."

He started the engine. Driving out of the car park of the *Duke of Kent*, he turned left because it was easier to do so, before remembering that he had no idea where they had been heading. He slowed, to let another ambulance race by.

Hugh suddenly began to laugh.

“I’ve just got it! Don’t you see, we’ve got a way to test my idea. We may even have a way to communicate with the director himself! Listen, we’ll do a special show. We’ll do a show about editing reality. We’ll make a film within the Film...a film *about* that Film. I’ll package this as a great morale-booster, which indeed it might well be! We’ll get the whole country laughing at what’s happening. It’ll help keep people sane during the Thousand Cuts.”

Alison clapped her hands.

“Thank you.”

“Just so long as we aren’t cut off,” said Don. “You know, ‘Normal transmission resumes as soon as the show is over.’”

“If we are cut off, we’ll still be going full steam ahead. We can watch it all on videotape afterward — Swing us around, Don. We’re going back to my flat to get the whole thing set up. And we’ll need to get hold of Martha. If somebody’s editing reality, I’m joining in. We’ll call the show ‘The Making of *Reality, the Motion Picture*!’”

“Don’t you mean ‘Remaking’?”

“Yes, I do. Quite right, love. ‘The Remaking of *Reality, the Motion Picture*’...that’s it. I stand corrected.” He slouched back in the seat of the Metro.

“So do we all, Hugh, if you’re right. So do we all.”

“Do what?”

“Stand corrected.—”

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Two weeks later, Hugh cradled a phone and turned to his friends.

“Well, I don’t know exactly what I’ve been *doing* the past four days. But I must have been busting my ass, as our American friends so colorfully put it. Our show’s been given the green light for October the fourth, right after the nine o’clock news. Seven European countries are hooking up,

using subtitles...and two major networks in the States are running us the same evening, with Australia and Japan following suit the next day. Even *Russia* is going to screen the show...subject, that is, to content analysis.”

Martha sneezed. She had caught a cold. “Shouldn’t be a problem,” she sniffled. “Soviets have always laughed at God.”

“Okay, so where were we, Don?” asked Alison.

“I’ve been going through this heap of notes. I’ll get them knocked into shape with Martha, then we can start rehearsing on videotape, Thursday. See what runs, and what doesn’t run.”

“Could we please switch the radio on for a moment?” asked Alison.

“Why? Oh, to check out what’s been happening in the,” and Hugh grinned broadly, “real world? Why not? We might harvest some more ideas.”

Fetching the radio, she set it on the bar.

“ — Helsinki. This agreement represents a major advance in the lessening of international tension ...”

“How on Earth can an advance lessen something?” Martha asked.

“You should meet my publisher,” quipped Don.

*“— first genuine reduction in weapons systems, with inspection and verification by neutral observers from the Third World. The actual dismantling and downgrading of —”*

“It seems even God can’t manage miracles overnight,” Hugh remarked.

“Blah to that,” said Alison. “They’re all scared of what could happen during one of the zombie intervals. Or just after one, when everyone’s confused.”

*“— reported casualty figures following the most recent break are already in the thousands. The worst disaster occurred at Heathrow Airport, where —”*

“See? It just takes one poor jerk to jab his finger at the wrong button. And *poof*. If this is an example of divine intervention, it’s the most ham-fisted miracle I’ve ever come across,” Alison said.

“When you’re cutting film, love,” said Hugh, “you waste a lot of good material for the sake of the picture as a whole.”

“You sound as if you sneakingly admire what’s going on,” protested Don. “All this bloody cutting of our lives.”

Hugh poured himself a brandy, and squirted some soda into the glass.

“No, it’s ludicrous, and dangerous, and it’s soul-destroying. But you’ve got to laugh at it, to get it in the right perspective...and yes, to keep our dignity and free will. It’s a mad universe...and it’s just turned out to be even madder than anybody could have imagined. Well, in my humble opinion the highest human art isn’t tragedy. It’s satire. And,” here he nodded derisively toward the ceiling, “speaking as one trickster to another, I want whoever or whatever is directing this big show, Life, to notice that *I’ve* spotted what’s going on. I’ve found out that reality is just a movie...and I can stay home and even laugh.”

“— *have been inundated with requests for Librium and Valium* —”

“I laugh, therefore I am. Birds don’t laugh. Cows don’t laugh. There’s the difference. Now let’s get on with it. Let’s make everyone kill themselves laughing. They deserve it.”

. . . . .

“The Remaking of *Reality, the Motion Picture*,” was prerecorded during the afternoons of October the first and second...with Hugh Carpenter in the role of Cosmic Director and the lovely Alison as his continuity-person...and it was edited into shape on the third.

It was, in the opinion of all concerned, just about the sharpest and funniest half-hour of TV in the history of the world.

Hugh turned from the video monitor to wave back to the technicians. Peter Rolfe, who had produced the show, pumped Hugh’s hand and slapped him on the back, then embraced Alison and kissed her. After a moment’s hesitation, he kissed Martha too. Though the show was prerecorded, the whole team had decided to be present for the

transmission.

Hugh popped open one of the champagne bottles he had brought along.

“Out she flies, out she flies! To Manchester and Munich, to Tulsa and Tel Aviv! To Alpha Centauri and all points in the universe, if there’s anybody out there! Cheers!”

Before long, Rolfe’s telephone was flashing for his attention.

“Yes? Really? Oh superb!” he enthused. “Hugh! The switchboard is absolutely *jammed*. The viewers are just bubbling over. You’ve stopped them from throwing themselves under a bus tomorrow. You’ve stopped them from overdosing tonight. You’ve made the first real sense out of this ghastly mess. You’ve made the world *fun* again!”

“What, no negative reactions at all?” interrupted Don.

“Oh, there’s a teeny little bit from the blasphemy brigade. But, my dear fellow, you can expect that.”

“I do. I look forward to it. The negative reactions are so comical.”

“Not this time, old son. It’s heartfelt gratitude all round. The country’s laughing its collective head off.”

.....

“Do you realize,” asked Rolfe, as he hosted the celebration party at his Hampstead house the next evening, “this has been a new high for TV? In the last twenty-four hours, you must have clocked up viewing figures of half a billion people? Give or take the Soviets, who don’t believe in ratings, mean beasts.”

The carpet was strewn with telegrams. Kicking his way among them, Rolfe pressed another whiskey and water on Alison and kissed her again.

“You’ve probably outdone Armstrong stepping onto the Moon,” he called to Hugh.

Tipsy people sprawled on the floor, watching a rerun of the show, chortling and whinnying at the high points. It was almost all high points.

—”  
“*Salud!*” Rolfe toasted. “The whole world must be laughing tonight.

. . . . .

“Damn!” swore Don. He glanced at the passing road sign. “Petworth, half a mile — We must be heading down to the cottage.”

Hugh was hunched tensely on Don’s left, with Martha and Alison behind. Martha was wearing an orange headscarf tied tightly around her black curls...which was remarkably impromptu of her, for a weekend with friends.

The fuel gauge was showing empty, though Don always kept the tank well filled.

Slowing...and really, he had been speeding, doing nearly sixty along this country lane...he relaxed and admired the trees in the reddening sunset of their foliage.

Hugh loosened up too. “You’ve got to laugh, haven’t you?” he asked reflectively.

And then Don looked at his watch. It wasn’t the weekend at all; it was midweek.

“Good God, it’s October the twentieth. That’s the longest break yet. We’re at Peter’s place in Hampstead, on the fifth...I mean, we *were*. That’s a cut of two whole weeks.”

“I’ve got the radio here,” said Sarah.

The filler music was Beethoven’s. It played jubilantly on and on.

“There’s a lot to catch up on,” remarked Hugh idly.

Finally the music died away.

“— and I am Robin Johnson. The date is —”

“We’ll be at the cottage in another ten minutes,” Don said. “I’ve got a couple of spare gallons I keep there.”

*“— news will come as a grave shock to you all. Briefly, the Helsinki disarmament talks collapsed in ruins on the eleventh of October. Yugoslavia was invaded by Warsaw Pact forces on the eighteenth, two days ago. Currently, Soviet armor is massing on the West German border. The NATO Alliance is on full alert, but so far — Wait! — I’ve just received an unconfirmed report that several tactical nuclear weapons have exploded inside West Germany. This report is as yet unconfirmed —”*

“But,” said Hugh lamely.

“So that’s why we’re all trying to get down to the cottage on an empty tank — We’re trying to be the lucky ones.”

The engine missed several times, coughed, then quietly gave out. The Metro coasted to a halt.

“It seems,” said Alison quietly, “that we did *kill* ourselves laughing, after all.”

“Do you mean,” whispered Martha, “‘God...or something...is not mocked’?”

“I don’t know about ‘God...or something,’” said Don bitterly. “But I suppose we have to describe this as, well, a negative reaction. And somehow it doesn’t seem comical. The movie’s been axed.”

“Post-holocaust scenes now, I presume,” grumbled Hugh. “No damn sense of continuity —”

He wound the window down.

“Cut!” he screamed at the sky. “Cut! Cut!”

But the sky in the north brightened intolerably for a few seconds. Not long after, a fierce hot wind tore the red and gold leaves from the trees.

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\* \* \* \*



# SERPENTS' TEETH

*by Spider Robinson*

LOOK OVER LOUNGE HOUSE RULES—AGES SIXTEEN AND UP. IF THERE'S A BEEF, IT'S YOUR FAULT. IF YOU BREAK IT, YOU PAY FOR IT, PLUS SALES TAX AND INSTALLATION. NO RESTRICTED DRUGS. IF YOU ATTEMPT TO REMOVE ANY PERSON OR PERSONS FROM THESE PREMISES INVOLUNTARILY, BY FORCE OR COERCION AS DEFINED BY THE HOUSE, YOU WILL BE SURRENDERED TO THE POLICE IN DAMAGED CONDITION. THE DECISIONS OF YOUR BARTENDER ARE FINAL, AND THE MANAGEMENT DOESN'T WANT TO KNOW YOU. THE FIRST ONE'S ON THE HOUSE; HAVE A GOOD TIME.

Teddy and Freddy had certainly been highlighted when the door first slid open, but by the time their eyes had adjusted to the dimmer light inside the lounge, no one seemed to be looking at them. (Was that a good or a bad sign? Neither was sure.)

Teddy entered first, Freddy at her heels. They strove to move synchronously, complementarily, as if they were old dance partners or old cop partners, as if they were married long enough to be telepathic. In fact, they were all of these things, but you could never have convinced anyone watching them now.

Teddy's first impression was that the lounge was just what she had been expecting. The crowd was sizable for this time of night, perhaps four or five dozen souls, almost evenly divided between hunters and hunted. While the general mood seemed hearty and cheerful, quiet desperation could be seen in any direction, invariably on the faces of the hunters. She frowned at a processor group, which was working the lower register, leaving the higher frequencies free for conversation.

Teddy located the bar and went over to it. The bartender was a grizzled old man whose hair had been red and whose eyes had been innocent—perhaps a century before. He displayed teeth half that age, “Welcome to the Big Apple, folks.”

Freddy's eyebrows rose. “How did you know we're from out of town?”

“I'm awake at the moment. What'll it be?”

Teddy and Freddy told him what they wanted. The old man took his time, poured with one finger, brought their drinks to them with his pinkies extended. As they accepted the drinks, he leaned forward confidentially. "None o' my business, but... you might could do all right here tonight. There's good ones in just now, one or two anyways. Don't push is the thing. Don't try quite so hard. Get me?"

They stared at him. "Thanks, uh-"

"Pop, everybody calls me. Let them do the talking."

"We will," Freddy said, tasting his drink. "Thank you, Pop."

"Whups! Scuse me." He spun and darted off at surprising speed toward the other end of the bar.

Teddy found them a table near one of the circulators, with a good view of the rest of the room. "Freddy, for God's sake quit staring. You heard what the old foggy said. Lighten up."

"Teddy!"

"I like him, too; I was trying to get your attention. Try to look like there isn't muck on your shoes, will you?"

"How about that one?"

"Where?"

"There."

"In the *blue and red*?" Teddy composed her features with a visible effort. "Look, my love. Apparently we have HICK written across our faces in big, black letters. All right. Let's not make it DUMB HICK, all right? Look at her arms, for God's sake."

"Oh." Freddy's candidate was brazenly wearing a sleeveless shirt, and a cop should not miss track marks.

"I'm telling you, slow down. Look, let's make an agreement: We're not going to hit on anybody for the first hour, all right? We're just out for an evening of quiet conversation- that's all."

"I see. We spent three hundred and sixty-seven Newdollars to come to New York and have a few drinks."

Teddy smiled as if Freddy had said something touching and funny and murmured, "*God damn it, Freddy. You promised. Don't say another word.*"

"All right, but I think these people can spot a phony a klick away. The one in pink and yellow, on your left."

"I'm not saying we should be phony I'm-" Teddy made an elaborate hair-adjusting gesture, sneaked a look, then frankly stared. "Wow. That's more like it. Dancing with the brunette, right?"

"Yeah."

Their choice was golden-haired and heartbreakingly beautiful, dressed daringly by their standards, but not shockingly. Ribs showed, and pathetically slender arms, and long, smooth legs. Intelligence showed in the eyes; lips were slightly curled in boredom. No tattoos, facial or otherwise.

"Too good to be true," Teddy said sadly. "All those regulars here, and we walk into this place our very first night and score that?"

"I *like* wishful thinking. You shoot for the moon, once in a while you get it."

"And end up wishing you'd settled for a space station. I'd settle for that redhead in the corner with the ventilated shoes."

Freddy followed her glance, winced, and made a small sound of pity. "Don't mock the funny-looking."

"Me? I grew *up* funny-looking. I worked four summers pushing greaseburgers for this chin and nose. I'll settle for anyone halfway pleasant."

"I love your chin and nose. I don't like him anyway. He looks like the secretive type."

"And aren't you? This drink is terrible." The music had come to a halt.

“So’s this-”

The voice was startlingly close. “Hey! You’re in my seat, Atlas.”

It was the stunning, golden-haired youngman. Alone.

Freddy began to move and speak at the same time, but Teddy kicked him hard in the shin, and he subsided.

“No, we’re not,” she said firmly.

There was nothing especially grudging about the respect that came into the youngman’s eyes, but there was nothing especially submissive about it, either. “I always sit by a circulator. I don’t like breathing garbage.” He made no move to go.

Teddy refused her eyes permission to drop from his. “We would be pleased if you’d join us.”

“I accept.”

Before Teddy could stop him, Freddy was up after a chair. He placed it beside the youth, who moved it slightly to give himself a better view of the room than of them. The youngman sat without saying thanks.

“You’re welcome,” Freddy said quietly but quite audibly, slouching down in his own chair, and Teddy suppressed a grin. When she led firmly, her husband always followed well. For the first time Teddy became aware that she was enjoying herself.

The youngman glanced sharply at Freddy. “Thanks,” he said belatedly.

“Buy you a drink?” Teddy asked.

“Sure. Beer.”

Teddy signaled a waiter. “Tell Pop we’d like a couple of horses over here,” she said, watching the youngman. Dos Equis had become quite expensive since the rationalization of Mexico, but his expression did not change. Teddy glanced down at her own glass. “In fact, make it three pair.”

“Tab?” asked the waiter.

“Richards Richards, Ted Fred.”

When the waiter had left, the blond said, “You people always seem to know how to do that. Signal waiters. What is that, a size thing or an age thing?”

“Neither one,” Freddy answered seriously. “I think you could-”

“Which one of you is which?”

“I’m Freddy.”

“Oh, Christ, and you’re Teddy, huh?” He sighed. “I hope I die before I get cute. I’m Davy Pangborn.”

Teddy wondered whether it was his legal name, but she did not ask. It would not have been polite; he had not asked them. “Hello, Davy.”

“How long’ve you been in the city?”

Teddy grinned broadly, annoyed. “Is there hay in my hair or something? Honest to God, I feel like there’s a fly unzipped on my forehead.”

“There is,” Davy said briefly and turned his attention to the room.

Teddy and Freddy exchanged a glance. Teddy shrugged.

“How old are you, Davy?” Freddy asked.

Davy turned very slowly, then looked Freddy over with insolent thoroughness. “How many times a week do you folks do the hump?” he asked.

Teddy kept her voice even with some effort. “See here, we’re willing to swap data, but if you get to ask questions that personal, so do we.”

“You just did.”

Teddy considered that. “Okay,” she said finally. “I guess I understand. We’re new at this, though.”

“Is that so?” Davy said disgustedly and turned back to face the room at large.

“We make love about three times a week,” Freddy said.

“I’m nine,” Davy said without turning.

\* \* \* \*

The beer arrived, along with a plate of soy crunchies garnished with real peanuts. “Compliments of the house,” the waiter said, and left.

Teddy glanced up, craned her head until she could see through the crowd to the bar. Pop’s eyes were waiting for hers; he shook his head slightly, winked, and turned away. Total elapsed time was less than a second; she was not sure she had not imagined it.

She examined Davy more carefully. He was obviously bright and quick; his vocabulary and grammar were excellent; his education could not have been too badly neglected. He was clean. His clothes were exotic but neat and well kept. He didn’t look like a welfare type; she would have given long odds that he had some kind of job, perhaps even a legal one. He was insolent, but she decided that in his position he could hardly be otherwise. He was fearfully beautiful, and must know it. She was sure he was not and had never been a prostitute; he didn’t have the chickie look that went with the profession.

Her well-developed cop sense told her that Davy had potential.

Did Pop know something she didn’t? How honest was Davy? How many scars were drawn how deep across his soul? How much garbage had modern civilization poured into his subconscious? Would he grow up to be Maker, Taker, or Faker? Everyone in this room was walking wounded; how severe were Davy’s wound?

“How long have you been single, Davy?”

He still watched the roomful of hunters and hunted, face impassive. “How long since *your* kid divorced *you*!”

“Why do you assume we’re divorced?”

Davy drank deeply from his beer, turned to face her. “Okay, let’s run it down. You’re not sterile, or if you are, it was postnatal complications. You’ve had it before. I can see it in your eyes. Maybe you worked in a power plant, or maybe Freddy here got the measles, but once someone called you

Mommy. It's unmistakable. And you're here. So the kid walked out on you."

"Or died," she suggested. "Or got sent up, or institutionalized."

"No." He shook his head. "You're hurting, but you're not hurting that bad."

She smiled. "All right. We've been divorced a year as of last week. And what about you?"

"Three years."

Teddy blinked, hiding her surprise. If Davy was telling the truth-and a lie seemed pointless-he had opted out the moment he could and was in no hurry to remarry. Well, with his advantages he could afford to be independent.

On the other hand, Teddy looked around the room herself, studying only the hunters, the adults, and saw no one who made her feel inferior. *He never met a couple like us before*, she told herself, and she made herself promise not to offer him their notarized resume sheets unless and until he had offered them his.

"What was your kid like, Atlas?" Davy sipped beer and watched her over the rim of the glass.

"Why do you call us that?" Freddy asked.

Teddy frowned. "It's pretty obvious, darling. Atlas was a giant."

Davy grinned through his glass. "Only half the answer. The least important half. Tell me about your kid-your ex-kid- and I'll tell you the other half."

Teddy nodded. "Done. Well, his name is Eddie, and he's-"

"*Eddie!*" the youngman exclaimed. "Oh, my God, you people are too much!" He began to laugh. "If it'd been a girl, it would've been Hedy, right?"

Teddy reddened but held her temper. She waited until he was done laughing, and then two seconds more, and continued. "And he's got dark brown hair and hazel eyes. He's short for his age, and he'll probably turn out stocky. He has... beautiful hands. He's got my temper and Freddy's hands. And he's bright, like you. Hell go far. About the divorce..." Teddy paused.

She and Freddy had rehearsed this next part for so long that they could make it sound unrehearsed. But Davy had a Built-in Crap Detector of high sensitivity. Mentally Teddy discarded her lines and just let the words come. “We... I guess we were slow in getting our consciousness raised. Faster than some, slower than most. We... we just didn’t realize how misguided our own conditioning had been... until it was too late. Until we had our noses rubbed in it.” She sipped her beer without tasting it.

Although he had not been fed proper cues, Freddy picked it up. “I guess we had our attention on other things. I don’t mean that we fell into parenting. We thought it through—we thought we thought it through—before we decided to conceive. But some of our axioms were wrong. We...” He paused, blushed, and blurted it out. “We had plans for Eddie.”

“Don’t say another word,” Davy ordered.

Freddy looked puzzled. Teddy frowned. And they both waited.

Davy finished his beer in one long, slow draft, stretching the silence. He set the glass down, put both hands on the table, and smiled. The smile shocked Teddy to her core. She had never, not in the worst of the divorce, not in the worst of her work in the streets, seen such naked malice on so young a face. She ordered her own face to be inscrutable. And she took hold of Freddy’s hand under the table.

\* \* \* \*

“Let me finish. It’ll save time,” Davy said. “And I’ll still tell you why you’re an Atlas.” He looked them both up and down with care. “Let’s see. You’re hicks. Some kind of civil service or social work or both—both of you. Very committed, very concerned. I can tell you what grounds Eddie cited at the hearing. Want to hear me?”

“You’re doing okay so far,” Teddy said tightly.

“On the decree absolute it says, ‘Conceptual Conditioning, Restraint of Personality, and Authoritarianism.’ Guaranteed, sure as God made little green grasshoppers. But it won’t have the main reason on it: ‘Delusions of Ownership.’ “

They had not quite visibly flinched at the first three charges, but it was obvious that the fourth one got to them both. Davy grinned wickedly.

“Now the key word for both of you, the word that unlocks you both, is



the word *future*. I can even sort of see why. Both of you are the kind that wants to change things, to make a better world. You figure like this: The past is gone, unchangeable. The present is here *right now*, and it's too late. So the only part you can change is the future. You're both heavy into politics, am I right? Right." He paused for a minute.

He knew that he was getting to them both: his grin got bigger. Teddy and Freddy were rigid in their chairs.

"So one day," the youngman went on softly, "it dawned on you that the best way to change the future is to colonize it. With little xeroxes of yourselves. Of course, one of the first concerns of a colonizing country is to properly *condition* the colonists. To ensure their loyalty. Because a colonist is supposed to give you the things *you* want to have in exchange for the things *you* want *him* to have, and for this golden opportunity he is supposed to be properly grateful. It wouldn't do for him to get any treasonous ideas about his own destiny, his own goals." Davy popped a handful of soy crunchies into his mouth. "In your case, the world needed saving, and Eddie was elected. Like it or not." He chewed the mouthful. "Let me see. Don't tell me now. I see the basic program this way: first a solid grounding in math, history, and languages-I'd guess Japanese Immersion followed by French. Then by high school begin working toward law, maybe with a minor in Biz Ecch. Then some military service, police probably, and then law school if he survived all that. With any luck at all, old Eddie could have been mayor of wherever the hell you live-one of the Dakotas, isn't it?-by the time he was thirty-five. Then senator by forty."

"*Jesus*" Teddy croaked.

"I even know what Eddie wants to be instead. A musician. And not even a respectable musician, piano or electric guitar or something cubical like that, right? He wants to play that flash stuff that isn't even proper music. He wants to be in a processor group, right? I saw the way you looked at the band when you came in. There are probably very few things on Earth that are of as little use to the future as flash. It doesn't even get recorded. It's not supposed to be. It's for the *present*. I wonder if Eddie's any good."

"*What are you trying to do to us?*"

"Now, about why you're Atlases. Atlas isn't just a giant, he's the worst kind of giant, the one to avoid at all costs, because he's got the weight of the whole world on his shoulders. And he wants you to take it over for him as soon as you're big enough. Sooner if possible." Suddenly, finally, the

grin was gone, replaced by a snarl. “Well, screw you, Atlas! You’re not even cured yet are you? You’re still looking for a Nice Young Kid Who Wants to Make Something of Himself. You want a goddamn volunteer! You’re suddenly childless, and you’re so goddamn lonely you tell each other you’ll settle for anything just to have a kid around the house again. But in your secret hearts you can’t help hoping you’ll find one with *ambition*. Can you?”

He sat back. He was done. “Well,” he said in a different voice, already knowing the answer, “how’d I do?” And he began eating the peanuts from the bowl.

Teddy and Freddy were speechless for a long time. The blood had drained from both their faces. Garish bar lighting made them look like wax mannequins, save that Teddy was swaying slightly from side to side, quite out of rhythm with the background music. Her hand crushed Freddy’s hand.

It was Teddy who found her voice first, and to her horror it trembled and would not stop trembling. “You did very damned well. Two insignificant errors. It was going to be Swahili Immersion after the Japanese. Not French.”

“And...?”

“Our mutual occupation. You bracketed it, but no direct hit.”

“So? All right, surprise me.”

“We’re cops.”

Now it was Davy’s turn to be speechless. But he recovered a lot faster than they had. “*Pigs*” he said.

Teddy could not get the quaver out of her voice. “Davy, how do you feel when some Atlas calls you punk, or kid, or baby?”

Davy’s eyes flashed.

The quaver was lengthening its period. Soon she would be speaking in sing-song ululation, and shortly after that, she knew, she would completely lose the power to articulate and would simply break down and weep. But she pressed on.

“Well, that’s how we feel when some punk kid baby calls us pigs”

He raised his eyebrows, looked impressed for the first time since he sat down. "Good shot. Fair is fair. Except that you *chose* to be pigs."

"Not at first. We were drafted at the same time, worked together in a black-and-white. After the Troubles, when our hitch was up, we got married and went career."

"Hmm. Either of you ever work Juvenile?"

Teddy nodded. "I had a year. Freddy, three."

Davy looked thoughtful. "So. Sometimes Juvie cops are all right. Sometimes they get to see things most Atlases don't. And hick cops aren't as bad as New York cops." He nodded. "Okay, I grant you the provisional status of human beings. Let's deal. I've got no eyes for anything lengthy, but I could flash on, say, a weekend or two in the country. Then if we're compatible, if I like your place, maybe we could talk something a little more substantial-*maybe*. So what's your offer?"

Teddy groped for words. "Offer?"

"What terms are you offering? We might as well start with your resumes. That'll give us parameters."

She stared.

"Oh, my God," he said, "don't tell me you came *here* looking for something *permanent*! On a first date? Oh, you people are the Schwartzchild Limit!" He began to laugh. "Ill bet your own contract is lifetime. Not even ten-year renewable." When that sank home, he laughed even harder. "Unbelievable!" Suddenly he stopped laughing. "Oh, Momma, you have a lot to learn. Now how about those résumés?"

"Shut up," Freddy said quietly.

Davy stared. "*What did you say?*"

"Shut up," Freddy repeated. "You may not call her that."

Teddy stared, too.

Freddy's voice did not rise in volume, but suddenly there was tempered steel in it. "You just granted us the provisional status of human

beings. We do not reciprocate. You are cruel, and we would not inflict you on our town, much less our home. You can go now.”

The enormity of the affront left Davy momentarily at a loss for words. He soon found some. “How’d you like to wake up in the alley with a broken face, old man? You read the house rules. Your badges are junk silver in here. All I have to do is poke you right in the eye and let those bouncers over there take care of the rest.”

Freddy had the habit of sitting slouched quite low, curled in on himself. He sat up straight now, and for the first time Davy realized that the man topped one hundred eighty-five centimeters and massed well over ninety kilos. Freddy’s shoulders seemed to have swollen, and his eyes were burning with a cold fire that had nothing to do with neon. Teddy stared at him, round-eyed, not knowing him. Suddenly it registered on Davy that both of her hands were now visible on the table and that neither of Freddy’s were.

“They’ll put us all in the same Emergency Room,” Freddy said dreamily. “You’re a lot younger than I am. But I’m *still* faster. Leave this table.”

Davy soon realized that his face was blank with shock. He hastily hung a sneer on it. “Hah.” He got to his feet. “My pleasure.” Standing beside them, he was nearly at eye level. “Just another couple of dumb Atlases,” he said. Then he left.

Freddy turned to his wife, found her gaping at him. The fire went out in him; he slumped again in his chair and finished off his beer.

“Stay here, darling,” he said, his voice soft and musical again. “I’ll get us another round.”

Her eyes followed him as he walked over toward the bar.

Pop had two more beers waiting for him. “Thanks for the munchies, Pop. And the wink.”

“Sure,” Pop said, smiling.

“He was deliberately wasting our time, Pop. Why?”

“Because time wasted hurts you more than it does him.”

“Can I buy you a drink, Pop?”

The old man’s smile broadened. “Thank you, buddy. That’s neighborly of you.” He punched himself up a whisky sour and took a drink. “You’re well shut of that one. He is nothing but a little vampire.”

\* \* \* \*

Freddy’s eye was caught by a graffito, crudely painted on a near wall. It read: ‘TAKE OUT YOUR OWN FUCKIN GARBARGE!’ On the adjacent wall someone with a different color spray can had, in a neater, tighter hand, thoughtfully misquoted: “HOW SHARPER THAN A SERPENT’S TOOTH IS A THANKLESS CHILD.” Freddy shook his head and sighed. “Why is it that the word *another* is the crudest word in the language, Pop?”

“How d’you mean?”

“Well, when he’s alone with himself, a man may get real honest and acknowledge-and accept-that he is a fool. But nobody wants to be *just another* fool. ‘Another couple of dumb Atlases,’ he called us, and that was the only thing he said that really hurt.”

“Here now, easy! Here, use this here bar rag. Be right back.” While Freddy wiped his eyes, the old man quickly filled a tray of orders for the waiter. By the time he returned, Freddy was under control and had begun repairing his makeup with a hand mirror. “See here,” Pop said, “if you’re hip-deep in used food, well, maybe you could climb out. But if you look around and see a whole other bunch of people hip-deep, too, then the chances of you becoming the rare one to climb out seem to go down kinda drastic. But, you see, that’s a kind of optical illusion. All those others don’t affect *your* odds at all. What matters is how bad *you* want to get out of the stuff and what purchase you can find for your feet.”

Freddy took a sip of his new beer and nodded slowly, “Thanks, Pop. I think you’re into something.”

“Sure. Don’t let that kid throw you. Did he tell you his parents divorced *him*! Mental cruelty, by Jesus.”

Freddy blinked, then roared with laughter that shook the bar.

“Now take that beer back to your wife. She’s looking kind o’ shell-shocked. Oh, and I would recommend the redhead over in the corner,

the short, funny-looking boy with the holes in his shoes. He's one who's worth getting to know better. He's got some stuff."

Freddy stared at the bartender, then raised his glass and drank deep. "Thanks again, Pop."

"Anytime, son," the old man said easily and went off to punch up two scotches and a chocolate ice-cream soda.

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\* \* \* \*

# BOUNDARY ECHOES

*by John M. Ford*

At sunset, with the red-gold light washing down the face of Shadow Mountain, dazzling on the lake below, Dr. Larkin told Mrs. Weiss about the cancer.

Helena Weiss stared at him for what might have been minutes. They had gotten to the park before noon, hiked all over creation, and only now did he say anything, as if he'd been saving it as a present.

"Is it operable?" she managed to say.

"What's operable, and what isn't? You would have to go through a couple of higher function centers to get to the body of the growth, but the damn thing's stellate-you know, starburst."

"I know."

"And you'd never get all the spikes. So surgery, plus irradiation, with plenty of chances for both to go wrong and no guarantee of a cure or anything like one."

Weiss looked straight out at the western horizon, at thin lenticular clouds trapped in the mixing layers of the atmosphere. Her palms were damp. She still hated heights. Spacelab had been high, too, but you couldn't just slip and fall from orbit.

You couldn't even jump.

Still staring at the boundary clouds, she asked, "How -long?"

"Not long. Probably not six months. If it takes longer, there would be... mental changes, convulsions. It could get-"

"Messy?"

"Yeah."

"How *do* you get so cold?"

He did not answer, and she felt very bad, sensing his hurt. But she did not turn, because there was nothing that way to look at but a rock and a tree and Boris Larkin, M.D. Finally she faced him.

He was sitting on a rock, hands folded on a blue-jeaned knee, staring at the toe of his extended boot.

Weiss said, "So now what?"

He looked up. Golden light bounced from his glasses, making his face indistinct. "How long to do your symphony?"

"Quattrocycle," she said, too quickly.

"Quattrocycle, yeah," he said, and looked down, the flare of light going out. he looked very tired. "How long?"

"Not long," she said, and as she saw him twitch she realized they had just turned each other's words around. She looked back to the red sun, burning up the layers of cloud. She said, "Just tell me..."

\* \* \* \*

Helena Weiss first met Dr. Boris Evgenovitch Larkin in a conference room at Penrose Hospital. "Not Penrose *Community*," Dr. Larkin had warned her over the phone, "make sure the cabdriver knows."

The driver recognized her—"The Mrs. Weiss?" and she was too honest to deny it—and all the way in from the airport hotel she was treated to *El tren subterraneo* and Suite for Walking Beams from a tape player on the taxi's dashboard. Then they arrived at the wrong hospital, and he played her all of *One Thousand Orbits* on the trip across town. And out the windows were mountains, large mountains. Pointing up. High. In the air. *She* was high up in the air. It wasn't worth a free cab ride.

When she walked into the hospital lobby, hands white on the shoulder strap of her keyboard, the staff tried to get her into a wheelchair and admitted on the spot. Several repetitions of Larkin's name and her own finally got her pointed the right way, into the little conference cubicle, with a cup of something that had the color but no other characteristic of coffee.

At least the room had no windows.



She unzipped the case, touched the keyboard within. She clipped on the earphones, turned power on, and began to play-nothing of her own, of course. The Pachelbel Canon in D, that perennial Muzak favorite, because nobody was listening, so what the hell. Even poststructuralist architectonic composers have to have secret vices.

She looked up. A man was standing across the table. He was short, broad, dark, and muscular, in a white lab coat over a sweater and slacks. He was in his early thirties, like herself. There were pencils and so forth in his pockets, a photo badge on his lapel. He wore very large eyeglasses.

“I’m Boris Larkin,” he said.

“Oh, uh-hello.”

She snapped off the keyboard power and took off the phones. “I’m Helena Weiss. Pleased to meet you, Doctor.”

“Yeah. Could I look at that? I like gadgets.” He came around the table faster than she could push the keyboard toward him. She said, “Do you play an instrument?”

“No. I have lousy taste in music, too. What’s a timbre gate?”

“It shapes waveforms. Under the panel-here-these slide pots alter the wave envelope at time increments set by these dials over here.”

“Do you have to do that for every note?”

“That’s just the programming panel. This key moves the setting to a memory block. I can hold eight reshapes at once and call them from this switch.” She turned the power on again, gave him a phone, and played a few notes with different gatings.

“I love it,” he said. “Where do you get one of these?”

“I built this one,” she said.

He laughed. “Then I really love it. Come on with me, then, and I’ll show you what I do in the basement of this place.”

\* \* \* \*

Mrs. Weiss's head was held firmly inside a sort of Plexiglas helmet, crowned with a steel cylinder one meter across. Dr. Larkin was taking readings with a pocket Multimeter. He said, "You feel okay?"

"Fine." She sat comfortably in a padded metal chair.

"Good. Some people get nervous when they're hooked up to this thing. It reminds them of that one the state runs."

"What one is that?"

"The one over at the prison."

"Oh, Yeah, right."

"And," he said theatrically, "I *will* know if you get nervous."

"Really?" She thought a moment. "I'm scared to death of heights."

"Are you serious? Because I wasn't." She nodded. He added, "I'll label the tape with that, if you don't mind. There are about eighty billion things we want to try correlations on, and every piece of data helps."

"Sure. What's that?"

Larkin was loading a glass cylinder into a bright metal device. The tube came from a metal box marked PROPERTY U.S. AIR FORCE in blue and RADIOACTIVE in purple on yellow. He snapped a lever on the gadget, and it became a hypodermic syringe. "This is the potion that makes the magic machine work. Radioiodine-129. Scared of needles too?"

"I thought everybody was scared of needles," she said as he swabbed her neck. She looked away. The sting wasn't too bad.

"Sorry," he said. "I've only got two doctorates; I'm not a nurse."

"But that stuff belongs to the Air Force?"

"In the same sense," he said quite seriously, "that Johann Sebastian Bach's music belonged to the margrave of Brandenburg, or Wagner's belonged to Ludwig of Bavaria. We all have our patrons at court." Before she could think about that, he said, "Okay, now what you want to do is watch that monitor. Can you see it clearly?"

“I see it.”

“We’re all set, then.” Larkin closed the RADIOACTIVE box and went behind an instrument board. With its knobs and little screens, it reminded Weiss of a Hammond Polytronic or a Concert Moog VI. There was no keyboard, but an Arp-X synthesizer dispensed with that, too. She touched the keyboard in her lap, rested her fingers lightly in home positions.

Larkin worked his own console. The monitor cube came to life with a pattern of colored bars, knotted around and through one another. Larkin’s hands moved below Weiss’s line of sight, and the interlinked pattern rotated, tumbled end for end.

The cube went blank. Above Weiss’s head there was a faint noise of machinery. Her eyes flicked up, down. In the arm of the chair, out of sight but in easy reach, was a switch that would immediately release her head from the scanner. A chicken switch, the European Space Agency ground crew called theirs, when they tested her for Space-lab. She hadn’t pulled it then.

“Signal’s coming through,” Larkin said.

In the cube monitor, painted on the filament strands that filled it, was something like a pink, climbing vine.

“That’s your cranial artery,” Larkin said. “The tracer’s just getting there.”

The vine branched out, became diffuse. The cube flashed, and a green-line overlay showed a rounded outline: a humped, furrowed shape, the shape of a human brain. Helena Weiss’s.

The technique was called Solid Image Generation by Multi-Axial Positron Scanning: SIGMAPS. On the front of the control bank, in burnished metal, was the emblem  $\Sigma$ : the Greek sigma and the symbol for a positron, an antimatter electron. The radioiodine tracer emitted positrons, which crashed into the molecules of her brain to produce gamma rays. In the cylinder around her skull, scanners were triggered in sequence, hundreds of times a second, reading the ray emissions and feeding data to the monitor. She thought of a dollar-in-the-slot arcade machine: *Brain Invaders*.

The green sketch-plan was gone now, unnecessary. Weiss saw the outlines of her brain in blue, a lacy cyan haze filling out the lobes of her

cerebrum. Within it were spots of colors from further down the spectrum-yellow fingers around hot orange cores-and in her left frontal lobe was a blood-red star.

“Comfortable, Mrs. Weiss?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. Have a listen.” He put a little cassette player on top of the console, and she tensed-there were flashes around the cerebellum-but it was not her music. It was the Ninth. Her brain lit up.

Specifically, two more red stars novaed, left hemisphere and right. The brain revolved in space, showing a top view, left side, right.

Larkin said, “This is something they found out with flat positron images, what we called PET scans. The activity zone on the right, that’s where all of us listen to music. But you’re a professional musician, and you’re reacting in the left cortex, the analytical centers, too. You’re very analytical, Mrs. Weiss.”

“Thank you.”

“Now, here’s something new.” The leftside red zone began expanding, the whole image was being enlarged. The brain surface was soon lost beyond the limits of the cube, until the whole monitor was filled with what must have been only a few cubic millimeters of her brain.

The structure displayed was in layers of color, with strands of contrasting colors interlaced. It was, she thought, like the understructure of Manhattan, or oil wells in deep rock strata, or-and each time the image changed in her mind, the image in the monitor shifted its form.

“This is the edge of a thought,” Larkin said, suddenly quite intense. “For decades we argued about whether there were really activity centers. Well, there are; the scan shows them working. But what’s the difference between working-center brain and noncenter brain? It’s not a line, you can see that, not just a line, any more than the skin was the simple mechanical structure we thought it was. There’s a whole boundary complex, and if those intermittent flashes-see, there’s one!-if those mean what I think, then the active brain is interacting with the... you can’t call it inactive, call it otherwise-active, majority. And if the-what the *fuck!*”

The image on the monitor pitched over. “*Alle Menschen icerden*

*Bruder,*” sang the tape. Weiss tried to turn her head, which hurt just a little. “What is it, Doctor?”

He was silent for several seconds, unseen behind his machinery. Then he said, “Uh, nothing. Seeing things, I guess.” His humor came back instantly. “Stare at brains all day and you’ll start seeing pictures in them. Queen Victoria. The Yellow Brick Road.” Larkin threw some switches, and the monitor went dark, the scanner silent.

“Is that all?” she said, hands poised above the keyboard. “Enough for today. Do you think you’re going to get a piece of music out of this?”

Weiss’s hands moved across the keys, but the power was off. “I tell reporters I don’t write ‘pieces of music,’ but I think so. It’s too soon to tell what it’ll be like, but-”

“We’ll do more scans. You’re not really a subject until I have an hour’s tape on you. But no more until Monday.” He moved the catches and released her from the scanner, stuck a label on a tape cassette and made unreadable scrawls across it.

“It’s three days till Monday,” she said.

“Uh-huh,” he said distantly. Then he looked at her, scratching his temple with his pen. “You ever climb a rock?”

\* \* \* \*

It had taken two hours Friday night, at a shop that seemed to stock nothing but leather and blue denim and big hats, to get Mrs. Weiss fitted out with hiking rig. By noon Saturday they were on a trail in Rocky Mountain National Park. It was no strain for her; she was in excellent shape for thirty-four, she hiked regularly (over rather flatter ground), she had passed the ESA physical. At least, it was no physical strain. *Keep looking at the trees*, she kept telling herself. *Keep looking at the ground. Do not look over there. There’s nothing over there but a thousand meters of straight down.*

They stopped for lunch in view of a peak Larkin said was named Hallett. “Over twelve thousand feet. You look terrible. Pace too quick?”

“No,” she said, looking at a point about halfway up Hallett Peak. Half the rest of the distance up, anyway; she realized they were halfway up, and she chewed a super-carbohydrate bar in deep thought of meadows and

living rooms. Larkin handed her a cup from his vacuum flask, and she took a long first swallow. It wasn't water.

Larkin said, "Hey, slow down, that stuff's too good for guzzling."

"White wine on a mountain?"

"A loaf of gorp, a jug of Gewurztraminer, and thou beside me in the wilderness. Hoo boy, wilderness."

"I think you're crazy," she said.

"Of course I am. Alcohol is illegal in national parks. Try to look like you're drinking ginger ale."

"Who's to know?" She looked toward the edge of their clearing, felt her feet getting damp, looked back. "In fact, who's to know if we fall off this vertical surface?"

"Sit down. It doesn't really tilt. Invisible hands aren't really thrusting you toward the edge." He reached into a pocket of his down vest and showed a flat, black object with a set of buttons on its face. "And if anything untoward happens, this FM phone can call that ranger station yonder"-he pointed, but she didn't look-"and they'll have the choppers out in nothing flat. Any time, any weather. I've seen 'em come in with more ice than blade overhead."

"Well, at least I'll get a decent burial."

He took a bit of beef jerky, sipped his wine. "You know, it's probably not heights you're afraid of; it's falling. Everybody's scared of falling at birth, and we overcome it to varying degrees. I'm not really sure acrophobia is a separate fear at all."

"I didn't think you were a psychiatrist. Or is that your other doctorate?"

He shook his head. "Ph.D. electrical engineering."

"Yeah? Me too. Don't call me Doctor."

"Why?"

"I'm an artist. I want to keep my amateur standing."

He chuckled. "My first research work was on perception. One of the things we did was put subjects over a cliff-"

"What?"

"A 'visual cliff,' sorry. A drop-off, with checkerboard painting to make it very obvious. We could read a basic fear blip: some showed it more strongly than others, but everyone showed it to some extent."

"All scientists are sadists," she said, watching him gesture explosively as he spoke.

"Yeah, I'll buy that. Ever put EEG wires on a baby? The parents smile and nod at you, helping science march on, and you feel like a pervert. But the really weird thing was, there was no cliff. The perspective of the drop was painted on a dead-flat board. You could touch it, pound on it, jump on it-and people did all that-and we still got the falling-fear blips." He turned to look at the mountaintop, the brim of his cap throwing his face into shadow. "It was like... an archetype. A basic subconscious code for-" He held out his hands, palms outward, framing the view.

She said, "Faw down go boom?"

He laughed. "Exactly. Exactly! We have to learn that fire burns, too much candy makes tummyaches-but faw down go boom is hard-wired somehow." He turned back to her. "How did you come by the minor-chord triplets for the aquifer theme in *Walking Beam Suite*?"

"I thought you said you had terrible taste in music," she said, surprised.

"I don't know one note from another," he said, "unless I ask and somebody tells me."

"Well, I warn you, you won't get far asking artists where they steal things from." He looked expectant. She said, "You're supposed to laugh at that, but let it pass. It happens that I do remember where those notes came from. I was listening to the geophone tapes I'd made in Oklahoma, and had the coffee percolator on, and the triplets just, well, bubbled up, if that's not a terrible choice of words."

"It's... excellent."

"You sound disappointed."

“I’m not. No. Not at all. Have you thought about your new work?”

“There’s hardly been time. You want to scan me again, don’t you?”

“Mrs. Weiss, I could scan you for hours.”

She waited for him to kiss her, but he didn’t. He closed the thermos of wine and said, “That’s enough for a first day in the mountains.”

They drove back to Colorado Springs, arriving a little after dark. Larkin let Weiss off at the hotel doorstep. She said, “If you’d like to come in for coffee-”

“I’ve seen quite a few hotel rooms, thanks,” he said politely, “and one’s like another. Good night, Mrs. Weiss.”

“My late husband made me promise...” she started to say, too late. She watched from the curb until the car’s taillights had vanished.

Over the next weeks she did spend hours in the scanner listening to music, playing it. He showed her tapes of other subjects, pointing out patterns in patients with fugue dementia, cranial wounds, the great spreading darkness or stroke. He gave her a joystick wired to the main console so she could explore the corridors of her own brain, flying nap-of-cortex through convolutions, looping the corpus callosum.

On Thursdays the Air Force “got its money’s worth,” as Larkin put it; bored and unwilling cadets were sent in to be scanned as they did mental and manual exercises. The Air Force wanted a magic indicator of potential piloting skill.

He got Weiss a white coat and stethoscope, and addressed her as Doctor (“It’s not a lie, right?”). They gave one young man a paper and told him to read it aloud, and the bewildered cadet recited all of “High Flight” while Weiss entered chords in the keyboard’s memory and Larkin hid, laughing helplessly behind his console.

She watched him lecture neurology students on SIGMAPS and more mundane subjects; she did a special series of talks for advanced music classes and gave a couple of recitals.

After the recitals she began to get headaches behind her left eye; he gave her aspirin and caffeine, and that was all. “If you need aspirin-codeine,



I'll prescribe it," he said, "but I don't like tranquilizers for headache. Valium in particular. You give somebody Valium, and they tell you it works just great, and you don't know whether to be happy or scared."

They went to movies. They never ate twice at the same restaurant. She never saw where he lived. He never went further than the hotel lobby. After four weeks they went back to the mountains.

"I'm going to do a quattrocycle," she told him in the high, clear air.

"I have no idea what that is," he said, "unless you tell me."

"Four cycles-subpieces that interlock. A little like symphonic movements, but not as elaborate as a symphony, and the parts are more closely related. The themes of the cycles are-

"The temporal lobe," he said, "occipital, parietal, and frontal lobes."

"You guessed."

"What else have you been staring at for a month? It had to be that, or else cerebrum, cerebellum, medulla, and pons."

"Hmm. I may have to write two." She looked out at the peaks surrounding them; ice-blue and chocolate and snowcapped and vivid red. "It's not hard to look *at* them," she said. "Especially since they're outside the window every damn morning. Do you ever get tired of looking at mountains, Boris?"

"No. My melancholy Russian soul."

"You told me you weren't Russian. Just had some family with long memories."

"Yeah. Maybe melancholy souls are genetically determined."

"Or part of the collective unconscious?"

"Now there is something I would like to know. How long has it been, Helena, since you wrote the Spacelab piece?"

"*One Thousand Orbits* was... three years ago, Christmas."

"That would be nearer three and a half."

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“You’d produced much faster before that, hadn’t you?”

“I guess so. I did about one major work a year after Terry died, plus the other things-songs, radio commercials.”

“But nothing now for three and a half years.”

“Not nothing, Boris. Nothing major. Do you think composers live on composing? The first day we met, you talked to me about ‘patrons at court.’ I’m a rich widow. If they melted all my records down for floor tile I’d still be a rich widow.”

“But not as happy.”

“I’d have to think about it,” she said, joking, and at once regretted it. Worry was marked in every part of him. She touched his shoulder, asked about several things it might have been, all of which he denied. Her head began to hurt, and he said, “It’s tension,” from somewhere very far away.

They went back to the city, and he left her at the hotel.

The following week he went to Denver, where he could not be reached and would not return calls.

On Saturday morning he phoned early, from the lobby downstairs. They went to the park, they climbed the trails, and that afternoon he told her what the SIGMAPS scan had found, the Denver specialists confirmed.

“Just tell me,” she said (recalling “-what the fuck?” “What is it?” “Nothing-”) “Did you know then?”

“Not for certain. Not then. And I didn’t want-I couldn’t say anything until I was certain.”

*Well, she thought, this is one I can’t blame on Terry’s ghost.*

Larkin said, “I really do want to hear your symphony.”

“*Quat-tro-cycle!*” She turned away from him, looked down at the lake, too angry to realize what she was doing. She felt slightly dizzy, touched her eye, where there was the promise of pain. He would give her pills for that,

because she could not work in pain, but nothing that might relax her, make her rest; he would not let her rest until the music was done. He wanted to hear it. All right. She would give it to him.

“Let’s go,” Larkin said to her, “before we lose all the light.”

\* \* \* \*

She left the Springs for home the following week, with a trunkful of notes, her suitcase, and her keyboard. A taxi took her to the airport, and no one saw her off. That was just how she wanted it.

She had not been back to the house for sixteen months. There were no deliveries there to stop or start; the mail accumulated at her post-office box until she or her New York agent called for it.

The house had no telephone either, and the electric power came from a generator that ran on gasoline, moonshine, or anything in between. In the basement was a bombproof shelter, gas/biowar-protective suits in several sizes, including maternity, and enough dehydrated food to last for at least five years.

In a room on the main floor was Helena’s master composition console, a percolator, and a framed photo of Terence Gallagher Weiss, deceased, who had refused to be called a survivalist, insisting that he just didn’t believe in miracles. He had gotten a promise out of her, that if the time came she’d go on living without him.

Now and again, she would rage at his picture, calling it anything she could think of. It was not that she had been made to keep her promise. She had just never imagined that it could be so hard to keep.

Writing the quattrocycle took almost four months. The lobes of the brain failed her as a framework, as did the gross structures; she had to tear down and build up again, note by note, phrase by phrase.

The headaches became blinding more than once, and she would have to stop for a day, take aspirin, drink coffee, sleep; but only for a day at a time.

When she was satisfied with the last note, she made a shortwave call to the state police, telling them that the house would be empty again, loaded tapes and bag and keyboard into the Land Rover, and drove away through the yellow haze of autumn.

\* \* \* \*

They found a sheltered spot on the lee slope of Shadow Mountain. Mrs. Weiss set up the keyboard and auxiliary tapes on a rock of a convenient height, and Dr. Larkin unspooled a strand of wire and hooked it to a pair of thin-panel speakers.

They had a tiny amphitheater in the shadow of the spine of the land. Larkin poured some white wine from his flask and settled down. Helena Weiss began to play.

The first cycle crashed against itself in waves of antiphony, a quick, bold, immediate theme for the right hand against a more deliberate and reverberating one for the left that faded and crested: Jaynes's bicameral mind, the centers of direct response having access to the higher reasoning potential only in moments of stress, and then only as an oracular voice from beyond. The overvoice ceased oscillating, becoming coequal to the instant mind: the breakdown of bicamerality, the origin of conscious thought.

The second cycle began in thunder.

The second cycle was concrete thought. The sounds of the hunt, the battle, the crowd; dance music and work song; gongs of bamboo and brass and steel. Notes progressed evenly, bricks on bricks in square measures and even time, until as the thunder returned, the lightning cracking it across, the notes seemed to strain against the lines, as if trying to expand.

The third cycle: abstract thought.

Note sequences leaped the scale as if intuitively finding the upper registers; there were five-tone scales, twelve-tone, twenty-tone, in measures of seven notes or thirteen or any number. There was ragtime. There was atonality. There were 4.33 seconds of silence. There were blue notes Doppler-shifted into the red, bending around the universe and back. Out again went the bridge, bending, stretching, galloping in a harmonic wind, until it shifted into the black.

The fourth cycle snapped into existence from silence, as if the ear had refused to hear the chaos at its very beginning. Then, above the incoherent rush of sound, a single line of melody rose like a vocalist in an unknown language, singing of those things that no language has ever found words for. A counterpoint split from the voice, the "Starscape" theme from *One Thousand Orbits* and the melody sang against a background of stars,

of crystalline, inhuman precision: but in the melody the inhumanity dissolved, and the distance to the stars-the boundary between what was thought and what was not thought-was bridged.

She launched into the last line. Her left hand played an overpowering major-chord sequence, while her right fingers picked out delicate knotworks of sound in the keyboard's pipe voicings: a million impulses of thought submerged in the torrent of intellect in motion, going on forever.

*And Amen!*

She leaned on the rock that held the board. Her knees were weak, and the sweat was cold on her forehead and the back of her neck. She turned slowly to face him. "And no headache," she said. "'Guess you were right. It was just tension. Just-"

Larkin was sitting with his back against a boulder. His left leg stuck out, twisted at a bizarre angle. His head was back against the stone, eyes open and staring at the sky, hard as ice. There was a dark trickle from his nostril.

*Not very messy, she thought.*

She touched him. He was stiff and quite cold. *Oh, Boris ... how did you get so cold?* She wondered if he had first realized he was dying the day she arrived, when he had that small seizure behind his console. "What is it?"

"Nothing." But surely there had been earlier signs. The man who built SIGMAPS must have known his own brain. The goddam son of a bitch who had swindled her out of the only fear that she could admit to having.

She shouted, "You got it out of me, didn't you, you selfish son of a bitch? You wanted me to do it, up here, so you could hear it just for yourself-all for yourself- and now what? How am I supposed to get us off this rock? Listen to me, you bastard!"

Two fingers of Larkin's right hand were thrust deep into his vest pocket.

Inside the pocket was his FM phone, with instructions, typed because his handwriting was so bad.

The helicopter came very soon, just as he had said it would. And as it lifted them away, its lights like gem-stones on the velvet cloth of the sky, Helena Weiss sat in its open door, playing the last cycle with her fingers bloody, the notes echoing from the peaks and in every layer of the air.

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\* \* \* \*

# WITH THE ORIGINAL CAST

*by Nancy Kress*

In the summer of 1998 Gregory Whitten was rehearsing a seventy-fifth-year revival of George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*, and Barbara Bishop abruptly called to ask me to fly back from Denver and attend a few rehearsals with her. She was playing Shaw's magnificent teen-aged fanatic, a role she had not done for twenty years and never on Broadway. Still, it was an extraordinary request; she had never specifically asked for my presence before, and I wound up my business for Gorer-Redding Solar and caught the next shuttle with uncharacteristic hope. At noon I landed in New York and coptered directly to the theater. Barbara met me in the lobby.

"Austin! You came!"

"Did you doubt it?" I kissed her, and she laughed softly.

"It was so splendid of you to drop everything and rush home."

"Well-I didn't exactly drop it. Lay it down gently, perhaps."

"Could Carl spare you? Did you succeed in blocking that coalition, or can they still stop Carl from installing the new Battery?"

"They have one chance in a billion," I said lightly. Barbara always asks; she manages to sound as interested in Gorer-Redding Solar as in Shakespeare and ESIR, although I don't suppose she really is. Of late neither am I, although Carl Gorer is my brother and the speculative risks of finance, including Gorer-Redding, is my profession. It was a certain faint boredom with seriously behaved money that had driven me in the first place to take wildcat risks backing legitimate theater. In the beginning Gorer-Redding Solar was itself a wildcat risk: one chance in a hundred that solar energy could be made cheap and plentiful enough to replace the exhausted petrofields. But that was years ago. Now solar prosperity is a reality; speculations lie elsewhere.

"I do appreciate your coming, you know," Barbara said. She tilted her head to one side, and a curve of shining dark hair, still without gray, slanted across one cheek.

"All appreciation gratefully accepted. Is there something wrong with the play?"

"No, or course not. What could be wrong with Shaw? Oh, Gregory's a little edgy, but then you know Gregory."

"Then you called me back solely to marry me."

"Austin, not again," she said, without coyness. "Not now."

"Then something *is* wrong."

She pulled a little away from me, shaking her head. "Only the usual new-play nerves."

"Rue-day nerves."

"Through-the-day swerves."

"Your point," I said. "But, Barbara, you've played Joan of Arc before."

"Twenty years ago," she said, and I glimpsed the strain on her face a second before it vanished under her publicity-photo smile, luminous and cool as polished crystal. Then the smile disappeared, and she put her cheek next to mine and whispered, "I do thank you for coming. And you look so splendid," and she was yet another Barbara, the Barbara I saw only in glimpses through her self-contained poise, despite having pursued her for half a year now with my marriage proposals, all gracefully rejected. I, Austin Gorer, who until now had never ever pursued anything very fast or very far. Nor ever had to.

"Nervous, love?"

"Terrified," she said lightly, the very lightness turning the word into a denial of itself, a delicate stage mockery.

"I don't believe it."

"That's half your charm. You never believe me."

"Your Joan was a wild success."

"My God, that was even before ESIR, can you believe it?"



“I believe it.”

“So do I,” she said, laughing, and began to relate anecdotes about casting that play, then this one, jumping between the two with witty, effortless bridges, her famous voice rising and falling with the melodious control that was as much a part of the public’s image of her as the shining helmet of dark hair and the cool grace.

She has never had good press. She is too much of a paradox to reduce easily to tabloid slogans, and the stupider journalists have called her mannered and artificial. She is neither. Eager animation and conscious taste are two qualities the press usually holds to be opposites, patronizing the first and feeling defensive in the presence of the second. But in Barbara Bishop, animation and control have melded into a grace that owes nothing to nature and everything to a civilized respect for willed illusion. When she walks across a stage or through a bedroom, when she speaks Shaw’s words or her own, when she hands Macbeth a dagger or a dinner guest a glass of wine, every movement is both free of artifice and perfectly controlled. Because she will not rage at press conferences, or wail colorfully at lost roles, or wrinkle her nose in professional cuteness, the press has decided that she is cold and lacks spontaneity. But for Barbara, what is spontaneous *is* control. She was born with it. She’ll always have it.

“—and so now Gregory’s *still* casting for the crowd scenes. He’s tested what has to be every ESIR actor in New York, and now he’s scraping up fledglings straight out of the hospital. Their scalp scars are barely healed and the ink on their historian’s certificates is still wet. We’re two weeks behind already, and rehearsals have barely begun, would you believe it? He can’t find enough actors with an ESIR in fifteenth-century France, and he’s not willing to go even fifty years off on either side.”

“Then you must have been French in Joan’s time,” I said, “or he wouldn’t have cast you? Even you?”

“Quite right. Even me.” She moved away from me toward the theater doors. Again I sensed in her some unusual strain. An actor is always reluctant to discuss his ESIR with an outsider (bad form), but this was something more.

“As it happens,” Barbara continued, “I was not only French, I was even in Rouen when Joan was burned at the stake in 1431. I didn’t see the burning, and I never laid eyes on her—I was only a barmaid in a country tavern—but, still, it’s rather an interesting coincidence.”

“Yes.”

“One chance in a million,” she said, smiling. “Or, no—what would be the odds, Austin? That’s really your field.”

I didn’t know. It would depend, of course, on just how many people in the world had undergone ESIR. There were very few. Electronically Stimulated Incarnation Recall involves painful, repeated electrochemical jolts through the cortex, through the limbic brain, directly into the R-Complex, containing racial and genetic memory. Biological shields are ripped away; defense mechanisms designed to aid survival by streamlining the vast load of memory are deliberately torn. The long-term effects are not yet known. ESIR is risky, confusing, morally disorienting, painful, and expensive. Most people want nothing to do with it. Those who do are mostly historians, scientists, freaks, mystics, poets—or actors, who must be a little of each. A stage full of players who believe totally that they *are* in Hamlet’s Denmark or Sir Thomas More’s England or Blanche DuBois’s South because they *have* been there and feel it in every gesture, every cadence, every authentic cast of mind—such a stage is out of time entirely. It can seduce even a philistine financier. Since ESIR, the glamour of the theater has risen, the number of would-be actors has dropped, and only the history departments of the world’s universities have been so in love with historically authentic style.

“Forget the odds,” I said. “Who hasn’t been cast yet?”

“Well, we need to see,” she said, ticking off roles on her fingers. I recognized the parody instantly. Gregory Whitten himself. Her very face seemed to lengthen into the horse-faced scowl so beloved by Sunday-supplement caricaturists. “We must have two royal ladies—no, they must absolutely look royal, *royal*. And DeStogumber, I need a marvelous DeStogumber! How can anyone expect me to direct without an absolutely wonderful DeStogumber-”

The theater doors opened. “We are ready for you onstage, Miss Bishop.”

“Thank you.” The parody of Whitten had vanished instantly; in this public of one stagehand she was again Barbara Bishop, controlled and cool.

I settled into a seat in the first row, nodding vaguely at the other hangers-on scattered throughout the orchestra and mezzanine. No one nodded back. There was an absurd public fiction that we, who contributed

nothing to the play but large sums of money, were like air: necessary but invisible. I didn't mind. I enjoyed seeing the cast ease into their roles, pulling them up from somewhere inside and mentally shaking each fold around their own gestures and voices and glances. I had not always known how to see that. It had taken me, from such a different set of signals, a long time to notice the tiny adjustments that go, rehearsal by rehearsal, to create the illusion of reality. Perhaps I was slow. But now it seemed to me that I could spot the precise moment when an actor has achieved that precarious balance between his neocortical knowledge of the script and his older, ESIR knowledge of the feel of his character's epoch, and so is neither himself nor the playwright's creation but some third, subtler force that transcends both.

Barbara, I could see, had not yet reached that moment.

Whitten, pacing the side of the stage, was directing the early scene in which the seventeen-year-old Joan, a determined peasant, comes to Captain Robert de Baudricourt to demand a horse and armor to lead the French to victory over the English. De Baudricourt was being played by Jason Kellig, a semisuccessful actor whom I had met before and not particularly liked. No one else was onstage, although I had that sensation one always has during a rehearsal of hordes of other people just out of sight in the wings, eyeing the action critically and shushing one another. Moths fluttering nervously just outside the charmed circle of light.

"No, squire!" Barbara said. "God is very merciful, and the blessed saints Catherine and Margaret, who speak to me every day, will intercede for you. You will go to paradise, and your name will be remembered forever as my first helper."

It was subtly wrong: too poised for the peasant Joan, too graceful. At the same time, an occasional gesture—an outflinging of her elbow, a sour smile—was too brash, and I guessed that these had belonged to the Rouen barmaid in Joan's ESIR. It was very rough, and I could see Whitten's famous temper, never long in check, begin to mount.

"No, no, no—Barbara, you're supposed to be an *innocent*. Shaw says that Joan answers 'with muffled sweetness.' You sound too surly. Absolutely too surly. You must do it again. Jason, cue her."

"Well, I am damned," Kellig said.

"No, squire! God is very merciful, and blessed saints Catherine and Margaret, who speak to me every day, will intercede for you. You will go to

paradise—”

“Again,” Whitten said.

“Well, I am damned.”

“No, squire! God is very merciful, and the blessed saints Catherine and Margaret, who speak to me every—”

“No! Now you sound like you’re sparring with him! This is not some damned eighteenth-century drawing-room repartee! Joan absolutely *means* it! The voices are absolutely real to her. You must do it again, Barbara. You must tap into the religious atmosphere of your ESIR. You are not trying! Do it again!”

Barbara bit her lip. I saw Kellig glance from her to Whitten, and I suddenly had the impression—I don’t know why—that they had all been at one another earlier, before I had arrived. Something beyond the usual rehearsal frustration was going on here. Tension, unmistakable as the smell of smoke, rose from the three of them.

“Well, I am damned.”

“No, squire! God is very merciful, and the blessed saints Catherine and Margaret, who speak to me every day, will intercede for you. You will go to paradise, and your name will be remembered forever as my first helper.”

“Again,” Whitten said.

“Well, I am damned.”

“No, squire! God is—”

“Again.”

“Really, Gregory,” Barbara began icily, “how you think you can judge after four words of—”

“I need to hear only *one* word when it’s as bad as that! And what in absolute hell is that little flick of the wrist supposed to be? Joan is not a discus thrower. She must be—” Whitten stopped dead, staring off-stage.

At first, unsure of why he had cut himself off or turned so red, I thought he was having an attack of some kind. The color in his face was

high, almost hectic. But he held himself taut and erect, and then I heard the siren coming closer, landing on the roof, trailing off. It had come from the direction of Larrimer—which was, I suddenly remembered, the only hospital in New York that would do ESIR.

A very young man in a white coat hurried across the stage.

“Mr. Whitten, Dr. Metz says could you come up to the copter right away?”

“What is it? No, don’t hold back, damn it. you absolutely must tell me now! Is it?”

On the young technician’s face professional restraint battled with self-importance. The latter won, helped perhaps by Whitten’s seizing the boy by the shoulders. For a second I actually thought Whitten would shake him.

“It’s her, sir. It really is. We were looking for fifteenth-century ESIR, like you said, and we tried the neos for upper class for the ladies in waiting, and all we were getting were peasants or non-Europeans or early childhood deaths, and then Dr. Metz asked—” He was clearly enjoying this, dragging it out as much as possible. Whitten waited with a patience that surprised me until I realized that he was holding his breath. “-this neo to concentrate on the pictures Dr. Metz would show her of buildings and dresses and bowls and stuff to clear her mind. She looked dazed and in pain like they do, and then she suddenly remembered who she was, and Dr. Metz asked her lots of questions—that’s his period anyway, you know; he’s the foremost American historian on medieval France—and then he said she was.”

Whitten let out his breath, a long, explosive sigh. Kellig leaned forward and said “Was...”

“Joan,” the boy said simply. “Joan of Arc.”

It was as if he had shouted, although of course he had not. But the name hung in the dusty silence of the empty theater, circled and underlined by everything there: the heavy velvet curtains, the dust motes in the air, the waiting strobes, the clouds of mothlike actors, or memories of actors, in the wings. They all existed to lend weight and probability to what had neither. One in a million, one in a billion.

“Is Dr. Metz sure?” Whitten demanded. He looked suddenly violent, capable of disassembling the technician if the historian were not sure.

“He’s sure!”

“Where is she? In the copter?”

“Yes.”

“Have Dr. Metz bring her down here. No, I’ll go up there. No, bring her here. Is she still weak?”

“Yes, sir,” the boy said.

“Well, go! I told Dr. Metz I wanted her here as soon as he absolutely was sure!”

The boy went.

So Whitten had been informed of the possibility earlier. I looked at Barbara, suddenly understanding the tension on stage. She stood smiling, her chin raised a little, her body very straight, her chin raised a little, her body very straight. She looked pale. Some trick of lighting, some motionless tautness in her shoulders, made me think for an instant that she was going to faint, but of course she did not. She behaved exactly as I knew she must have been willing herself to, waiting quietly through the interminable time until Joan of Arc should appear. Whitten fidgeted; Kellig lounged, his eyelids lowered halfway. Neither of them looked at Barbara.

The technician and the historian walked out onto the stage, each with a hand under either elbow of a young girl whose head was bandaged. Even now I feel a little ashamed when I remember rising halfway in my seat, as for an exalted presence. But the girl was not an exalted presence, was not Joan of Arc; she was an awkward, skinny plain-faced girl who had once *been* Joan of Arc and now wanted to be an extra in the background of a seventy-five-year-old play. No one else seemed to be remembering the distinction.

“You were Joan of Arc?” Whitten asked. He sounded curiously formal, as out of character as the girl.

“Yes, I... I remember Joan. Being Joan.” The girl frowned, and I thought I knew why: She was wondering why she didn’t *feel* like Joan. But ESIR, Barbara has told me, doesn’t work like that. Other lives are like remembering someone you have known, not like experiencing the flesh and bone of this one—unless this one is psychotic. Otherwise, it usually takes

time and effort to draw on the memory of a previous incarnation, and this child had been Joan of Arc only for a few days. Suddenly I felt very sorry for her.

“What’s your first name?” Whitten said.

“Ann. Ann Jasmine.”

Whitten winced. “A stage name?”

“Yes. Isn’t it pretty?”

“You must absolutely use your real name. What acting have you done?”

The girl shifted her weight, spreading her feet slightly apart and starting to count off on her fingers. Her voice was stronger now and cockier. “Well, let’s just see: In high school I played Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, and in the Country-Time Players—that’s community theater—I was Goat’s Sister in *The Robber Bridegroom* and Aria in *Moondust*. And then I came to New York, and I’ve done— oh, small stuff, mostly. A few commercials.” She smiled at Whitten, then looked past him at Kellig and winked. He stared back at her as if she were a dead fish.

“What,” said Kellig slowly, “*is* your real name?”

“Does it matter?” The girl’s smile vanished, and she pouted.

“Yes.”

“Ann Friedland,” she said sulkily, and I knew where the “few commercials, mostly” as well as the expensive ESIR audition had come from. Trevor Friedland, of Friedland Computers, was a theater backer for his own amusement, much as I was. He was not, however, a co-backer in this one. Not yet.

At the Friedland name, Kellig whistled, a low, impudent note that made Whitten glance at him in annoyance. Barbara still had not moved. She watched them intently.

“Forget your name,” Whitten said. “Absolutely forget it. Now I know this play is new to you, but you must read for me. Just read cold; don’t be nervous. Take my script and start there. No—there. Jason, cue her.”

“You want me to read Joan? The part of *Joan*?” the girl said. All her assumed sophistication was gone; her face was as alive as a seven-year-old’s at Christmas, and I looked away, not wanting to like her.

“Oh, really, Greg,” Kellig said. Whitten ignored him.

“Just look over Shaw’s description there, and then start. I know you’re cold. Just start.”

“Good morning, captain squire,” she began shakily, but stopped when Barbara crossed the stage to sit on a bench near the wings. She was still smiling, a small frozen smile. Ann glanced at her nervously, then began over.

“Good morning, captain squire. Captain, you are to give me a horse...” Again she stopped. A puzzled look came over her face; she skimmed a few pages and then closed her eyes. Immediately I thought of the real Joan, listening to voices. But this was the real Joan. For a moment the stage seemed to float in front of me, a meaningless collection of lines and angles.

“It wasn’t like that,” Ann Friedland said slowly.

“Like what?” Whitten said. “What wasn’t like what?”

“Joan. Me. She didn’t charge in like that at all to ask de Baudricourt for horse and armor. It wasn’t at all... she was more... Insane, I think. What he has written here, Shaw...” She looked at each of us in turn, frowning. No one moved. I don’t know how long we stayed that way, staring at the thin girl onstage.

“Saint Catherine,” she said finally. “Saint Margaret.” Her slight figure jerked as if shocked, and she threw back her head and howled like a dog. “But Orleans was not even my idea! The commander, my father, the commander, my father... oh, my God, my dear God, he made her do it, he told me—they all *promised*—”

She stumbled, nearly falling to her knees. The historian leaped forward and caught her. I don’t think any of us could have borne it if that pitiful, demented figure had knelt and begun to pray.

The next moment, however, though visibly fighting to control herself, she knew where—and who—she was.



“Doctor, don’t, I’m all right now. It’s not—I’m all right. Mr. Whitten, I’m sorry, let me start the scene over!”

“No, don’t start the scene over. Tell me what you were going to say. Where is Shaw wrong? What happened? Try to feel it again.”

Ann’s eyes held Whitten’s. They were beyond all of us, already negotiating with every inflection of every word.

“I don’t have to feel it again. I remember what happened. That wave of... I won’t do that again. It was just when it all came rushing back. But now I remember it, I have it, I can *control* it. It didn’t happen like Shaw’s play. She—I—was used. She did hear voices, she was mad, but the whole idea to use her to persuade the Dauphin to fight against the English didn’t come from the voices. The priests insisted on what they said the voices meant, and the commander made her a sort of mascot to get the soldiers to kill... I was *used*. A victim.” A complicated expression passed over her face, perhaps the most extraordinary expression I have ever seen on a face so young: regret and shame and loss and an angry, wondering despair for events long beyond the possibility of change. Then the expression vanished, and she was wholly a young woman coolly engaged in the bargaining of history.

“I know it all, Mr. Whitten—all that *really* happened. And it happened to me. The real Joan of Arc.”

“Cosgriff,” Whitten said, and I saw Kellig start. Lawrence Cosgriff had won the Pulitzer Prize for drama the last two years in a row. He wrote powerful, despairing plays about the loss of individual morality in an institutionalized world.

“My dear Gregory,” Kellig said, “one does not simply commission Lawrence Cosgriff to write one a play. He’s not some hack you can—”

Whitten looked at him, and he was quiet. I understood why; Whitten was on fire, as exalted with his daring idea as the original Joan must have been with hers. But no, of course, she hadn’t been exalted, that was the whole point. She had been a dupe, not a heroine. Young Miss Friedland, fighting for her name in lights, most certainly considered Joan the Heroine to be an expendable casualty. One of the expendable casualties. I stood up and began to make my way to the stage.

"I'm the real thing," Ann said. "The *real* thing. I'll play Joan, of course."

"Of course," Kellig drawled. He was already looking at her with dislike, and I could see what their rehearsals would be: the chance upstart and the bit player who had paid largely fruitless dues for twenty years. The commander and the Dauphin would still be the male leads; Kellig's part could only grow smaller under Ann's real thing.

"I'll play Joan," she said again, a little more loudly.

Whitten, flushed with his vision, stopped his ecstatic pacing and scowled. "Of course you must play Joan!"

"Oh," Ann said, "I was afraid—"

"Afraid? What is this? You *are* Joan."

"Yes," she said slowly, "yes, I am." She frowned, sincerely, and then a second later replaced the frown with a smile all calculation and relief. "Yes, of course I am!"

"Then I'll absolutely reach Cosgriff's agent today. He'll jump at it. You will need to work with him, of course. We can open in six months, with any luck. You *do* live in town? Cosgriff can tape you. No, someone else can do that before he even—Austin!"

"You're forgetting something, aren't you, Gregory, in this sudden great vision? You have a contract to do Shaw."

"Of course I'm not forgetting the contract. But you absolutely must want to continue, for this new play... Cosgriff..." He stopped, and I knew the jumble of things that must be in his mind: deadlines, backing (Friedland Computers!), contracts, schedules, the percentage of my commitment, and, belatedly, Barbara.

She still sat on the bench at stage left, half in shadow. Her back was very straight, her chin high, but in the subdued light her face with its faint smile looked older, not haggard but set, inelastic. I walked over to her and turned to face Whitten.

"I will not back this new play, even if you do get Cosgriff to write it. Which I rather doubt. Shaw's drama is an artistic masterpiece. What you are planning is a trendy exploitation of some flashy technology. Look elsewhere for your money."

Silence. Whitten began to turn red, Kellig snickered—at whom was not clear. In the silence the historian, Dr. Metz, began timidly, “I’m sure Miss Friedland’s information would be welcomed warmly by any academic—”

The girl cried loudly, “But I’m the real thing!” and she started to sob.

Barbara had risen to take my arm. Now she dropped it and walked over to Ann. Her voice was steady. “I know you are. And I wish you all luck as an actress. It’s a brilliant opportunity, and I’m sure you’ll do splendidly with it.”

They faced each other, the sniveling girl who had at least the grace to look embarrassed and the smiling, humiliated woman. It was a public performance, of course, an illusion that all Barbara felt was a selfless, graceful warmth, but it was also more than that. It was as gallant an act of style as I have ever seen.

Ann muttered “Thank you” and flushed a mottled maroon. Barbara took my arm, and we walked down the side aisle and out of the theater. She walked carefully, choosing her steps, her head high and lips together and solemn, like a woman on her way to a public burning.

I wish I could say that my quixotic gesture had an immediate and disastrous effect on Whitten’s plans, that he came to his artistic senses—and went back to Shaw’s *Saint Joan*. But of course he did no such thing. Other financial backing than mine proved to be readily available. Contracts were rewritten, agents placated, lawsuits avoided. Cosgriff did indeed consent to write the script, and *Variety* became distressingly eager to report any tidbit connected with what was being billed as *JOAN OF ARC: WITH THE ORIGINAL CAST!* It was a dull theater season in New York. Nothing currently running gripped the public imagination like this as-yet-unwritten play. Whitten, adroitly fanning the flames, gave out very few factual details.

Barbara remained silent on the whole subject. Business was keeping me away from New York a great deal. Gorer-Redding Solar was installing a new plant in Bogotá, and I would spend whole weeks trying to untangle the lush foliage of bribes, kickbacks, nepotism, pride, religion, and *mañana* that is business in South America. But whenever I was in New York, I spent time with Barbara. She would not discuss Whitten’s play, warning me away from the subject with the tactful withdrawal of an estate owner discouraging trespassing without hurting local feelings. I admired her tact and her refusal to whine, but at the same time I felt vaguely impatient. She was keeping me

at arm's length. She was doing it beautifully, but arm's length was not where I wanted to be.

I do not assume that intimacy must be based on a mutual display of sores. I applaud the public illusion of control and well-being as a civilized achievement. However, I knew Barbara well enough to know that under her illusion of well-being she must be hurt and a little afraid. No decent scripts had been offered her, and the columnists had not been kind over the loss of *Saint Joan*. Barbara had been too aloof, too self-possessed for them to show any compassion now. Press sympathy for a humiliated celebrity is in direct proportion to the anguished copy previously supplied.

Then one hot night in August I arrived at Barbara's apartment for dinner. Lying on a hall table was a script:

*A MAID OF DOMREMY*  
by  
*Lawrence Cosgriff*

Incredulous, I picked it up and leafed through it. When I looked up, Barbara was standing in the doorway, holding two goblets of wine.

"Hello, Austin. Did you have a good flight?"

"Barbara Bogotá what is this?" I asked, stupidly.

She crossed the hall and handed me one of the goblets.

"It's Lawrence's play about Joan of Arc."

"I see that. But what is it doing here?"

She didn't answer me immediately. She looked beautiful, every illusion seeming completely natural: the straight, heavy silk of her artfully cut gown, the flawless makeup, the hair cut in precise lines to curve over one cheek. Without warning, I was irritated by all of it. Illusions. Arm's length.

"Austin, why don't you reconsider backing Gregory's play?"

"Why on earth should I?"

"Because you really could make quite a lot of money on it."

"I could make quite a lot of money backing auto gladiators. I don't do that, either."

She smiled, acknowledging the thrust. I still did not know how the conversation had become a duel.

"Are you hungry? There are canapés in the living room. Dinner won't be ready for a while yet."

"I'm not hungry. Barbara, why do you want me to back Whitten's play?"

"I don't want you to, if you don't wish to. Come in and sit down. *I'm* hungry. I only thought you might want to back the play. It's splendid." She looked at me steadily over the rim of her goblet. "It's the best new script I've seen in years. It's subtle, complex, moving Bogotá much better even than his last two. It's going to replace Shaw's play as the best we have about Joan. And on the subject of victimization by a world the main character doesn't understand, it's better than *Streetcar* or *Joy Ride*. A hundred years from now this play will still be performed regularly, and well."

"It's not like you to be so extravagant with your praise."

"No, it's not."

"And you want me to finance the play for the reflected glory?"

"For the satisfaction. And," she added quietly, but firmly, "because I've accepted a bit part in it."

I stared at her. Last week a major columnist had headlined: **FALLEN STAR LANDS ON HER PRIDE.**

"It's a very small role. Yolande of Aragon, the Dauphin's mother-in-law. She intrigued on the Dauphin's behalf when he was struggling to be crowned. I have only one scene, but it has possibilities."

"For you? What does it have possibilities of —being smirked at by that little schemer in *your* role? Did you read how much her agent is holding Whitten up for? No wonder he could use more backers."

"You would get it back. But that's not the question, Austin, is it? Why do you object to my taking this part? It's not like you to object to my choice of roles."

“I’m upset because I don’t want you to be hurt, and I think you are. I think you’ll be hurt even more if you play this Yolande with Miss Ann Friedland as Joan, and I don’t want to see it, because I love you.”

“I know you do, Austin.” She smiled warmly and touched my cheek. It was a perfect Barbara Bishop gesture: sincere, graceful, and complete in itself—so complete that it promised nothing more than what it was, led on to nothing else. It cut off communication as effectively as a blow—or, rather, more effectively, since a blow can be answered in kind. I slammed my glass on the table and stood up. Once up, however, I had nothing to say and so stood there feeling ridiculous. What *did* I want to say? What did I want from her that I did not already have?

“I wish,” I said slowly, “that you were not always acting.”

She looked at me steadily. I knew the look. She was waiting: for retraction or amendment or amplification. And of course she was right to expect any, or all, of those things. What I had said was inaccurate. She was not acting. What she did was something subtly different. She behaved with the gestures and attitudes and behaviors of the world as she believed it ought to be, a place of generous and rational individuals with enough sheer style to create events in their own image. That people’s behavior was in fact often uncivilized, cowardly, and petty she of course knew; she was not stupid. Hers was a deliberate, controlled choice: to ignore the pettiness and to grant to all of us — actors, audience, press, Whitten, Ann Friedland, me, herself — the illusion of having the most admirable motives conceivable.

It seemed to me that this was praiseworthy, even “civilized,” in the best sense of that much-abused word.

Why, then, did it make me feel so lonely?

Barbara was still waiting. “Forgive me; I misspoke. I don’t mean that you are always acting. I mean — I mean that I’m concerned for you. Standing for a curtain call at the back of the stage while that girl, that chance reincarnation...” Suddenly a new idea occurred to me. “Or do you think that she won’t be able to do the part and you will be asked to take over for her?”

“No!”

“But if Ann Friedland can’t —”

“No! I will never play Joan in *A Maid of Domrémy!*”

“Why not?”

She finished her wine. Under the expensive gown her breasts heaved. “I had no business even taking the part in Shaw’s *Joan*. I am forty-five years old, and Joan is seventeen. But at least there — at least Shaw’s Joan was not really a victim. I will not play her as a pitiful victim.”

“Come on, Barbara. You’ve played Blanche DuBois, and Ophelia, and Jessie Kane. They’re all victims.”

“I won’t play Joan in *A Maid of Domrémy!*”

I saw that she meant it, that even while she admired the play, she was repelled by it in some fundamental way I did not understand. I sat down again on the sofa and put my arms around her. Instantly she was Barbara Bishop again, smiling with rueful mockery at both her own violence and my melodrama, drawing us together in a covenant too generous for quarreling.

“Look at us, Austin — actually discussing that tired old cliché, the understudy who goes on for the fading star. But I’m not her understudy, and she can hardly fade before she’s even bloomed! Really, we’re too ridiculous. I’m sorry, love, I didn’t mean to snap at you like that. Shall we have dinner now?”

I stood up and pulled her next to me. She came gracefully, still smiling, the light sliding over her dark hair, and followed me to her bedroom. The sex was very good, as it always was. But afterward, lying with her head warm on my shoulder, I was still baffled by something in her I could not understand. Was it because of ESIR? I had thought that before. What was it like to have knowledge of those hundreds of other lives you had once lived? I would never know. Were the exotic types I met in the theater so different, so less easily understood, because they had “creative temperament” (whatever that was) or because of ESIR? I would probably never know that, either, nor how much of Barbara was what she was here, now, and how much was subtle reaction to all the other things she knew she had been. I wasn’t sure I wanted to know.

Long after Barbara fell asleep, I lay awake in the soft darkness, listening to the night sounds of New York beyond the window and to something else beyond those, some large silence where my own ESIR memories might have been.

\* \* \* \*

Whitten banned everyone but actors and tech crew from rehearsals of *A Maid of Domrémy*: press, relatives, backers, irate friends. Only because the play had seized the imagination of the public—or at least that small portion of the public that goes to the theater — could his move succeed. The financial angels went along cheerfully with their own banning, secure in the presale ticket figures that the play would make money even without their personal supervision.

Another director, casting for a production of *Hamlet*, suddenly claimed to have discovered the reincarnation of Shakespeare. For a week Broadway was a laser of rumors and speculations. Then the credentials of the two historians verifying the ESIR were discovered by a gleeful press to have been faked. The director, producer, historians, and ersatz Shakespeare were instantly unavailable for comment.

The central computer of the AMA was tapped into. For two days executives with private face-lifts and politicians with private accident records and teachers with private drug-abuse histories held their collective breaths, cursing softly under them. The AMA issued a statement that only ESIR records had been pirated, and the scandal was generally forgotten in the central part of the country and generally intensified on both coasts. Wild reports were issued, contradicted, confirmed, and disproved, all in a few hours. An actor who remembered being King Arthur had been discovered and was going to star in the true story of the Round Table. Euripides was living in Boston and would appear there in his own play *Medea*. The computer verified that ESIR actually *had* uncovered Helen of Troy, and the press stampeded out to Bowling Green, Ohio, where it was discovered that the person who remembered being Helen of Troy was a male, bald, sixty-eight-year-old professor emeritus in the history department. He was writing a massive scholarly study of the Trojan War, and he bitterly resented the “cheap publicity of the popular press.”

“The whole thing is becoming a circus,” Barbara grumbled. Her shirt was loose at the breasts, and her pants gaped at the waist. She had lost weight and color.

“And this, too, shall pass,” I told her. “Think of when ESIR was first introduced. A few years of wild quakes all over society, and then everyone adjusted. This is just the aftershock on the theater.”

“I don’t especially like standing directly on the fault line.”



“How are rehearsals going?”

“About the same,” she said, her eyes hooded. Since she never spoke of the play at all, I didn’t know what “about the same” would be the same as.

“Barbara, what are you waiting for?”

“Waiting for?”

“Constantly now you have that look of waiting, frowning to yourself, looking as if you’re scrutinizing something. Something only you can see.”

“Austin, how ridiculous! What I’m looking at is all *too* public: opening night for the play.”

“And what do you see?”

She was silent for a long time. “I don’t know.” She laughed, an abrupt, opaque sound like the sudden drawing of a curtain. “It’s silly, isn’t it? Not knowing what I don’t know. A tautology, almost.”

“Barbara, marry me. We’ll go away for a weekend and get married, like two children. This weekend.”

“I thought you had to fly back to Bogotá this weekend.”

“I do. But you could come with me. There *is* a world outside New York, you know. It isn’t simply all one vast out-of-town tryout.”

“I do thank you, Austin, you know that. But I can’t leave right now; I do have to work on my part. There are still things I don’t trust.”

“Such as what?”

“Me,” she said lightly, and would say no more.

Meanwhile the hoopla went on. A professor of history at Berkeley who had just finished a — now probably erroneous — dissertation on Joan of Arc tried various legal ploys to sue Ann Friedland on the grounds that she “undercut his means of livelihood.” A group called the Catholic Coalition to Clear the Inquisition published in four major newspapers an appeal to Ann Friedland to come forward and declare the fairness of the church at Joan of Arc’s heresy trial. Each of the ads cost a fantastic sum. But Ann did not

reply; she was preserving to the press a silence as complete as Barbara's to me. I think this is why I didn't press Barbara more closely about her rehearsals. I wanted to appear as different from the rest of the world as possible — an analogy probably now one made except me. Men in love are ludicrous.

Interest in Ann Friedland was not dispelled by her silence. People merely claiming to be a notable figure from the past was growing stale. For years people had been claiming to be Jesus Christ or Muhammad or Judas; all had been disproved, and the glamour, evaporated. But now a famous name had not only been verified, it was going to be showcased in an enterprise that carried the risk of losing huge sums of money; several professional reputations, and months of secret work. The public was delighted. Ann Friedland quickly became a household name.

She was going to marry the widowed King Charles of England. She was going to lead a revival of Catholicism and was being considered for the position of first female pope. She was a drug addict, a Mormon, pregnant, mad, in love, clairvoyant, ten years old, extraterrestrial. She was refusing to go on opening night. Gregory Whitten was going to let her improvise the part opening night. Rehearsals were a disaster, and Barbara Bishop would play the part opening night.

Not even to this last did Barbara offer a comment. Also silent were the reputable papers, the serious theater critics, the men and women who control the money that controls Broadway. They, too, were waiting.

We all waited.

\* \* \* \*

The week that *A Maid of Domrémy* was to open in New York I was still in Bogotá. I had come down with a low-grade fever, which in the press of work I chose to ignore. By Saturday I had a temperature of one hundred four degrees and a headache no medication could touch. I saw everything through slow, pastel-colored swirls. My arms and legs felt lit with a dry, papery fire that danced up and down from shoulder to wrist, ankle to hip, up and down, wrist to shoulder. I knew I should go to a hospital, but I did not. The opening was that night.

On the plane to New York I slept, dreaming of Barbara in the middle of a vast solar battery. I circled the outside, calling to her desperately. Unaware, she sat reading a script amid the circuits and storage cells, until the fires of the sun burst out all around her and people she had known from

other lives danced maniacally in the flames.

At my apartment I took more pills and a cold shower, then tried to phone Barbara. She had already left for makeup call. I dressed and caught a copter to the theater, sleeping fitfully on the short trip, and then I was in the theater, surrounded by firstnighters who did not know I was breathing contagion on all of them, and who floated around me like pale cutouts in diamonds, furs, and nauseating perfume. I could not remember walking from the copter, producing my ticket, or being escorted to my seat. The curtain swirled sickeningly, and I closed my eyes until I realized that it was not my fever that caused the swirls: The curtain was rising. Had the house lights dimmed? I couldn't remember anything. Dry fire danced over me, shoulder to wrist, ankle to hip.

Barbara, cloaked, entered stage left. I had not realized that her scene opened the play. She carried a massive candle across the stage, bent over a wooden table, and lit two more candles from the large one, all with the taut, economical movements of great anger held fiercely in check. Before the audience heard her speak, before they clearly saw her face, they had been told that Yolande was furious, not used to being so, and fully capable of controlling her own anger.

"Mary! Where are you sulking now, Mary?" Barbara said. She straightened and drew back her hood. Her voice was low, yet every woman named Mary in the audience started guiltily. Onstage Mary of Anjou, consort of the uncrowned Dauphin of France, crept sullenly from behind a tapestry, facing her mother like a whipped dog.

"Here I am, for all the good it will do you, or anyone," she whined, looking at her own feet. Barbara's motionless silence was eloquent with contempt; Mary burst out with her first impassioned monologue against the Dauphin and Joan; the play was launched. It was a strong, smooth beginning, fueled by the conviction of Barbara's portrait of the terrifying Yolande. As the scene unfolded, the portrait became even stronger, so that I forgot both my feverish limbs and my concern for Barbara. There were no limbs, no Barbara, no theater. There was only a room in fifteenth-century France, sticky with bloody shed for what to us were illusions: absolute good and absolute evil. Cosgriff was exploring the capacities in such illusions for heroism, for degradation, for nobility beyond what the audience's beliefs, saner and more temperate, could allow. Yolande and Mary and the Dauphin loved and hated and gambled and killed with every fiber of their elemental beings, and not a sound rose from the audience until Barbara delivered her final speech and exited stage right. For a moment the audience sat still, bewildered — not by what had happened onstage, but by the unwelcome

remembrance that they were not a part of it, but instead were sitting on narrow hard seats in a wooden box in New York, a foreign country because it was not medieval France. Then the applause started.

The Dauphin and his consort, still onstage, did not break character. He waited until the long applause was over, then continued bullying his wife. Shortly afterward two guards entered, dragging between them the confused, weeping Joan. The audience leaned forward eagerly. They were primed by the wonderful first scene and eager for more miracles.

“Is *this* the slut?” the Dauphin asked, and Mary, seeing a woman even more abused and wretched than herself, smiled with secret, sticky joy. The guards let Joan go, and she stumbled forward, caught herself, and staggered upward, raising her eyes to the Dauphin’s.

“In the name of Saint Catherine —” She choked and started to weep. It was stormy weeping, vigorous, but without the chilling pain of true hysteria. The audience shuffled a little.

“I will do whatever you want, I swear it in the name of God, if you will only tell me what it is!” On the last word her voice rose; she might have been demanding that a fractious child cease lying to her.

I leaned my head sideways against one shoulder. Waves of fever and nausea beat through me, and for the first time since I had become ill I was aware of labored breathing. My heart beat, skipped, beat twice, skipped. Each breath sounded swampy and rasping. People in the row ahead began to turn and glare. Wadding my handkerchief into a ball, I held it in front of my mouth and tried to watch the play — Lines slipped in and out of my hearing; actors swirled in fiery paper-dry pastels. Once Joan seemed to turn into Barbara, and I gasped and half-rose in my seat, but then the figure onstage was Ann Friedland, and I sat down again to glares from those around me. It was Ann Friedland; I had been a fool to doubt it. It was not Joan of Arc. The girl onstage hesitated, changed tone too often, looked nervously across the footlights, moved a second too late. Once she even stammered.

Around me the audience began to murmur discreetly. Just before the first-act curtain, in a moment of clarity, Joan finally sees how she is being used and makes an inept, wrenchingly pathetic attempt to manipulate the users by manufacturing instructions she says come from her voices. It is a crucial point in the play, throwing into dramatic focus the victim who agrees to her own corruption by a misplaced attempt at control. Ann played it nervously, with an exaggerated grab at pathos that was actually

embarrassing. Nothing of that brief glimpse of personal power she had shown at her audition, so many weeks ago, was present now. Between waves of fever, I tried to picture the fit Whitten must be having backstage.

“Christ,” said a man in the row ahead of me, “can you believe that?”

“What an absolute travesty,” said the woman next to him. Her voice hummed with satisfaction. “Poor Lawrence.”

“He was ripe for it. Smug.”

“Oh, yes. Still.”

“Smug,” the man said.

“It doesn’t matter to me what you do with her,” said Mary of Anjou, onstage. “Why should it? Only for a moment she seemed... different. Did you remark it?” Ann Friedland, who had not seemed different, grimaced weakly, and the first-act curtain fell. People were getting to their feet, excited by the magnitude of the disaster. The house lights went up. Just as I stood, the curtains onstage parted and there was some commotion, but the theater leaped in a single nauseous lurch, blinding and hot, and then nothing.

\* \* \* \*

“Austin,” a voice said softly. “Austin.”

My head throbbed, but from a distance, as if it were not my head at all.

“Austin,” the voice said far above me. “Are you there?”

I opened my eyes. Yolande of Aragon, her face framed in a wool hood, gazed down at me and turned into Barbara. She was still in costume and makeup, the heavy, high color garish under too-bright lights. I groaned and closed my eyes.

“Austin. Are you there? Do you know me?”

“Barbara?”

“You are there! Oh, that’s splendid. How do you feel? No, don’t talk. You’ve been delirious, love, you had such a fever... this is the hospital.

Larrimer. They've given you medication; you're going to be fine."

"Barbara."

"I'm here, Austin, I'm right here."

I opened my eyes slowly, accustoming them to the light. I lay in a small private room; beyond the window the sky was dark. I was aware that my body hurt, but aware in the detached, abstract way characteristic of EL painkillers, that miracle of modern science. The dose must have been massive. My body felt as if it belonged to someone else, a friend for whom I felt comradely simulations of pain, but not the real thing.

"What do I have?"

"Some tropical bug. What did you drink in Bogotá? The doctor says it could have been dangerous, but they flushed out your whole system and pumped you full of antibiotics, and you'll be fine. Your fever's down almost to normal. But you must rest."

"I don't want to rest."

"You don't have any choice." She took my hand. The touch felt distant, as if the hand were wrapped in layers of padding.

"What time is it?"

"Five A.M."

"The play —"

"Is long since over."

"What happened?"

She bit her lip. "A lot happened. When precisely do you mean? I wasn't there for the second act, you know. When the ambulance came for you, one of the ushers recognized you and came backstage to tell me. I rode here in the ambulance with you. I didn't have another scene anyway."

I was confused. If Barbara had missed the entire last act, how could "a lot have happened"? I looked at her closely, and this time I saw what only the EL's could have made me miss before: the signs of great, repressed strain. Tendons stood out in Barbara's neck; under the cracked and

sagging makeup her eyes darted around the room. I felt myself suddenly alert, and a fragment of memory poked at me, a fragment half-glimpsed in the hot swirl of the theater just before I blacked out.

“She ran out on the stage.” I said slowly. “Ann Friedland. In front of the curtain. She ran out and yelled something...” It was gone. I shook my head. “On the *stage*.”

“Yes.” Barbara let go of my hand and began to pace. Her long train dragged behind her; when she turned, it tangled around her legs and she stumbled. The action was so uncharacteristic, it was shocking.

“You saw what the first act was. A catastrophe. She was trying —”

“The whole first act wasn’t bad, love. Your scene was wonderful. Wait — the reviews on your role will be very good.”

“Yes,” she said distractedly. I saw that she had hardly heard me. There was something she had to do, had to say. The best way to help was to let her do it. Words tore from her like a gale.

“She tried to do the whole play reaching back into her ESIR Joan. She tried to just feel it, and let Lawrence’s words — her words — be animated by the remembered feeling. But without the conscious balancing... no, it isn’t even balancing. It’s more like imagining what you already know, and to do that, you have to *forget* what you know and at the same time remember every tiny nuance... I can’t explain it. Nobody ever really *was* a major historical figure before, in a play composed of his own words. Gregory was so excited over the concept, and then when rehearsals began... but by that time he was committed, and the terrible hype just bound him further. When Ann ruined the first act like that, he was just beside himself. I’ve never seen him like that. I’ve never seen anybody like that. He was raging, just completely out of control. And onstage Ann was coming apart, and I could see that he was going to completely destroy her, and we had a whole act to *go*, damn it! A whole fucking act!”

I stared at her. She didn’t notice. She lighted a cigarette; it went out; she flung the match and cigarette on the floor. I could see her hand trembling.

“I knew that if Gregory got at her, she was done. She wouldn’t even go back out after intermission. Of course the play was a flop already, but not to even *finish* the damn thing... I wasn’t thinking straight. All I could see

was that he would destroy her, all of us. So I hit him.”

“You what?”

“I hit him. With Yolande’s candlestick. I took him behind a flat to try to calm him down, and instead I hit him. *Without knowing I was going to.* Something strange went through me, and I picked up my arm and hit him. Without knowing I was going to!”

She wrapped her arms around herself and shuddered. I saw what had driven her to this unbearable strain. *Without knowing I was going to.*

“His face became very surprised, and he fell forward. No one saw me. Gregory lay there, breathing as if he were just asleep, and I found a phone and called an ambulance. Then I told the stage manager that Mr. Whitten had had a bad fall and hit his head and was unconscious. I went around to the wings and waited for Ann. When the curtain came down and she saw me waiting for her, she turned white, and then red, and started shouting at me that she was Joan of Arc and I was an aging bitch who wanted to steal her role.”

I tried to picture it — the abusive girl, the appalled, demoralized cast, the director lying hidden, bashed with a candlestick — *without knowing I was going to!* — and, out front,, the polite chatter, the great gray critics from the *Times* and the *New Yorker*, the dressed-up suburbanites from Scarsdale squeezing genially down the aisles for an entr’acte drink and a smoke.

“She went on and on,” Barbara said. “She told me *I* was the reason she couldn’t play the role, that I deliberately undermined her by standing around like I knew everything, and she knew everybody was expecting me to go on as Joan after she failed. Then suddenly she darted away from me and went through the curtains onto the stage. The house lights were up; half the audience had left. She spread out her arms and *yelled* at them.”

Barbara stopped and put her hands over her face. I reached up and pulled them away. She looked calmer now, although there was still an underlying tautness in her voice. “Oh, it’s just too ridiculous, Austin. She made an absolute fool of herself, of Lawrence, of all of us, but it wasn’t her fault. She’s an inexperienced child without talent. Gregory should have known better, but his egomania got all tangled up in his ridiculous illusion that he was going to revitalize the theater, take the next historical step for American drama. God, what the papers will say...” She laughed weakly,



with pain. “And I was no better, hitting poor Gregory.”

“Barbara...”

“Do you know what Ann yelled at them, at the audience? She stood on that stage, flung her arms wide like some martyr...”

“What did she say? What, love?”

“She said, ‘But I’m the *real thing!*’”

We were quiet for a moment. From outside the window rose blurred traffic noises: therealthingtherealthingtherealthing.

“You’re right,” I said. “The whole thing was an egomaniacal ride for Whitten, and the press turned it into a carnival. Cosgriff should have known better. The real thing — that’s not what you want in the theater. Illusion, magic, imagination. What should have happened, not what did. Reality doesn’t make good theater.”

“No, you still don’t understand!” Barbara cried. “You’ve missed it all! How can you think that it’s that easy, that Gregory’s mistake was to use Ann’s reality instead of Shaw’s illusion!”

“I don’t understand what you —”

“It’s not that clear!” she cried. “Don’t you think I wish it were? My God!”

I didn’t know what she meant, or why under the cracked makeup her eyes glittered with feverish, exhausted panic. Even as I reached out my arm, completely confused, she was backing away from me.

“Illusion and reality,” she said. “My God. Watch.”

She crossed the room to the door, closed it, and pressed the dimmer on the lights. The room faded to a cool gloom. She stood with her back to me, her head bowed. Then she turned slowly and raised her eyes to a point in the air a head above her.

“In the name of Saint Catherine —” she began, choked, and started to weep. The weeping was terrifying, shot through with that threat of open hysteria that keeps a listener on the edge of panic in case the weeper should lose control entirely, and also keeps him fascinated for the same

reason. "I will do whatever you want, I swear it in the name of God, if you will only tell me what it is." On the last word her voice fell, making the plea into a prayer to her captors, and so the first blasphemy. I caught my breath. Barbara looked young, terrified, pale. How could she look pale when a second ago I had been so conscious of all that garish makeup? There was no chance to wonder. She plunged on, through that scene and the next and all of Joan's scenes. She went from hysterical fear to inept manipulation to the bruised, stupid hatred of a victim to, finally, a kind of negative dignity that comes not from accomplishment but from the clear-eyed vision of the lack of it, and so she died, Cosgriff's vision of the best that institutionalized man could hope for. But she was not Cosgriff's vision; she was a seventeen-year-old girl. Her figure was slight to the point of emaciation. Her face was young — I saw its youth, felt its fragile boniness in the marrow of my own bones. She moved with the gaudy, unpredictable quickness of the mad, now here, now darting a room's length away, now still with a terrible catatonic stillness that excluded her trapped eyes. Her desperation made me catch my breath, try to look away and fail, feeling that cold grab at my innards: It happened. And it could happen again. It could happen to me.

Her terror gave off a smell, sickly and sour. I wanted to escape the room before that smell could spread to me. I was helpless. Neither she nor I could escape. I did not want to help her, this mad skinny victim. I wanted to destroy her so that what was being done to her would not exist any longer in the world and I would be safe from it. But I could not destroy her. I could only watch, loathing Joan for forcing me to know, until she rose to her brief, sane dignity. In the sight of that dignity, shame that I had ever wanted to smash her washed over me. I was guilty, as guilty as all those others who had wanted to smash her. Her sanity bound me with them, as earlier her terror had unwillingly drawn me to her. I was victim and victimizer, and when Joan stood at the stake and condemned me in a grotesque parody of Christ's forgiving on the cross, I wanted only for her to burn and so be quiet, so release me. I would have lighted the fire. I would have shouted with the crowd, "Burn! Burn!" already despairing that no fire could sear away what she, I, all of us had done. From the flames, Joan looked at me, stretched out her hand, came toward me. I thrust out my arm to ward her off. Almost I cried out. My heart pounded in my chest.

"Austin," she said.

In an instant Joan was gone.

Barbara came toward me. It was Barbara. She had grown three inches, put on twenty pounds and thirty years. Her face was tired and lined under gaudy, peeling makeup. Confusedly I blinked at her. I don't think she

even saw the confusion; her eyes had lost their strained panic, and she was smiling, a smile that was a peaceful answer to some question of her own.

“That was the reality,” she said, and stooped to lay her head on my chest. Through the fall of her hair I barely heard her when she said that she would marry me whenever I wanted.

\* \* \* \*

Barbara and I have been married for nearly a year. I still don't know precisely why she decided to marry me, and she can't tell me; she doesn't know herself. But I speculate that the night *A Maid of Domrémy* failed, something broke in her, some illusion that she could control, if not the world, then at least herself. When she struck Whitten with the candlestick, she turned herself into both victim and victimizer as easily as Lawrence Cosgriff had rewritten Shaw's *Joan*. Barbara has never played the part again. (Gregory Whitten, no less flamboyantly insensitive for his bashing with a candlestick, actually asked her.) She has adamantly refused both Joans, Shaw's heroine and Cosgriff's victim. I was the last person to witness her performance.

Was her performance that night in my hospital room really as good as I remember? I was drugged; emotion had been running high; I loved her. Any or all of that could have colored my reactions. But I don't think so. I think that night Barbara Bishop *was* Joan, in some effort of will and need that went beyond both the illusions of a good actress and the reality of what ESIR could give to her, or to Ann Friedland, or to anyone. ESIR only unlocks the individual genetic memories in the brain's R-Complex. But what other identities, shared across time and space, might still be closed in there beyond our present reach?

All of this is speculation.

Next week I will be hospitalized for my own ESIR. Knowing what I have been before may yield only more, speculation, more illusions, more multiple realities. It may yield nothing. But I want to know, on the chance that the yield will be understandable, will be valuable in untangling the endless skein of waking visions.

Even if the chance is one in a million.

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# Our Lady of the Sauropods

*By Robert Silverberg*

**21 August. 0750 hours.** Ten minutes since the module melt down. I can't see the wreckage from here, but I can smell it, bitter and sour against the moist tropical air. I've found a cleft in the rocks, a kind of shallow cavern, where I'll be safe from the dinosaurs for a while. It's shielded by thick clumps of cycads, and in any case it's too small for the big predators to enter. But sooner or later I'm going to need food, and then what? I have no weapons. How long can one woman last, stranded and more or less helpless, aboard a habitat unit not quite five hundred meters in diameter that she's sharing with a bunch of active, hungry dinosaurs?

I keep telling myself that none of this is really happening. Only I can't quite convince myself of that.

My escape still has me shaky. I can't get out of my mind the funny little bubbling sound the tiny powerpak made as it began to overheat. In something like fourteen seconds my lovely mobile module became a charred heap of fused-together junk, taking with it my communicator unit, my food supply, my laser gun and just about everything else. And but for the warning that funny little sound gave me, I'd be so much charred junk now, too. Better off that way, most likely.

When I close my eyes, I imagine I can see Habitat Vronsky floating serenely in orbit a mere 120 kilometers away. What a beautiful sight! The walls gleaming like platinum, the great mirror collecting sunlight and flashing it into the windows, the agricultural satellites wheeling around it like a dozen tiny moons. I could almost reach out and touch it. Tap on the shielding and murmur, "Help me, come for me, rescue me." But I might just as well be out beyond Neptune as sitting here in the adjoining Lagrange slot. No way I can call for help. The moment I move outside this cleft in the rock I'm at the mercy of my saurians and their mercy is not likely to be tender.

Now it's beginning to rain—artificial, like practically everything else on Dino Island. But it gets you just as wet as the natural kind. And clammy. Pfaugh.

Jesus, what am I going to do?

**0815 hours.** The rain is over for now. It'll come again in six hours. Astonishing how muggy, dank, thick, the air is. Simply breathing is hard work, and I feel as though mildew is forming on my lungs. I miss Vronsky's clear, crisp, everlasting springtime air. On previous trips to Dino Island I never cared about the climate. But, of course, I was snugly englobed in my mobile unit, a world within a world, self-contained, self-sufficient, isolated from all contact with this place and its creatures. Merely a roving eye, traveling as I pleased, invisible, invulnerable.

Can they sniff me in here?

We don't think their sense of smell is very acute. Sharper than a crocodile's, not as good as a cat's. And the stink of the burned wreckage dominates the place at the moment. But I must reek with fear-signals. I feel calm now, but it was different as I went desperately scrambling out of the module during the meltdown. Scattering pheromones all over the place, I bet.

Commotion in the cycads. *Something's coming in here!*

Long neck, small birdlike feet, delicate grasping hands. Not to worry. Struthiomimus, is all—dainty dino, fragile, birdlike critter barely two meters high. Liquid golden eyes staring solemnly at me. It swivels its head from side to side, ostrichlike, click-click, as if trying to make up its mind about coming closer to me. *Scat!* Go peck a stegosaur. Let me alone.

The struthiomimus withdraws, making little clucking sounds.

Closest I've ever been to a live dinosaur. Glad it was one of the little ones.

**0900 hours.** Getting hungry. What am I going to eat?

They say roasted cycad cones aren't too bad. How about raw ones? So many plants are edible when cooked and poisonous otherwise. I never studied such things in detail. Living in our antiseptic little L5 habitats, we're not required to be outdoors-wise, after all. Anyway, there's a fleshy-looking cone on the cycad just in front of the cleft, and it's got an edible look. Might as well try it raw, because there's no other way. Rubbing sticks together will

get me nowhere.

Getting the cone off takes some work. Wiggle, twist, snap, tear—*there*. Not as fleshy as it looks. Chewy, in fact. Like munching on rubber. Decent flavor, though. And maybe some useful carbohydrate.

The shuttle isn't due to pick me up for thirty days. Nobody's apt to come looking for me, or even think about me, before then. I'm on my own. Nice irony there: I was desperate to get out of Vronsky and escape from all the bickering and maneuvering, the endless meetings and memoranda, the feinting and counterfeinting, all the ugly political crap that scientists indulge in when they turn into administrators. Thirty days of blessed isolation on Dino Island! An end to that constant dull throbbing in my head from the daily infighting with Director Sarber. Pure research again! And then the meltdown, and here I am cowering in the bushes wondering which comes first, starving or getting gobbled.

**0930 hours.** Funny thought just now. Could it have been sabotage?

Consider. Sarber and I, feuding for weeks over the issue of opening Dino Island to tourists. Crucial staff vote coming up next month. Sarber says we can raise millions a year for expanded studies with a program of guided tours and perhaps some rental of the island to film companies. I say that's risky both for the dinos and the tourists, destructive of scientific values, a distraction, a sellout. Emotionally the staff's with me, but Sarber waves figures around, showy fancy income-projections, and generally shouts and blusters. Tempers running high, Sarber in lethal fury at being opposed, barely able to hide his loathing for me. Circulating rumors—designed to get back to me—that if I persist in blocking him, he'll abort my career. Which is malarkey, of course. He may outrank me, but he has no real authority over me. And then his politeness yesterday. (*Yesterday?* An aeon ago.) Smiling smarmily, telling me he hopes I'll rethink my position during my observation tour on the island. Wishing me well. Had he gimmicked my powerpak? I guess it isn't hard if you know a little engineering, and Sarber does. Some kind of timer set to withdraw the insulator rods? Wouldn't be any harm to Dino Island itself, just a quick, compact, localized disaster that implodes and melts the unit and its passenger, so sorry, terrible scientific tragedy, what a great loss. And even if by some fluke I got out of the unit in time, my chances of surviving here as a pedestrian for thirty days would be pretty skimpy, right? Right.

It makes me boil to think that someone's willing to murder you over a

mere policy disagreement. It's barbaric. Worse than that: it's tacky.

**1130 hours.** I can't stay crouched in this cleft forever. I'm going to explore the island and see if I can find a better hideout. This one simply isn't adequate for anything more than short-term huddling. Besides, I'm not as spooked as I was right after the meltdown. I realize now that I'm not going to find a tyrannosaur hiding behind every tree. And tyrannosaurs aren't going to be much interested in scrawny stuff like me.

Anyway I'm a quick-witted higher primate. If my humble mammalian ancestors seventy million years ago were able to elude dinosaurs well enough to survive and inherit the earth, I should be able to keep from getting eaten for the next thirty days. And with or without my cozy little mobile module, I want to get out into this place, whatever the risks. Nobody's ever had a chance to interact this closely with the dinos before.

Good thing I kept this pocket recorder when I jumped from the module. Whether I'm a dino's dinner or not, I ought to be able to set down some useful observations.

Here I go.

**1830 hours.** Twilight is descending now. I am camped near the equator in a lean-to flung together out of tree-fern fronds—a flimsy shelter, but the huge fronds conceal me, and with luck I'll make it through to morning. That cycad cone doesn't seem to have poisoned me yet, and I ate another one just now, along with some tender new fiddleheads uncoiling from the heart of a tree-fern. Spartan fare, but it gives me the illusion of being fed.

In the evening mists I observe a brachiosaur, half-grown but already colossal, munching in the treetops. A gloomy-looking triceratops stands nearby and several of the ostrichlike struthiomimids scamper busily in the underbrush, hunting I know not what. No sign of tyrannosaurs all day. There aren't many of them here, anyway, and I hope they're all sleeping off huge feasts somewhere in the other hemisphere.

What a fantastic place this is!

I don't feel tired. I don't even feel frightened—just a little wary.

I feel exhilarated, as a matter of fact.

Here I sit peering out between fern fronds at a scene out of the dawn of time. All that's missing is a pterosaur or two flapping overhead, but we haven't brought those back yet. The mournful snufflings of the huge brachiosaur carry clearly even in the heavy air. The struthiomimids are making sweet honking sounds. Night is falling swiftly and the great shapes out there take on dreamlike primordial wonder.

What a brilliant idea it was to put all the Olsen-process dinosaur-reconstructs aboard a little L5 habitat of their very own and turn them loose to recreate the Mesozoic! After that unfortunate San Diego event with the tyrannosaur, it became politically unfeasible to keep them anywhere on earth, I know, but even so this is a better scheme. In just a little more than seven years Dino Island has taken on an altogether convincing illusion of reality. Things grow so fast in this lush, steamy, high-CO<sub>2</sub> tropical atmosphere! Of course, we haven't been able to duplicate the real Mesozoic flora, but we've done all right using botanical survivors, cycads and tree ferns and horsetails and palms and ginkgos and auracarias, and thick carpets of mosses and selaginellas and liverworts covering the ground. Everything has blended and merged and run amok: it's hard now to recall the bare and unnatural look of the island when we first laid it out. Now it's a seamless tapestry in green and brown, a dense jungle broken only by streams, lakes and meadows, encapsulated in spherical metal walls some two kilometers in circumference.

And the animals, the wonderful fantastic grotesque animals—

We don't pretend that the real Mesozoic ever held any such mix of fauna as I've seen today, stegosaurs and corythosaurs side by side, a triceratops sourly glaring at a brachiosaur, struthiomimus contemporary with iguanodon, a wild unscientific jumble of Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous, a hundred million years of the dinosaur reign scrambled together. We take what we can get. Olsen-process reconstructs require sufficient fossil DNA to permit the computer synthesis, and we've been able to find that in only some twenty species so far. The wonder is that we've accomplished even that much: to replicate the complete DNA molecule from battered and sketchy genetic information millions of years old, to carry out the intricate implants in reptilian host ova, to see the embryos through to self-sustaining levels. The only word that applies is *miraculous*. If our dinos come from eras millions of years apart, so be it: we do our best. If we have no pterosaur and no allosaur and no archaeopteryx, so be it: we may have them yet. What we already have is plenty to work with. Some day there may



be separate Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous satellite habitats, but none of us will live to see that, I suspect.

Total darkness now. Mysterious screechings and hissings out there. This afternoon, as I moved cautiously, but in delight, from the wreckage site up near the rotation axis to my present equatorial camp, sometimes coming within fifty or a hundred meters of living dinos, I felt a kind of ecstasy. Now my fears are returning, and my anger at this stupid marooning. I imagine clutching claws reaching for me, terrible jaws yawning above me.

I don't think I'll get much sleep tonight.

**22 August. 0600 hours.** Rosy-fingered dawn comes to Dino Island, and I'm still alive. Not a great night's sleep, but I must have had some, because I can remember fragments of dreams. About dinosaurs, naturally. Sitting in little groups, some playing pinochle and some knitting sweaters. And choral singing, a dinosaur rendition of *The Messiah* or maybe Beethoven's Ninth.

I feel alert, inquisitive, and hungry. Especially hungry. I know we've stocked this place with frogs and turtles and other small-size anachronisms to provide a balanced diet for the big critters. Today I'll have to snare some for myself, grisly though I find the prospect of eating raw frog's legs.

I don't bother getting dressed. With rain showers programmed to fall four times a day, it's better to go naked anyway. Mother Eve of the Mesozoic, that's me! And without my soggy tunic I find that I don't mind the greenhouse atmosphere half as much.

Out to see what I can find.

The dinosaurs are up and about already, the big herbivores munching away, the carnivores doing their stalking. All of them have such huge appetites that they can't wait for the sun to come up. In the bad old days when the dinos were thought to be reptiles, of course, we'd have expected them to sit there like lumps until daylight got their body temperatures up to functional levels. But one of the great joys of the reconstruct project was the vindication of the notion that dinosaurs were warm-blooded animals, active and quick and pretty damned intelligent. No sluggardly crocodilians these! Would that they were, if only for my survival's sake.

**1130 hours.** A busy morning. My first encounter with a major predator.

There are nine tyrannosaurs on the island, including three born in the past eighteen months. (That gives us an optimum predator-to-prey ratio. If the tyrannosaurs keep reproducing and don't start eating each other, we'll have to begin thinning them out. One of the problems with a closed ecology—natural checks and balances don't fully apply.) Sooner or later I was bound to encounter one, but I had hoped it would be later.

I was hunting frogs at the edge of Cope Lake. A ticklish business—calls for agility, cunning, quick reflexes. I remember the technique from my girlhood—the cupped hand, the lightning pounce—but somehow it's become a lot harder in the last twenty years. Superior frogs these days, I suppose. There I was, kneeling in the mud, swooping, missing, swooping, missing; some vast sauropod snoozing in the lake, probably our diplodocus; a corythosaur browsing in a stand of gingko trees, quite delicately nipping off the foul-smelling yellow fruits. Swoop. Miss. Swoop. Miss. Such intense concentration on my task that old T. rex could have tiptoed right up behind me, and I'd never have noticed. But then I felt a subtle something, a change in the air, maybe, a barely perceptible shift in dynamics. I glanced up and saw the corythosaur rearing on its hind legs, looking around uneasily, pulling deep sniffs into that fantastically elaborate bony crest that houses its early-warning system. *Carnivore alert!* The corythosaur obviously smelled something wicked this way coming, for it swung around between two big gingkos and started to go galumphing away. Too late. The treetops parted, giant boughs toppled, and out of the forest came our original tyrannosaur, the pigeon-toed one we call Belshazzar, moving in its heavy, clumsy waddle, ponderous legs working hard, tail absurdly swinging from side to side. I slithered into the lake and scrunched down as deep as I could go in the warm oozing mud. The corythosaur had no place to slither. Unarmed, unarmored, it could only make great bleating sounds, terror mingled with defiance, as the killer bore down on it.

I had to watch. I had never seen a kill.

In a graceless but wondrously effective way, the tyrannosaur dug its hind claws into the ground, pivoted astonishingly, and, using its massive tail as a counterweight, moved in a ninety-degree arc to knock the corythosaur down with a stupendous sidewise swat of its huge head. I hadn't been expecting that. The corythosaur dropped and lay on its side, snorting in pain and feebly waving its limbs. Now came the coup de grace with hind legs, and then the rending and tearing, the jaws and the tiny arms at last coming

into play. Burrowing chin-deep in the mud, I watched in awe and weird fascination. There are those among us who argue that the carnivores ought to be segregated into their own island, that it is folly to allow reconstructs created with such effort to be casually butchered this way. Perhaps in the beginning that made sense, but not now, not when natural increase is rapidly filling the island with young dinos. If we are to learn anything about these animals, it will only be by reproducing as closely as possible their original living conditions. Besides, would it not be a cruel mockery to feed our tyrannosaurs on hamburger and herring?

The killer fed for more than an hour. At the end came a scary moment: Belshazzar, blood-smeared and bloated, hauled himself ponderously down to the edge of the lake for a drink. He stood no more than ten meters from me. I did my most convincing imitation of a rotting log; but the tyrannosaur, although it did seem to study me with a beady eye, had no further appetite. For a long while after he departed, I stayed buried in the mud, fearing he might come back for dessert. And eventually there was another crashing and bashing in the forest—not Belshazzar this time, though, but a younger one with a gimpy arm. It uttered a sort of whinnying sound and went to work on the corythosaur carcass. No surprise: we already knew that tyrannosaurs had no prejudices against carrion.

Nor, I found, did I.

When the coast was clear, I crept out and saw that the two tyrannosaurs had left hundreds of kilos of meat. Starvation knoweth no pride and also few qualms. Using a clamshell for my blade, I started chopping away.

Corythosaur meat has a curiously sweet flavor—nutmeg and cloves, dash of cinnamon. The first chunk would not go down. You are a pioneer, I told myself, retching. You are the first human ever to eat dinosaur meat. *Yes, but why does it have to be raw?* No choice about that. Be dispassionate, love. Conquer your gag reflex or die trying. I pretended I was eating oysters. This time the meat went down. It didn't stay down. The alternative, I told myself grimly, is a diet of fern fronds and frogs, and you haven't been much good at catching the frogs. I tried again. Success!

I'd have to call corythosaur meat an acquired taste. But the wilderness is no place for picky eaters.

**23 August. 1300 hours.** At midday I found myself in the southern

hemisphere, along the fringes of Marsh Marsh about a hundred meters below the equator. Observing herd behavior in sauropods—five brachiosaurs, two adult and three young, moving in formation, the small ones in the center. By “small” I mean only some ten meters from nose to tail-tip. Sauropod appetites being what they are, we’ll have to thin that herd soon, too, especially if we want to introduce a female diplodocus into the colony. *Two* species of sauropods breeding and eating like that could devastate the island in three years. Nobody ever expected dinosaurs to reproduce like rabbits—another dividend of their being warm-blooded, I suppose. We might have guessed it, though, from the vast quantity of fossils. If that many bones survived the catastrophes of a hundred-odd million years, how enormous the living Mesozoic population must have been! An awesome race in more ways than mere physical mass.

I had a chance to do a little herd-thinning myself just now. My serious stirring in the spongy soil right at my feet, and I looked down to see triceratops eggs hatching! Seven brave little critters, already horny and beaky, scrabbling out of a nest, staring around defiantly. No bigger than kittens, but active and sturdy from the moment of birth.

The corythosaur meat has probably spoiled by now. A more pragmatic soul very likely would have augmented her diet with one or two little ceratopsians. I couldn’t do it.

They scuttled off in seven different directions. I thought briefly of catching one and making a pet out of it. Silly idea.

**25 August. 0700 hours.** Start of the fifth day. I’ve done three complete circumambulations of the island. Slinking around on foot is fifty times as risky as cruising around in a module, and fifty thousand times as rewarding. I make camp in a different place every night. I don’t mind the humidity any longer. And despite my skimpy diet, I feel pretty healthy. Raw dinosaur, I know now, is a lot tastier than raw frog. I’ve become an expert scavenger—the sound of a tyrannosaur in the forest now stimulates my salivary glands instead of my adrenals. Going naked is fun, too. And I appreciate my body much more, since the bulges that civilization puts there have begun to melt away.

Nevertheless, I keep trying to figure out some way of signaling Habitat Vronsky for help. Changing the position of the reflecting mirrors, maybe, so I can beam an SOS? Sounds nice, but I don’t even know where the island’s controls are located, let alone how to run them. Let’s hope my luck holds

out another three and a half weeks

**27 August. 1700 hours.** The dinosaurs know that I'm here and that I'm some extraordinary kind of animal. Does that sound weird? How can great dumb beasts *know* anything? They have such tiny brains. And my own brain must be softening on this protein-and-cellulose diet. Even so, I'm starting to have peculiar feelings about these animals. I see them *watching* me. An odd knowing look in their eyes, not stupid at all. They stare and I imagine them nodding, smiling, exchanging glances with each other, discussing me. I'm supposed to be observing them, but I think they're observing me, too, somehow.

This is crazy. I'm tempted to erase the entry. But I'll leave it as a record of my changing psychological state if nothing else.

**28 August. 1200 hours.** More fantasies about the dinosaurs. I've decided that the big brachiosaur—Bertha—plays a key role here. She doesn't move around much, but there are always lesser dinosaurs in orbit around her. Much eye contact. *Eye contact between dinosaurs?* Let it stand. That's my perception of what they're doing. I get a definite sense that there's communication going on here, modulating over some wave that I'm not capable of detecting. And Bertha seems to be a central nexus, a grand totem of some sort, a— a switchboard? What am I talking about? What's happening to me?

**30 August. 0945 hours.** What a damned fool I am! Serves me right for being a filthy voyeur. Climbed a tree to watch iguanodons mating at the foot of Bakker Falls. At climactic moment the branch broke. I dropped twenty meters. Grabbed a lower limb or I'd be dead now. As it is, pretty badly smashed around. I don't think anything's broken, but my left leg won't support me and my back's in bad shape. Internal injuries too? Not sure. I've crawled into a little rock-shelter near the falls. Exhausted and maybe feverish. Shock, most likely. I suppose I'll starve now. It would have been an honor to be eaten by a tyrannosaur, but to die from falling out of a tree is just plain humiliating.

The mating of iguanodons is a spectacular sight, by the way. But I hurt

too much to describe it now.

**31 August. 1700 hours.** Stiff, sore, hungry, hideously thirsty. Leg still useless and when I try to crawl even a few meters, I feel as if I'm going to crack in half at the waist. High fever.

How long does it take to starve to death?

**1 Sep. 0700 hours.** Three broken eggs lying near me when I awoke. Embryos still alive—probably stegosaur—but not for long. First food in forty-eight hours. Did the eggs fall out of a nest somewhere overhead? Do stegosaurs make their nests in trees, dummy?

Fever diminishing. Body aches all over. Crawled to the stream and managed to scoop up a little water.

**1330 hours.** Dozed off. Awakened to find haunch of fresh meat within crawling distance. Struthiomimus drumstick, I think. Nasty sour taste, but it's edible. Nibbled a little, slept again, ate some more. Pair of stegosaurs grazing not far away, tiny eyes fastened on me. Smaller dinosaurs holding a kind of conference by some big cycads. And Bertha Brachiosaur is munching away in Ostrom Meadow, benignly supervising the whole scene.

This is absolutely crazy.

I think the dinosaurs are taking care of me.

**2 Sep. 0900 hours.** No doubt of it at all. They bring eggs, meat, even cycad cones and tree-fern fronds. At first they delivered things only when I slept, but now they come hopping right up to me and dump things at my feet. The struthiomimids are the bearers—they're the smallest, most agile, quickest hands. They bring their offerings, stare me right in the eye, pause as if waiting for a tip. Other dinosaurs watching from the distance. This is a coordinated effort. I am the center of all activity on the island, it seems. I

imagine that even the tyrannosaurs are saving choice cuts for me. Hallucination? Fantasy? Delirium of fever? I feel lucid. The fever is abating. I'm still too stiff and weak to move very far, but I think I'm recovering from the effects of my fall. With a little help from my friends.

**1000 hours.** Played back the last entry. Thinking it over. I don't *think* I've gone insane. If I'm insane enough to be worried about my sanity, how crazy can I be? Or am I just fooling myself? There's a terrible conflict between what I think I perceive going on here and what I know I ought to be perceiving.

**1500 hours.** A long, strange dream this; afternoon. I saw all the dinosaurs standing in the meadow and they were connected to one another by gleaming threads, like the telephone lines of olden times, and all the threads centered on Bertha. As if she's the switchboard, yes. And telepathic messages were traveling. An extrasensory hookup, powerful pulses moving along the lines. I dreamed that a small dinosaur came to me and offered me a line and, in pantomime, showed me how to hook it up, and a great flood of delight went through me as I made the connection. And when I plugged it in, I could feel the deep and heavy thoughts of the dinosaurs, the slow rapturous philosophical interchanges.

When I woke, the dream seemed bizarrely vivid, strangely real, the dream-ideas lingering as they sometimes do. I saw the animals about me in a new way. As if this is not just a zoological research station, but a community, a settlement, the sole outpost of an alien civilization—an alien civilization native to earth.

Come off it. These animals have minute brains. They spend their days chomping on greenery, except for the ones that chomp on other dinosaurs. Compared with dinosaurs, cows and sheep are downright geniuses.

I can hobble a little now.

**3 Sep. 0600 hours.** The same dream again last night, the universal telepathic linkage. Sense of warmth and love flowing from dinosaurs to me.

Fresh tyrannosaur eggs for breakfast.

**5 Sep. 1100 hours.** I'm making a fast recovery. Up and about, still creaky but not much pain left. They still feed me. Though the struthiomimids remain the bearers of food, the bigger dinosaurs now come close, too. A stegosaurus nuzzled up to me like some Goliath-sized pony, and I petted its rough scaly flank. The diplodocus stretched out flat and seemed to beg me to stroke its immense neck.

If this is madness, so be it. There's community here, loving and temperate. Even the predatory carnivores are part of it: eaters and eaten are aspects of the whole, yin and yang. Riding around in our sealed modules, we could never have suspected any of this.

They are gradually drawing me into their communion. I feel the pulses that pass between them. My entire soul throbs with that strange new sensation. My skin tingles.

They bring me food of their own bodies, their flesh and their unborn young, and they watch over me and silently urge me back to health. Why? For sweet charity's sake? I don't think so. I think they want something from me. I think they need something from me.

What could they need from me?

**6 Sep. 0600 hours.** All this night I have moved slowly through the forest in what I can only term an ecstatic state. Vast shapes, humped monstrous forms barely visible by dim glimmer, came and went about me. Hour after hour I walked unharmed, feeling the communion intensify. Until at last, exhausted, I have come to rest here on this mossy carpet, and in the first light of dawn I see the giant form of the great brachiosaur standing like a mountain on the far side of Owen River.

I am drawn to her. I could worship her. Through her vast body surge powerful currents. She is the amplifier. By her are we all connected. The holy mother of us all. From the enormous mass of her body emanate potent healing impulses.

I'll rest a little while. Then I'll cross the river to her.



**0900 hours.** We stand face to face. Her head is fifteen meters above mine. Her small eyes are unreadable. I trust her and I love her.

Lesser brachiosaurs have gathered behind her on the riverbank. Farther away are dinosaurs of half a dozen other species, immobile, silent.

I am humble in their presence. They are representatives of a dynamic, superior race, which but for a cruel cosmic accident would rule the earth to this day, and I am coming to revere them.

Consider: they endured for a hundred forty million years in ever-renewing vigor. They met all evolutionary challenges, except the one of sudden and catastrophic climatic change against which nothing could have protected them. They multiplied and proliferated and adapted, dominating land and sea and air, covering the globe. Our own trifling, contemptible ancestors were nothing next to them. Who knows what these dinosaurs might have achieved if that crashing asteroid had not blotted out their light? What a vast irony: millions of years of supremacy ended in a single generation by a chilling cloud of dust. But until then—the wonder, the grandeur—

Only beasts, you say? How can you be sure? We know just a shred of what the Mesozoic was really like, just a slice, literally the bare bones. The passage of a hundred million years can obliterate all traces of civilization. Suppose they had language, poetry, mythology, philosophy? Love, dreams, aspirations? No, you say, they were beasts, ponderous and stupid, that lived mindless bestial lives. And I reply that we puny hairy ones have no right to impose our own values on them. The only kind of civilization we can understand is the one we have built. We imagine that our own trivial accomplishments are the determining case, that computers and spaceships and broiled sausages are such miracles that they place us at evolution's pinnacle. But now I know otherwise. Humanity has done marvelous things, yes. But we would not have existed at all had this greatest of races been allowed to live to fulfill its destiny.

I feel the intense love radiating from the titan that looms above me. I feel the contact between our souls steadily strengthening and deepening.

The last barriers dissolve.

And I understand at last.

I am the chosen one. I am the vehicle. I am the bringer of rebirth, the beloved one, the necessary one. Our Lady of the Sauropods am I, the holy one, the prophetess, the priestess.

Is this madness? Then it is madness.

Why have we small hairy creatures existed at all? I know now. It is so that through our technology we could make possible the return of the great ones. They perished unfairly. Through us, they are resurrected aboard this tiny glove in space.

I tremble in the force of the need that pours from them.

*I will not fail you*, I tell the great sauropods before me, and the sauropods send my thoughts reverberating to all the others.

**20 September. 0600 hours.** The thirtieth day. The shuttle comes from Habitat Vronsky today to pick me up and deliver the next researcher.

I wait at the transit lock. Hundreds of dinosaurs wait with me, each close beside the nest, both the lions and the lambs, gathered quietly, their attention focused entirely on me.

Now the shuttle arrives, right on time, gliding in for a perfect docking. The airlocks open. A figure appears. Sarber himself! Coming to make sure I didn't survive the meltdown, or else to finish me off.

He stands blinking in the entry passage, gaping at the throngs of placid dinosaurs arrayed in a huge semicircle around the naked woman who stands beside the wreckage of the mobile module. For a moment he is unable to speak.

"Anne?" he says finally. "What in God's name—"

"You'll never understand," I tell him. I give the signal. Belshazzar rumbles forward. Sarber screams and whirls and sprints for the air-lock, but a stegosaur blocks the way.

"No!" Sarber cries, as the tyrannosaur's mighty head swoops down. It is all over in a moment.

Revenge! How sweet!

And this is only the beginning. Habitat Vronsky lies just 120 kilometers away. Elsewhere in the Lagrange belt are hundreds of other habitats ripe for conquest. The earth itself is within easy reach. I have no idea yet how it will be accomplished, but I know it will be done and done successfully, and I will be the instrument by which it is done.

I stretch forth my arms to the mighty creatures that surround me. I feel their strength, their power, their harmony. I am one with them, and they with me.

The Great Race has returned, and I am its priestess. Let the hairy ones tremble!

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# Going Under

By Jack Dann

She was beautiful, huge, as graceful as a racing liner. She was a floating Crystal Palace, as magnificent as anything J. P. Morgan could conceive. Designed by Alexander Carlisle and built by Harland and Wolff, she wore the golden band of the company along all nine hundred feet of her. She rose 175 feet like the side of a cliff, with nine steel decks, four sixty-two foot funnels, over two thousand windows and side-lights to illuminate the luxurious cabins and suites and public rooms. She weighed 46,000 tons, and her reciprocating engines and Parsons-type turbines could generate over fifty thousand horsepower and speed the ship over twenty knots. She had a gymnasium, a Turkish bath, squash and racquet courts, a swimming pool, libraries and lounges and sitting rooms. There were rooms and suites to accommodate 735 first-class passengers, 674 in second class, and over a thousand in steerage.

She was the R.M.S. Titanic, and Stephen met Esme on her Promenade Deck as she pulled out of her Southampton dock, bound for New York City on her maiden voyage.

Esme stood beside him, resting what looked to be a cedar box on the rail, and gazed out over the cheering crowds on the docks below. Stephen was struck immediately by how beautiful she was. Actually, she was plain-featured, and quite young.

She had a high forehead, a small, straight nose, wet brown eyes that peeked out from under plucked, arched eyebrows, and a mouth that was a little too full. Her blond hair, though clean, was carelessly brushed and tangled in the back. Yet, to Stephen, she seemed beautiful.

“Hello,” Stephen said, feeling slightly awkward. But colored ribbons and confetti snakes were coiling through the air, and anything seemed possible.

Esme glanced at him. “Hello, you,” she said.

“Pardon?” Stephen asked.

“I said, ‘Hello, you.’ That’s an expression that was in vogue when this boat first sailed, if you’d like to know. It means ‘Hello, I think you’re

interesting and would consider sleeping with you if I were so inclined.’ “

“You must call it a ship,” Stephen said.

She laughed and for an instant looked at him intently, as if in that second she could see everything about him—that he was taking this voyage because he was bored with his life, that nothing had ever really happened to him. He felt his face become hot. “Okay, ‘ship,’ does that make you feel better?” she asked. “Anyway, I want to pretend that I’m living in the past. I don’t ever want to return to the present, do you?”

“Well, I . . .”

“Yes, I suppose you do, want to return, that is.”

“What makes you think that?”

“Look how you’re dressed. You shouldn’t be wearing modern clothes on this ship. You’ll have to change later, you know.” She was perfectly dressed in a powder-blue walking suit with matching jacket, a pleated, velvet-trimmed front blouse, and an ostrich feather hat. She looked as if she had stepped out of another century, and just now Stephen could believe she had.

“What’s your name?” Stephen asked.

“Esme,” she answered. Then she turned the box that she was resting on the rail and opened the side facing the dock. “You see,” she said to the box, “we really are here.”

“What did you say?” Stephen asked.

“I was just talking to Poppa,” she said, closing and latching the box.

“Who?”

“I’ll show you later, if you like,” she promised. Then bells began to ring and the ship’s whistles cut the air. There was a cheer from the dock and on board, and the ship moved slowly out to sea. To Stephen it seemed that the land, not the ship, was moving. The whole of England was just floating peacefully away, while the string band on the ship’s bridge played

Oscar Strauss's The Chocolate Soldier.

They watched until the land had dwindled to a thin line on the horizon, then Esme reached naturally for Stephen's hand, squeezed it for a moment, then hurried away. Before Stephen could speak, she had disappeared into the crowd, and he stood looking after her long after she had gone.

Stephen found her again in the Cafe Parisien, sitting in a large wicker chair beside an ornately trellised wall.

"Well, hello, you," Esme said, smiling. She was the very model of a smart, stylish young lady.

"Does that mean you're still interested?" Stephen asked, standing before her. Her smile was infectious, and Stephen felt himself losing his poise, as he couldn't stop grinning.

"But mais oui," she said. Then she relaxed in her chair, slumped down as if she could instantly revert to being a child-in fact, the dew was still on her-and she looked around the room as though Stephen had suddenly disappeared.

"I beg your pardon?" he asked.

"That's French, which no one uses anymore, but it was the language of the world when this ship first sailed."

"I believe it was English," Stephen said smoothly.

"Well," she said, looking up at him, "it means that I might be interested if you'd kindly sit down instead of looking down at me from the heights." Stephen sat down beside her and she said, "It took you long enough to find me."

"Well," Stephen said, "I had to dress. Remember? You didn't find my previous attire ac--"

"I agree and I apologize," she said quickly, as if suddenly afraid of hurting his feelings. She folded her hands behind the box that she had centered perfectly on the damask-covered table. Her leg brushed against

his; indeed, he did look fine, dressed in gray striped trousers, spats, black morning coat, blue vest, and a silk cravat tied under a butterfly collar. He fiddled with his hat, then placed it on the seat of the empty chair beside him. No doubt he would forget to take it.

“Now,” she said, “don’t you feel better?”

Stephen was completely taken with her; this had never happened to him before. He found it inexplicable. A tall and very English waiter disturbed him by asking if he wished to order cocktails, but Esme asked for a Narcodrine instead.

“I’m sorry, ma’am, but Narcodrines or inhalors are not publicly sold on the ship,” the waiter said dryly.

“Well, that’s what I want.”

“One would have to ask the steward for the more modern refreshments.”

“You did say you wanted to live in the past,” Stephen said to Esme, and ordered a Campari for her and a Drambuie for himself.

“Right now I would prefer a robot to take my order,” Esme said.

“I’m sorry, but we have no robots on the ship either,” the waiter said before he turned away.

“Are you going to show me what’s inside the box?” Stephen asked.

“I don’t like that man,” Esme said.

“Esme, the box . . .”

“It might cause a stir if I opened it here.”

“I would think you’d like that,” Stephen said.

“You see, you know me intimately already.” Then she smiled and winked at someone four tables away. “Isn’t he cute?”

“Who?”

“The little boy with the black hair parted in the middle.” She waved at him, but he ignored her and made an obscene gesture at a woman who looked to be his nanny. Then Esme opened the box, which drew the little boy’s attention. She pulled out a full-sized head of a man and placed it gently beside the box.

“Jesus,” Stephen said.

“Stephen, I’d like you to meet Poppa. Poppa, this is Stephen.”

“I’m pleased to meetcha, Stephen,” said the head in a full, resonant voice.

“Speak properly, Poppa,” Esme said. “Meet you.”

“Don’t correct your father.” The head rolled his eyes toward Stephen and then said to Esme, “Turn me a bit, so I can see your friend without eyestrain.” The head had white hair, which was a bit yellowed on the ends. It was neatly trimmed at the sides and combed up into a pompadour in the front. The face was strong, although already gone to seed. It was the face of a man in his late sixties, lined and suntanned.

“What shall I call, uh, him?” Stephen asked.

“You may speak to me directly, son,” said the head. “My given name is Elliot.”

“Pleased to meetcha,” Stephen said, recouping. He had heard of such things; but had never seen one before.

“These are going to be all the rage in the next few months,” Esme said. “They aren’t on the mass market yet, but you can imagine their potential for both adults and children. They can be programmed to talk and react very realistically.”

“So I see,” Stephen said.

The head smiled, accepting the compliment.

“He also learns and thinks quite well,” Esme continued.

“I should hope so,” said the head.



The room was buzzing with conversation. At the other end, a small dance band was playing a waltz. Only a few Europeans and Americans openly stared at the head; the

Africans and Asians, who were in the majority, pretended to ignore it. The little boy was staring unabashedly.

“Is your father alive?” Stephen asked.

“I am her father,” the head said, its face betraying its impatience. “At least give me some respect.”

“Be civil, or I’ll close you up,” Esme said, piqued. She looked at Stephen. “Yes, he died recently. That’s the reason I’m taking this trip, and that’s the reason for this . . . .” She nodded to the head. “He’s marvelous, though. He is my father in every way.” Then, mischievously, she said, “Well, I did make a few changes. Poppa was very demanding, you know.”

“You ungrateful-”

“Shut up. Poppa.”

And Poppa simply shut his eyes.

“That’s all I have to say,” Esme said, “and he turns himself off. In case you aren’t as perceptive as I think you are, I love Poppa very much.”

The little boy, unable to control his curiosity any longer, came over to the table, just as Esme was putting Poppa back in the box. In his rush to get to the table, he knocked over one of the ivy pots along the wall. “Why’d you put him away?” he asked. “I want to talk to him. Take him out, just for a minute.”

“No,” Esme said firmly, “he’s asleep just now. And what’s your name?”

“Michael, and please don’t be condescending.”

“I’m sorry, Michael.”

“Apology accepted. Now, please, can I see the head, just for a minute?”

“If you like, Michael, you can have a private audience with Poppa tomorrow,” Esme said. “How’s that?”

“But-”

“Shouldn’t you be getting back to your nanny now?” Stephen asked, standing up and nodding to Esme to do the same. They would have no privacy here. -

“Stuff it,” Michael said. “And she’s not my nanny, she’s my sister.” Then he pulled a face at Stephen; he was able to

contort his lips, drawing the right side toward the left and left toward the right, as if they were made of rubber. Michael followed Stephen and Esme out of the cafe and up the staircase to the Boat Deck.

The Boat Deck was not too crowded; it was brisk out, and the breeze had a chill to it. Looking forward, Stephen and Esme could see the ship’s four huge smokestacks to their left and a cluster of four lifeboats to their right. The ocean was a smooth, deep green expanse turning to blue toward the horizon. The sky was empty, except for a huge, nuclear-powered airship that floated high over the Titanic—the dirigible California, a French luxury liner capable of carrying two thousand passengers.

“Are you two married?” Michael asked, after pointing out the airship above. He trailed a few steps behind them.

“No, we are not,” Esme said impatiently. “Not yet, at least,” and Stephen felt exhilarated at the thought of her really wanting him. Actually, it made no sense, for he could have any young woman he wanted. Why Esme? Simply because just now she was perfect.

“You’re quite pretty,” Michael said to Esme.

“Well, thank you,” Esme replied, warming to him. “I like you too.”

“Watch it,” said the boy. “Are you going to stay on the ship and die when it sinks?”

“No!” Esme said, as if taken aback.

“What about your friend?”

“You mean Poppa?”

Vexed, the boy said, “No, him,” giving Stephen a nasty look.

“Well, I don’t know,” Esme said. Her face was flushed. “Have you opted for a lifeboat, Stephen?”

“Yes, of course I have.”

“Well, we’re going to die on the ship,” Michael said.

“Don’t be silly,” Esme said.

“Well, we are.”

“Who’s `we’?” Stephen asked.

“My sister and I. We’ve made a pact to go down with the ship.”

“I don’t believe it,” Esme said. She stopped beside one of the lifeboats, rested the box containing Poppa on the rail, and gazed downward at the ocean spume curling away from the side of the ship.

“He’s just baiting us,” Stephen said, growing tired of the game. “Anyway, he’s too young to make such a decision, and his sister, if she is his sister, could not decide such a thing for him, even if she were his guardian. It would be illegal.”

“We’re at sea,” Michael said in the nagging tone of voice children use. “I’ll discuss the ramifications of my demise with Poppa tomorrow. I’m sure he’s more conversant with such things than you are.”

“Shouldn’t you be getting back to your sister now?” Stephen asked. Michael responded by making the rubber-lips face at him, and then walked away, tugging at the back of his shorts, as if his undergarments had bunched up beneath. He only turned around to wave good-bye to Esme, who blew him a kiss.

“Intelligent little brat,” Stephen said.

But Esme looked as if she had just now forgotten all about Stephen and the little boy. She stared at the box as tears rolled from her eyes.

“Esme?”

“I love him and he’s dead,” she said, and then she seemed to brighten. She took Stephen’s hand and they went inside, down the stairs, through several noisy corridors-stateroom parties were in full swing-to her suite. Stephen was a bit nervous, but all things considered, everything was progressing at a proper pace.

Esme’s suite had a parlor and a private promenade deck with Elizabethan half-timbered walls. She led him right into the plush-carpeted, velour-papered bedroom, which contained a huge four-poster bed, an antique night table, and a

desk and a stuffed chair beside the door. The ornate, harp sculpture desk lamp was on, as was the lamp just inside the bed curtains. A porthole gave a view of sea and sky. But to Stephen it seemed that the bed overpowered the room.

Esme pushed the desk lamp aside, and then took Poppa, out of the box and placed him carefully in the center of the desk. “There.” Then she undressed quickly, looking shyly away from Stephen, who was taking his time. She slipped between the parted curtains of the bed and complained that she could hear the damn engines thrumming right through these itchy pillows-she didn’t like silk. After a moment she sat up in bed and asked him if he intended to get undressed or just stand there.

“I’m sorry,” Stephen said, “but it’s just-” He nodded toward the head.

“Poppa is turned off, you know.”

Afterward, reaching for an inhalor, taking a long pull, and then finally opening her eyes, she said, “I love you too.” Stephen only moved in his sleep.

“That’s very nice, dear,” Poppa said, opening his eyes and smiling

at her from the desk.

Little Michael knocked on Esme's door at seven-thirty the next morning.

“Good morning,” Michael said, looking Esme up and down. She had not bothered to put anything on before answering the door. “I came to see Poppa. I won't disturb you.”

“Jesus, Mitchell-”

“Michael.”

“Jesus, Michael, it's too early for-”

“Early bird gets the worm.”

“Oh, right,” Esme said. “And what the hell does that mean?”

“I calculated that my best chance of talking with Poppa was if I woke you up. You'll go back to bed and I can talk with him in peace. My chances would be greatly diminished if-”

“Awright, come in.”

“The steward in the hall just saw you naked.”

“Big deal. Look, why don't you come back later, I'm not ready for this, and I don't know why I let you in the room.”

“You see, it worked.” Michael looked around the room. “He's in the bedroom, right?”

Esme nodded and followed him into the bedroom. Michael was wearing the same wrinkled shirt and shorts that he had on yesterday; his hair was not combed, just tousled.

“Is he with you, too?” Michael asked.

“If you mean Stephen, yes.”

“I thought so,” said Michael. Then he sat down at the desk and

talked to Poppa.

“Can’t we have any privacy?” Stephen asked when Esme came back to bed. She shrugged and took a pull at her inhalor. Drugged, she looked even softer, more vulnerable. “I thought you told me that Poppa was turned off all night,” he continued angrily.

“But he was turned off,” Esme said. “I just now turned him back on for Michael.” Then she cuddled up to Stephen, as intimately as if they had been in love for days. That seemed to mollify him.

“Do you have a spare Narcodrine in there?” Michael shouted.

Stephen looked at Esme and laughed. “No,” Esme said, “you’re too young for such things.” She opened the curtain so they could watch Michael. He made the rubber-lips face at Stephen and then said, “I might as well try everything. I’ll be dead soon.”

“You know,” Esme said to Stephen, “I believe him.”

“I’m going to talk to his sister, or whoever she is, about this.”

“I heard what you said.” Michael turned away from Poppa, who seemed lost in thought. “I have very good hearing, I heard everything you said. Go ahead and talk to her,

talk to the captain, if you like. It won’t do you any good. I’m an international hero, if you’d like to know. That girl who wears the camera in her hair already did an interview for me for the poll.” Then he gave them his back and resumed his hushed conversation with Poppa.

“Who does he mean?” asked Esme.

“The woman reporter from Interfax,” Stephen said.

“Her job is to guess which passengers will opt to die, and why,” interrupted Michael, who turned around in his chair. “She interviews the most interesting passengers, then gives her predictions to her viewers-and they are considerable. They respond immediately to a poll taken several times a day. Keeps us in their minds, and everybody loves the smell of death.” Michael turned back to Poppa.

“Well, she hasn’t tried to interview me,”

“Do you really want her to?” Stephen asked.

“And why not? I’m for conspicuous consumption, and I want so much for this experience to be a success. Goodness, let the whole world watch us sink, if they want. They might just as well take bets.” Then, in a conspiratorial whisper, she said, “None of us really knows who’s opted to die. That’s part of the excitement. Isn’t it?”

“I suppose,” Stephen said.

“Oh, you’re such a prig,” Esme said. “One would think you’re a doer.”

“What?”

“A doer. All of us are either doers or voyeurs, isn’t that right? But the doers mean business,” and to illustrate she cocked her head, stuck out her tongue, and made gurgling noises as if she were drowning. “The voyeurs, however, are just along for the ride. Are you sure you’re not a doer?”

Michael, who had been eavesdropping again, said, referring to Stephen, “He’s not a doer, you can bet on that! He’s a voyeur of the worst sort. He takes it all seriously.”

“Mitchell, that’s not a very nice thing to say. Apologize or I’ll turn Poppa off and you can go right-”

“I told you before, it’s Michael. M-I-C-H-A-”

“Now that’s enough disrespect from both of you,” Poppa said. “Michael, stop goading Stephen. Esme says she loves him. Esme, be nice to Michael. He just made my day. And you don’t have to threaten to turn me off. I’m turning myself off. I’ve got some thinking to do.” Poppa closed his eyes and nothing Esme said would awaken him.

“Well, he’s never done that before,” Esme said to Michael, who was now standing before the bed and trying to place his feet as wide apart as he could. “What did you say to him?”

“Nothing much.”

“Come on, Michael, I let you into the room, remember?”

“I remember. Can I come into bed with you?”

“Hell, no,” Stephen said.

“He’s only a child,” Esme said as she moved over to make room for Michael, who climbed in between her and Stephen. “Be a sport. You’re the man I love.”

“Do you believe in transmigration of souls?” Michael asked Esme.

“What?”

“Well, I asked Poppa if he remembered any of his past lives, that is, if he had any. Poppa’s conscious, you know, even if he is a machine.”

“Did your sister put such ideas in your head?” Esme asked.

“Now you’re being condescending.” However, Michael made the rubber-lips face at Stephen, rather than at Esme. Stephen made a face back at him, and Michael howled in appreciation, then became quite serious and said, “On the contrary, I helped my sister to remember. It wasn’t easy, either, because she hasn’t lived as many lives as I have. She’s younger than me. I bet I could help you to remember,” he said to Esme.

“And what about me?” asked Stephen, playing along, enjoying the game a little now.

“You’re a nice man, but you’re too filled up with philosophy and rationalizations. You wouldn’t grasp any of it; it’s too simple. Anyway, you’re in love and distracted.”

“Well, I’m in love too,” Esme said petulantly.

“But you’re in love with everything. He’s only in love with one thing at a time.”

“Am I a thing to you?” Esme asked Stephen.



“Certainly not.”

But Michael would not be closed out. “I can teach you how to meditate,” he said to Esme. “It’s easy, once you know how. You just watch things in a different way.”

“Then would I see all my past lives?” Esme asked.

“Maybe.”

“Is that what you do?”

“I started when I was six,” Michael said. “I don’t do anything anymore, I just see differently. It’s something like dreaming.” Then he said to Esme, “You two are like a dream, and I’m outside it. Can I come in?” .

Delighted, Esme asked, “You mean, become a family?”

“Until the end,” Michael said. ‘~

“I think it’s wonderful, what do you think, Stephen?”

Stephen lay back against the wall, impatient, ignoring them. w,

“Come on, be a sport,” Michael said. “I’ll even teach you how to make the rubber-lips face.”

Stephen and Esme finally managed to lose Michael by lunchtime. Esme seemed happy enough to be rid of the boy, and they spent the rest of the day discovering the ship. They took a quick dip in the pool, but the water was too cold and it was chilly outside. If the dirigible was floating above, they did not see it because the sky was covered with heavy gray clouds. They changed clothes, strolled along the glass-enclosed lower Promenade Deck, looked for the occasional flying fish, and spent an interesting half hour being interviewed by the woman from Interfax. They took a snack in the opulent

first-class smoking room. Esme loved the mirrors and stainedglass windows. After they explored cabin and tourist class, Esme talked Stephen

into a quick game of squash, which he played rather well. By dinnertime they found their way into the garish, blue-tiled Turkish bath. It was empty and hot, and they made gentle but exhausting love on one of the Caesar couches. Then they changed clothes again, danced in the lounge, and took a late supper in the Cafe.

He spent the night with Esme in her suite. It was about four o'clock in the morning when he was awakened by a hushed conversation. Rather than make himself known, Stephen feigned sleep and listened.

“I can't make a decision,” Esme said as she carefully paced back and forth beside the desk upon which Poppa rested.

“You've told me over and over what you know you must do,” said Poppa. “And now you change your mind?”

“I think things have changed.”

“And how is that?”

“Stephen, he . . .”

“Ah,” Poppa said, “so now love is the escape. But do you know how long that will last?”

“I didn't expect to meet him, to feel better about everything.”

“It will pass.”

“But right now I don't want to die.”

“You've spent a fortune on this trip, and on me. And now you want to throw it away. Look, the way you feel about Stephen is all for the better, don't you understand? It will make your passing away all the sweeter because you're happy, in love, whatever you want to claim for it. But now you want to throw everything away that we've planned and take your life some other time, probably when you're desperate and unhappy and don't have me around to help you. You wish to die as mindlessly as you were born.”

“That's not so, Poppa. But it's up to me to choose.”

“You’ve made your choice, now stick to it, or you’ll drop dead like I did.”

Stephen opened his eyes; he could not stand this any longer. “Esme, what the hell are you talking about?”

She looked startled and then said to Poppa, “You were purposely talking loudly to wake him up, weren’t you?”

“You had me programmed to help you. I love you and I care about you. You can’t undo that!”

“I can do whatever I wish,” she said petulantly.

“Then let me help you, as I always have. If I were alive and had my body, I would tell you exactly what I’m telling you now.”

“What is going on?” Stephen asked.

“She’s fooling you,” Poppa said gently to Stephen. “She’s using you because she’s frightened.”

“I am not!”

“She’s grasping at anyone she can find.”

“I am not!” she shouted.

“What the hell is he telling you?” Stephen asked.

“The truth,” Poppa said.

Esme sat down beside Stephen on the bed and began to cry, then, as if sliding easily into a new role, she looked at him and said, “I did program Poppa to help me die.”

Disgusted, Stephen drew away from her.

“Poppa and I talked everything over very carefully, we even discussed what to do if something like this came about.”

“You mean if you fell in love and wanted to live.”

“Yes.”

“And she decided that under no circumstances would she undo what she had done,” Poppa said. “She has planned the best possible death for herself, a death to be experienced and savored. She’s given everything up and spent all her money to do it. She’s broke. She can’t go back now, isn’t that right, Esme?”

Esme looked at Stephen and nodded.

“But you’re not sure, I can see that,” Stephen insisted.

“I will help her, as I always have,” said Poppa.

“Jesus, shut that thing up,” Stephen shouted.

“He’s not a-”

“Please, at least give us a chance,” Stephen said to Esme. “You’re the first authentic experience I’ve ever had, I love you, I don’t want it to end . . . .”

Poppa pleaded his case eloquently, but Esme told him to go to sleep.

He obediently closed his eyes.

The great ship hit an iceberg on the fourth night of her voyage, exactly one day earlier than scheduled. It was Saturday, 11:40 P.m. and the air was full of colored lights from tiny splinters of ice floating like motes of dust. “Whiskers ‘round the light” they used to be called by sailors. The sky was a panoply of twinkling stars, and it was so cold that one might imagine they were fragments of ice floating in a cold, dark, inverted sea overhead.

Stephen and Esme were again standing by the rail of the Promenade Deck. Both were dressed in the early-twentieth century accouterments provided by the ship: he in woolen trousers, jacket, motoring cap, and caped overcoat with a long scarf; she in a fur coat, a stylish Merry Widow hat, high button shoes, and a black velvet, two-piece suit edged with white silk. She looked ravishing, and very young, despite the clothes.

“Throw it away,” Stephen said in an authoritative voice. “Now!”

Esme brought the cedar box containing Poppa to her chest, as if she were about to throw it forward, then slowly placed it atop the rail again. “I can’t.”

“Do you want me to do it?” Stephen asked.

“I don’t see why I must throw him away.”

“Because we’re starting a new life together. We want to live, not-”

Just then someone shouted and, as if in the distance, a bell rang three times.

“Could there be another ship nearby?” Esme asked.

“Esme, throw the box away!” Stephen snapped; and then he saw it. He pulled Esme backward, away from the rail. An iceberg as high as the forecastle deck scraped against the side of the ship; it almost seemed that the bluish, glistening mountain of ice was another ship passing, that the ice rather than the ship was moving. Pieces of ice rained upon the deck, slid across the varnished wood, and then the iceberg was lost in the darkness astern. It must have been at least one hundred feet high.

“O my god!” Esme screamed, rushing to the rail and leaning over it.

“What it is?”

“Poppa, I dropped him, when you pulled me away from the iceberg. I didn’t mean to . . . .”

Stephen put his arms around her, but she pulled away. “If you didn’t mean to throw it away--”

“Him, not it!”

“-him away, then why did you bring him up here?”

“To satisfy you, to . . . I don’t know, Stephen. I suppose I was going to try to do it.”

“Well, it’s done, and you’re going to feel better, I promise. I love you. Esme.”

“I love you, Stephen,” she said distractedly. A noisy crowd gathered on the deck around them. Some were quite drunk and were kicking large chunks of ice about, as if they were playing soccer.

“Come on, then,” Stephen said, “let’s get heavy coats and blankets, and we’ll wait on deck for a lifeboat. We’ll take the first one out and watch the ship sink together.”

“No, I’ll meet you right here in an hour.”

“Esme, it’s too dangerous, I don’t think we should separate.” Stephen glimpsed the woman from Interfax standing alone on the elevated sun deck, recording this event for her millions of viewers.

“We’ve got time before anything is going to happen.”

“We don’t know that,” Stephen insisted. “Don’t you realize that we’re off schedule? We were supposed to hit that iceberg tomorrow.”

But Esme had disappeared into the crowd.

It was bitter cold, and the Boat Deck was filled with people, all rushing about, shouting, scrambling for the lifeboats, and, inevitably, those who had changed their minds at the last moment about going down with the ship were shouting the loudest, trying the hardest to be permitted into the boats, not one of which had been lowered yet. There were sixteen wooden lifeboats and four canvas Englehardts, the collapsibles. But they could not be lowered away until the davits were cleared of the two forward boats. The crew was quiet, each man busy with the boats and davits. All the boats were now swinging free of the ship, hanging just beside the Boat Deck.

“We’ll let you know when it’s time to board,” shouted an officer to the families crowding around him.

The floor was listing. Esme was late, and Stephen wasn’t going to wait. At this rate, the ship would be bow-down in the water in no time.

She must be with Michael, he thought. The little bastard must have talked her into dying.

Michael had a stateroom on C Deck.

Stephen knocked, called to Michael and Esme, tried to open the door, and finally kicked the lock free.

Michael was sitting on the bed, which was a Pullman berth. His sister lay beside him, dead.

“Where’s Esme?” Stephen demanded, repelled by the sight of Michael sitting so calmly beside his dead sister.

“Not here. Obviously.” Michael smiled, then made the rubber-lips face at Stephen.

“Jesus,” Stephen said. “Put your coat on, you’re coming with me.”

Michael laughed and patted his hair down. “I’m already dead, just like my sister, almost. I took a pill too, see?”

and he held up a small brown bottle. “Anyway, they wouldn’t let me on a lifeboat. I didn’t sign up for one, remember?”

“You’re a baby, they-”

“I thought Poppa explained that to you.” Michael lay down beside his sister and watched Stephen like a puppy with its head cocked at an odd angle.

“You do know where Esme is, now tell me.”

“You never understood her. She came here to die.”

“That’s all changed,” Stephen said, wanting to wring the boy’s neck.

“Nothing’s changed. Esme loves me, too. And everything else.”

“Tell me where she is.”

“It’s too late for me to teach you how to meditate. In a way, you’re already dead. No memory, or maybe you’ve just been born. No past lives. A baby.” Again, Michael made the rubber-lips face. Then he closed his eyes. He whispered, “She’s doing what I’m doing.”

An instant later, he stopped breathing. ,

Stephen searched the ship, level by level, broke in on the parties, where those who had opted for death were having a last fling, looked into the lounges where many old couples sat, waiting for the end. He made his way down to F Deck, where he had made love to Esme in the Turkish bath. The water was up to his knees; it was green and soapy. He was afraid, for the list was becoming worse minute by minute; everything was happening so fast.

The water rose, even as he walked.

He had to get to the stairs, had to get up and out, onto a lifeboat, away from the ship, but on he walked, looking for Esme, unable to stop. He had to find her. She might even be on the Boat Deck right now, he thought, wading as best he could through a corridor.

But he had to satisfy himself that she wasn’t down here.

The Turkish bath was filling with water, and the lights

were still on, giving the room a ghostly illumination. Oddments floated in the room: blue slippers, a comb, scraps of paper, cigarettes, and several seamless plastic packages.

On the farthest couch, Esme sat meditating, her eyes closed and hands folded on her lap. She wore a simple white dress. Relieved and overjoyed, he shouted to her. She jerked awake, looking disoriented, shocked to see him. She stood up and, without a word, waded toward the other exit, dipping her hands into the water, as if to speed her on her way.

“Esme, where are you going?” Stephen called, following. “Don’t run away from me.”

Just then an explosion pitched them both into the water, and a wall



gave way. A solid sheet of water seemed to be crashing into the room, smashing Stephen, pulling him under and sweeping him away. He fought to reach the surface and tried to swim back, to find Esme. A lamp broke away from the ceiling, just missing him. “Esme!” he shouted, but he couldn’t see her, and then he found himself choking, swimming, as the water carried him through a corridor and away from her.

Finally, Stephen was able to grab the iron curl of a railing and pull himself onto a dry step. There was another explosion, the floor pitched, yet still the lights glowed. He looked down at the water that filled the corridor, the Turkish bath, the entire deck, and he screamed for Esme.

The ship shuddered, then everything was dead quiet. In the great rooms, chandeliers hung at angles; tables and chairs had skidded across the floors and seemed to squat against the walls like wooden beasts. Still the lights burned, as if all were quite correct, except gravity, which was misbehaving.

Stephen walked and climbed, followed by the sea, as if in a dream.

Numbed, he found himself back on the Boat Deck. But part of the deck was already submerged. Almost everyone had moved aft, climbing uphill as the bow dipped farther into the water.

The lifeboats were gone, as were the crew. Even now he

looked for Esme, still hoping that she had somehow survived. Men and women were screaming “I don’t want to die,” while others clung together in small groups, some crying, others praying, while there were those who were very calm, enjoying the disaster. They stood by the rail, looking out toward the lifeboats or at the dirigible, which floated above. Many had changed their clothes and looked resplendent in their early twentieth-century costumes. One man, dressed in pajama bottoms and a blue and gold smoking jacket, climbed over the rail and just stepped into the frigid water.

But there were a few men and women atop the officers’ quarters. They were working hard, trying to launch collapsible lifeboats C and D, their only chance of getting safely away from the ship.

“Hey!” Stephen called to them, just now coming to his senses. “Do you need any help up there?” He realized that he was really going to die

unless he did something.

He was ignored by those who were pushing one of the freed collapsibles off the port side of the roof. Someone shouted, "Damn!" The boat had landed upside down in the water.

"It's better than nothing," shouted a woman, and she and her friends jumped after the boat.

Stephen shivered; he was not yet ready to leap into the twenty-eight-degree water, although he knew there wasn't much time left, and he had to get away from the ship before it went down. Everyone on or close to the ship would be sucked under. He crossed to the starboard side, where some other men were trying to push the boat "up" to the edge of the deck. The great ship was listing heavily to port.

This time Stephen didn't ask; he just joined the work. No one complained. They were trying to slide the boat over the edge on planks. All these people looked to be in top physical shape; Stephen noticed that about half of them were women wearing the same warm coats as the men. This was a game to all of them, he suspected, and they were enjoying it. Each one

was going to beat the odds, one way or another; the very thrill was to outwit fate, opt to die and yet survive.

But then the bridge was underwater.

There was a terrible crashing, and Stephen slid along the float as everything tilted.

Everyone was shouting; Stephen saw more people than he thought possible to be left on the ship. People were jumping overboard. They ran before a great wave that washed along the deck. Water swirled around Stephen and the others nearby.

"She's going down," someone shouted. Indeed, the stern of the ship was swinging upward. The lights flickered. There was a roar as the entrails of the ship broke loose: anchor chains, the huge engines and boilers. One of the huge black funnels fell, smashing into the water amid sparks. But still the ship was brilliantly lit, every porthole afire.

The crow's nest before him was almost submerged, but Stephen swam for it nevertheless. Then he caught himself and tried to swim away

,from the ship, but it was too late. He felt himself being sucked back, pulled under. He was being sucked into the ventilator, which was in front of the forward funnel.

Down into sudden darkness . . .

He gasped, swallowed water, and felt the wire mesh, the airshaft grating that prevented him from being sucked under. He held his breath until he thought his lungs would burst; he called in his mind to Esme and his dead mother. Water was surging all around him, and then there was another explosion. Stephen felt warmth on his back, as a blast of hot air pushed him upward. Then he broke out into the freezing air. He swam for his life, away from the ship, away from the crashing and thudding of glass and wood, away from the debris of deck chairs, planking, and ropes, and especially away from the other people who were moaning, screaming at him, and trying to grab him as buoy, trying to pull him down.

Still, he felt the suction of the ship, and he swam, even

though his arms were numb and his head was aching as if it were about to break. He took a last look behind him, and saw the Titanic slide into the water, into its own eerie pool of light. Then he swam harder. In the distance were other lifeboats, for he could see lights flashing. But none of the boats would come in to rescue him; that he knew.

He heard voices nearby and saw a dark shape. For a moment it didn't register, then he realized that he was swimming toward an overturned lifeboat, the collapsible he had seen pushed into the water. There were almost thirty men and women standing on it. Stephen tried to climb aboard and someone shouted, "You'll sink us, we've too many already."

"Find somewhere else."

A woman tried to hit Stephen with an oar, just missing his head. Stephen swam around to the other side of the boat. He grabbed hold again, found someone's foot, and was kicked back into the water.

"Come on," a man said, his voice gravelly. "Take my arm and I'll pull you up."

"There's no room!" someone else said.

“There’s enough room for one more.”

“No, there’s not.”

A fight threatened, and the boat began to rock.

“We’ll all be in the water if we don’t stop this,” shouted the man who was holding Stephen afloat. Then he pulled Stephen aboard.

“But no more, he’s the last one!”

Stephen stood with the others; there was barely enough room. Everyone had formed a double line now, facing the bow, and leaned in the opposite direction of the swells. Slowly the boat inched away from the site where the ship had gone down, away from the people in the water, all begging for life, for one last chance. As he looked back to where the ship had once been, Stephen thought of Esme. He couldn’t bear to think of her as dead, floating through the corridors of the ship. Desperately he wanted her, wanted to take her in his arms.

Those in the water could easily be heard; in fact, the calls seemed magnified, as if meant to be heard clearly by everyone who was safe, as a punishment for past sins.

“We’re all deaders,” said a woman standing beside Stephen. “I’m sure no one’s coming to get us before dawn, when they have to pick up survivors.”

“We’ll be the last pickup, that’s for sure, that’s if they intend to pick us up at all.”

“Those in the water have to get their money’s worth.”

“And since we opted for death . . .”

“I didn’t,” Stephen said, almost to himself.

“Well, you’ve got it anyway.”

Stephen was numb, but no longer cold. As if from far away, he heard the splash of someone falling from the boat, which was very slowly sinking as air was lost from under the hull. At times the water was up to Stephen’s

knees, yet he wasn't even shivering. Time distended, or contracted. He measured it by the splashing of his companions as they fell overboard. He heard himself calling Esme, as if to say good-bye, or perhaps to greet her.

By dawn, Stephen was so muddled by the cold that he thought he was on land, for the sea was full of debris: cork, steamer chairs, boxes, pilasters, rugs, carved wood, clothes, and of course the bodies of those unfortunates who could not or would not survive; and- the great icebergs and the smaller ones called growlers looked like cliffs and mountainsides. The icebergs were sparkling and many-hued, all brilliant in the light, as if painted by some cheerless Gauguin of the north.

"There," someone said, a woman's hoarse voice. "It's coming down, it's coming down!" The dirigible, looking like a huge white whale, seemed to be descending through its more natural element, water, rather than the thin, cold air. Its electric engines could not even be heard.

In the distance, Stephen could see the other lifeboats.

Soon the airship would begin to rescue those in the boats, which were now tied together in a cluster. As Stephen's thoughts wandered and his eyes watered from the reflected morning sunlight, he saw a piece of carved wood bobbing up and down near the boat, and noticed a familiar face in the .~ debris that seemed to surround the lifeboat.

y

There, just below the surface, in his box, the lid open, eyes closed, floated Poppa. Poppa opened his eyes then and y looked at Stephen, who screamed, lost his balance on the hull,

and plunged headlong into the cold black water.

The Laurel Lounge of the dirigible California was dark and filled with survivors. Some sat in the flowered, stuffed chairs; others just milled about. But they were all watching the lifelike holographic tapes of the sinking of the Titanic. The images filled the large room with the ghostly past.

Stephen stood in the back of the room, away from the others, who cheered each time there was a close-up of someone jumping overboard or

slipping under the water. He pulled the scratchy woolen blanket around him, and shivered. He had been on the dirigible for more than twenty-four hours, and he was still chilled. A crewman had told him it was because of the injections he had received when he boarded the airship.

There was another cheer and, horrified, he saw that they were cheering for him. He watched himself being sucked into the ventilator, and then blown upward to the surface. His body ached from being battered. But he had saved himself. He had survived, and that had been an actual experience. It was worth it for that, but poor Esme . . .

“You had one of the most exciting experiences,” a woman said to him, as she touched his hand. He recoiled from her, and she shrugged, then moved on.

“I wish to register a complaint,” -- said a stocky man dressed in period clothing to one of the Titanic’s officers; who was standing beside Stephen and sipping a cocktail.

“Yes?” asked the officer.

“I was saved against my wishes. I specifically took this voyage that I might pit myself against the elements.”

“Did you sign one of our protection waivers?” asked the officer.

“I was not aware that we were required to sign any such thing.”

“All such information was provided,” the officer said, looking uninterested. “Those passengers who are truly committed to taking their chances sign, and we leave them to their own devices. Otherwise, we are responsible for every passenger’s life.”

“I might just as well have jumped into the ocean early and gotten pulled out,” the passenger said sarcastically.

The officer smiled. “Most people want to test themselves out as long as they can. Of course, if you want to register a formal complaint, then . . .”

But the passenger stomped away.

“The man’s trying to save face,” the officer said to Stephen, who

had been eavesdropping. “We see quite a bit of that. But you seemed to have an interesting ride. You gave us quite a start; we thought you were going to take a lifeboat with the others, but you disappeared belowdecks. It was a bit more difficult to monitor you, but we managed-that’s the fun for us. You were never in any danger, of course. Well, maybe a little.”

Stephen was shaken. He had felt that his experiences had been authentic, that he had really saved himself. But none of that had been real. Only Esme . . .

And then he saw her step into the room.

“Esme?” He couldn’t believe it. “Esme?”

She walked over to him and smiled, as she had the first time they’d met. She was holding a water-damaged cedar box. “Hello, Stephen. Wasn’t it exciting?”

Stephen threw his arms around her, but she didn’t respond. She waited a proper time, then disengaged herself.

“And look,” she said, “they’ve even found Poppa.” She opened the box and held it up to him.

Poppa’s eyes fluttered open. For a moment his eyes were vague and unfocused, then they fastened on Esme and sharpened. “Esme . . .” Poppa said uncertainly, and then he smiled. “Esme, I’ve had the strangest dream.” He laughed. “I dreamed I was a head in a box . . . .”

Esme snapped the box closed. “Isn’t he marvelous,” she said. She patted the box and smiled. “He almost had me talked into going through with it this time.”

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# SIGMUND IN SPACE

*by Barry N. Malzberg*

Freud walks the anterior corridors of the *Whipperly VI*, meditating on the situation. The captain is a manic-depressive. The navigator has a severe oedipal block, which is gradually destroying him; he is unable to attain orgasm, even though the mechanicals are skilled and devoted. The hydroponics expert, a grim woman in her nineties, is manifesting advanced symptoms of dementia praecox, and at least half the crew, by all standards of early-twentieth-century Vienna (which must of necessity be his touchstone), is neurotic to the point of dysfunction: depressive reactions, conversion hysteria, bizarre sexual urges, and the like. Clearly, the administrators must have been desperate to place him on this vessel. Freud hardly knows where to begin. What can he do? What psychotherapeutic techniques (which by definition require patience) can possibly prevail in this emergency? If Freud were not so wondrously confident of his abilities, so protectively despairing, he would be most undone.

The rhythm of his pacing increases. Freud risks greedy little glances at the huge screens, glinting around him, looking at the disorder of a constellation, a smudge of stars. Here in the late twenty-fifth century space exploration is not routine; the *Whipperly VI* is on a dangerous mission to the hitherto-unprobed Vegans. The view of the universe from a distance of so many light-years from Vienna is astonishing. Freud would not have dreamed that such things were possible. Furthermore, he would not have dreamed that as technology advanced, the common neuroses would prevail. Of course, that was foolish. The pain, the schism, the older ironies would prevail.

Freud shrugs. He reaches inside his vest pocket for a cigar and match, lights the cigar with a flourish, watches smoke whisk into the ventilators as he turns in the corridor and then returns to the small cubicle that the administrators have given him as office space. The desk is littered with papers, the wall with diplomas. Freud feels right at home, within their limits the administrators have done everything possible to grant him credibility and a sense of domain. If he is unable to cope he knows they will only blame him more. *Well, he thinks, well, what they decide will be done. I will be shrunken again and replaced in the dream cube. It will be many centuries before I receive another assignment. But then again I will have*



*no knowledge, and therefore my entrapment will be in their estimation, not mine. The last time I had an assignment was in the early twenty-second century: the madman on Venus who thought he was a vine and threatened to cut off the dome respirators. I didn't handle that too well and got derricked for centuries. But here I am again and none the worse for it. Their sanctions exclude me.*

This thought impels him toward his next act, which is to use the communicator on his desk to contact the captain and summon him to his office. Of all the technological wonders of this time, the communicator is a simple instrument, reminiscent of the telephone of his era. Freud wonders idly whether they have given him this to make him feel at home or whether the twenty-fifth is simply a century less sophisticated than the slick and dangerous twenty-second, which he remembers so vividly. He also thinks, while waiting for the captain, of his old rivals Adler and Jung.

Doubtless that miserable pair have already been summoned and failed on this case. There is grim satisfaction in knowing this. But he would have hoped to have been reconstructed more often. Two jobs in the twenty-first, three in the twenty-second before that disaster on Venus, and now this. Not good. Not good at all.

Well, there is nothing to be done about that. Here he is, and here the responsibility for the mission reposes. The captain enters his cabin, a slender, ashen-faced man, dressed in fatigues but wearing a full dress cap. His aspect is impatient but restrained. Like all on board, he has been given the strictest orders to comply with Freud's procedures. The administrators cannot control the fate of the mission, but they can abort it, tearing the ship apart at the touch of a light-year-distant incendiary beam. The captain knows this. He sits across from Freud, his hands on his knees, and while staring at him earnestly, his eyes slowly ignite under Freud's gaze. "We're going to take over those Vegans," he says, unprompted. "You know that, of course."

"Of course." Freud says sympathetically.

"They're a green humanoid race, primitive but with the potential for technological advance. They're hostile and barbaric. We're going to wipe them out while we still have time. I have plans," the captain says shakily. "I have enormous plans."

"Of course you do," Freud says. He puffs on the cigar with what he hopes resembles a gesture of serenity. "Why do you feel you must destroy

the Vegans?”

“Because otherwise in a generation they’ll have spaceships and atomic devices and will destroy *us*,” the captain says. “Don’t worry, I’m completely in control. I’m a highly trained man.”

Freud has read the capsule reports prepared by the administrators. Of course there are no Vegans at all; there are three silicon-based planets circling an arid star. In five centuries of space probes, life has never been found on these planets. “I know you’re trained,” Freud says. “Still, I have a question, if I might ask it.”

“Please ask it,” the captain says hoarsely. “I am prepared to deal with any questions.”

“That’s an important quality, to be sure. Now, what if it happened to be,” Freud says gently, “that there are *no* Vegans?”

“There *are* Vegans. Several hundred million of them. I’m going to wipe them out.”

“Yes, yes, but what if there aren’t? Just to speculate-”

“You’re just like the rest of them,” the captain says, his face mottling. “You damned toy, you *reconstruct*. You’re just like the rest. Don’t humor me. I’m going to save the universe. Now I have to get back to my bridge. I must prepare for the deadly cancer-causing Vegan probes, which could encircle us at any moment.”

“How long have you felt this way?” Freud essays mildly as the captain stalks out. Freud sighs and stubs his cigar on the desk and then stares at his diploma for a while. Then he summons the navigator.

The navigator shows considerably less effect than the captain but, after some gentle probing, discloses that his mother is aboard the ship stowed away in one of the ventilators and whispering thoughts to him of the most disgusting nature. He has always hated and feared his mother, and that is why he enlisted in the service. But she will not leave him alone—he was a fool to think that he could escape. Freud dismisses him and turns to the hydroponics engineer, who tells him bitterly that he, too, is already affected virally with an insidious disease, which the captain has been seeding into the units. Machine or otherwise. Freud is as doomed as the rest, but at least he can try to keep up his strength. She offers him some

celery. After she leaves, he gnaws it meditatively and talks to some selected members of the crew. They believe the officers to be quite mad; in self-defense they have turned to bestial practices. Here at last Freud finds some professional respect—they are impressed that the administrators would send another famous psychoanalyst as reconstruct to superintend their voyage. They hope that he does better than Adler and Jung, who worked together and succeeded only in boring them with lectures in the assembly hall on mass consciousness until the administrators, displeased, dwindled them and said they would send a true practitioner, a medical doctor, in their place.

Freud sends the crew on their way and lights another cigar. The symptoms evinced are extraordinary, yet there is enough consistency in the syndrome for him to infer that the administrators have lied to him: *Everyone* on this ship has gone mad, and this is probably a consequence of the mission itself. Long probes their stress, isolation, boredom, and propinquity—must tend to break down the crews. The administrators have called for him not because of special circumstances but because of *ordinary* circumstances. What they want him to do is to patch over matters in order that the mission may conclude. There has been much difficulty and expense; it would be wasteful and cruel to abort the mission so close to its end.

Freud stands, neatens his desk marginally, and returns to the corridor and his pacing. The welter of constellation now stuns and discommodates. Freud adjusts the angle of the windows so that he can evade them. Space for an early-twentieth-century Viennese, is overwhelming; it must have less of an effect upon the custodians of the twenty-fifth, but several months in this environment would undo anyone, he thinks. The administrators have obviously tried to routinize the missions just as with the reconstructions they have routinized a qualified immortality. But in neither case has it really worked. *Three centuries in a cube*, thinks bitterly. *Three centuries*. They should have allowed his corpse to commingle with the earth undisturbed; they should have left him with the less noted of his time; they should have spared him this difficult and humiliating afterlife. What they need aboard the *Whipperly VI* is not a doctor but a priest. Freud can offer them no solutions; he can, at best, take them further into their unspeaking, resistant hearts, at the core of which outrage has been transformed into insanity. It is not the Vegan cancer probes that the captain fears; it is himself. If he were to be shown that, he would die.

This line of thinking, however, gives Freud an idea. He returns once more to his cubicle and uses the communicator to summon all officers and

crew to an emergency meeting in the lounge in ten minutes. Then he uses the special device he has been shown and speaks to the administrators. "I want to tell you," he says, "that your twenty-fifth century is finished. Your deep-space probes are finished, and your Vegan mission is done."

"Why is that?" one administrator says flatly. "Aren't you being a little florid?"

"I am telling you the truth."

"Why is that the truth? On what basis are you saying this outrageous thing?"

"Because you have pushed limits, you have isolated circumstances, you have misunderstood the human spirit itself, you have lied your way through the circumference of the planet, but you cannot do it among the stars." Freud says, and so on and so forth and on and on. He permits himself a raving monologue of two minutes in which he accuses the administrators of all the technological barbarities he can call to mind and then says that he has found a one-time, stopgap solution to the problem that can never be used again but that he will invoke for the sake of all those on board who cannot discern their right hand from their left and also much cattle.

"What is that?" the same administrator says weakly. "We have no cattle on board. I don't understand. Explain yourself before you're dwindled on the spot."

"You won't dwindle me," Freud says. "You don't dare do it; I'm your last hope. If you shut me down, you know the mission is finished, and you can't deal with that. So you're going to let me go ahead. And afterwards I don't care what you do. You are monstrous yet unconvinced of your monstrosity. That is the centrality of your evil." It is a good statement, a clean, high ventilation. Feeling as triumphant as the captain preparing his crew for dangerous probes, Freud shuts down the communicator, leaves his cubicle, and descends to the brightly, decorated lounge, where forty members of the *Whipperly VI* crew sit uneasily staring at him, waiting for him to speak. Freud stands on the Plexiglas stage, swaying unevenly in the wafting, odorous breezes of the ventilators.

"All of you should know who I am. I am Sigmund Freud, a famous Viennese medical doctor and student of the human mind who has been reconstructed to help you with your difficulties on this Vegan probe. I have come to give you the solution to your problems."

They stare at him. The hydroponics engineer puts down her gun, folds her hands in her lap, and looks at him luminously. The captain giggles, then subsides. "Ah, then." Freud says, "you must repel the Vegans. Caution will not do it. Circumspection will not do it. Only your own courage and integrity will accomplish this."

Chairs shift. The captain applauds fervently. "Understand me," Freud says, nodding at him, "the administrators have lied to you. They have always lied to you. Spaceflight is not the routine transference of human cargo. Space itself is not the ocean, and a star probe is not a nineteenth-century battleship. Vega is not the Azores! Conditions are new and terrible. Monsters lurk through the curtains of space. Everything is changed."

"Yes," the captain says gratefully, "everything is changed. I tried to tell them-"

"It's too late to tell them," Freud says sharply. "You must act. You will land on Vega and advance upon the Vegans' cities and kill every single one of them. Until then you will remain quiet and you will plan. I will see each of you individually to tell you what role you will play in the conquest. For the moment, thank you and bless you all."

He bows. The applause begins. It swerves toward him in thick, deepening waves. Freud is humbled. Tears come. It has not been this way for a long time, since the Academy as a matter of fact, and then there were the jeers and abuse of some rivalrous colleagues. He basks in the applause. Even a reconstruct can be permitted vanity. Finally, he bows and stumbles from the stage, then moves up the ramp into the darkened corridors above.

Pacing, he adjusts the viewscreens so that he can stare again at the dark constellations-which he no longer fears. Freud thinks that in this maddened circumstance, almost six full centuries from Vienna, he has found some qualified answer to his problems. It is possible to say that his final moments are happy or at least as happy as a scientist of the mind may make them. But they come, as do the emotions of all the others, to a startling termination.

The mission is aborted.

Not by the administrators. For Freud, these men of steel and power now have only the greatest respect.

But by the Vegan space probes, which do not bring cancer (the captain, like many insane, was intellectually damaged), but the fire.

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# THE INVITATION

*by Paul J. Nahin*

I can still recall my first encounter with Oliver Heaviside. Or rather, I should say with his *name*, since he had already been dead thirty-five years at the time. I was in the third year of college, and the professor in my electronics class mentioned him in passing.

The name made most of my classmates smile, and I immediately conjured up the image of the jolly, fat movie comic, Oliver Hardy. It was a juvenile response, I admit, but I began to notice from that time on how more and more frequently the contributions of Heaviside appeared in my classwork as I progressed into the advanced mathematical theories of electrical engineering.

Until recently I was quite unaware, *and could not have had* any idea, how that first encounter with Oliver Heaviside would prove to be fateful. Indeed, for you to best understand the full implications of the tale I'm about to relate, you should know a bit about the strange, enigmatic man of whom history has told us so little.

I'm the only person now alive who even knows what Heaviside looked like in his later years; indeed, I actually have a photograph that shows him to have been a tall, vigorous man, his eyes alive with the stupendous brilliance of his massive intellect. And another photograph lies on my desk, too. Seemingly benign in content, its image has changed my life. It shall take me some time to gather the nerve to tell you of *that* one. So let me first tell you about *him*.

Oliver Heaviside, one of the great mathematical and electrical geniuses of our time, laid the foundations of energy propagation by the electromagnetic waves predicted by Clerk Maxwell. He also theoretically predicted the existence of the ionosphere (known by some as the "Heaviside layer"). His was second (if not equal) only to that of the almost supernatural intelligence of Maxwell, and even Maxwell overlooked Heaviside's most astounding discovery.

But still-Heaviside died a hermit, a near pauper with only a tiny English Civil List pension to hold body and soul together. His official biography is short, impressive, and missing his very greatest accomplishment.

Born 1850, died 1925, Fellow of the Royal Society, first recipient of the Faraday Medal, and nephew on his mother's side of Sir Charles Wheatstone (the father of telegraphy, inventor of the self-excited dynamo, and the stereoscope). There can be little doubt that the young Heaviside's intellectual gift was nurtured by his famous uncle. Unable to understand his strange methods, the mathematicians of the Royal Society gave Heaviside's work little support, an act of ill treatment for which he never forgave them. His strong personality let him prevail in spite of their ignorance of his superior talent.

Using his novel mathematics Heaviside discovered the distortionless transmission line that made the miracle of the transoceanic telegraph cables possible. Unfortunately for him, his deep analysis led to conclusions that ran counter to those of Sir William Preece, the Chief Engineer of the British Post Office. Preece, by all accounts a genial but very ambitious man (who suffered from all the drawbacks of that vice), had Heaviside's work censored in the official journals. And so his theory fell on deaf ears in England, and it was left to Professor Pupin at Columbia University in America to successfully show the experimental validity of this mere fragment of Heaviside's work. Pupin became a millionaire selling the new technology to AT&T, while Heaviside received nothing.

Such a lack of practicality in an engineering genius had puzzled me for many years, but I know now why Heaviside ignored this profitable pursuit, and why his public scientific work *seemingly* ceased, abruptly, in 1912—he was devoting his energies to something far more incredible.

Yes, Heaviside was a great man. But a man of whom no photographs after the age of forty-three have survived, or at least that is what history has always thought. A man whose writings are studied world-wide by electrical engineers to this day, but one with no mature image for his disciples to revere. An analogy with Jesus Christ almost suggests itself, but possibly *that* is going a bit too far.

No, I'll take that back. Surely you are familiar with the Holy Shroud of Turin, the ancient linen cloth imprinted with the negative photographic image of a crucified man. A man believed by many to be that of our Lord. Well, I possess something of the same for Oliver Heaviside that is even more astounding.

Wait, I can see this is all coming too fast. Let me start from the beginning—then *you* decide if I am a charlatan or rather, as I believe, the luckiest man who has ever lived.



Until quite recently I, as have all others interested in such exotic matters, believed the only surviving full-view picture of Oliver Heaviside to be in existence is a large portrait painting hanging in the hallowed shrine of the Institution of Electrical Engineers at Savoy Place in London. It shows a bearded, handsome man in his early forties. But as to his appearance later in life, who can really say? We have always thought there to be no photographs.

This somewhat mysterious aspect of Mr. Heaviside has always attracted my interest, and as a professor of electrical engineering myself, I've made the collection of Heaviside memorabilia a hobby. I even have copies of his birth and death certificates, sent directly to me from the General Register Office at Somerset House, London.

Still, no matter what the burning intensity of my curiosity about Oliver Heaviside, it seemed to me that he had departed this world leaving us with no trace of his stay among the living but brilliant writings. Never married, preceded in death mere weeks by the last of his two older brothers, and buried in a near-forgotten grave next to his partners on the outskirts of the small English town of Paignton, there was no hope of finding even a forgotten family album. I had, therefore, contented myself with nothing more than stumbling across occasional, tantalizing tidbits about his life.

Indeed, to the despair of my poor, long-suffering wife, I had spent the whole of my last sabbatical leave in England in search of all I could find of Heaviside. But after the passage of more than half a century, even a search of the records at the Mount Stuart Nursing Home in Torquay where he passed his final days revealed no new information. He had faded forever into the dark shadows of time.

So you can imagine my surprise when, some weeks ago, the morning mail brought me an overseas registered letter from the London offices of Groffton, McKee, and St. George, Solicitors at Law. As I finished my second cup of coffee prior to leaving for my ten o'clock lecture on the design of spread spectrum radio communication receivers, I read the following astonishing, cryptic message:

*As per directions in the Last Will and Testament concerning the Estate of Mr. Oliver Heaviside, late of Torquay in the County of Devonshire, you are bequeathed the following items: (1) a wax-sealed, locked metal box, containing unspecified paper documents; (2) the key to said box. These*

*items may be claimed upon your personal appearance in our offices at precisely eight-thirty on the morning of the 29th of January of this year.*

That was just two days off! A cable to London verified my unexpected inheritance (I am embarrassed to admit it, but at first I suspected my students of having some fun with my well-known interest in Heaviside), and I hastened to make the necessary travel arrangements. For could there be any doubt at all that I would go?

What a strange happening. A man dead many years before my birth, but one I had long admired and studied deeply. Being blessed with his possessions was truly a miracle from the Lord Himself, one that brought me unbounded joy. But also confusion. *How* had it come to pass? I had always believed Heaviside had died intestate. Clearly there had been a secret will, unknown to all but his lawyers. And then the obvious answer came to me.

Most likely he had requested that his papers be presented by, the administrators of his estate, after the suitable passage of time, to whomever had shown through his own technical publications to be a worthy heir to the legacy. Certainly my own papers had often remarked on my admiration for Heaviside's genius, and that must have allowed me to pass the test.

My wife, understanding my life's passion, offered no objections to the trip. A quick call to my colleagues at the University, the rapid agreement by some graduate students to cover my classes, and I was free. Within hours I had booked passage and was on my way via the shuttle flight from Boston's Logan Airport to JFK International. I was off to England!

As my plane lifted free from New York, headed for London's Heathrow Airport, I wondered what could be in the box. Possibly some fantastic, previously unpublished technical papers? Papers full of new, incredible results?

But that was a long shot, I thought. All of Heaviside's known work had long been gathered together into five huge books, the two volume *Electrical Papers*, and his three volume masterpiece, *Electromagnetic Theory*. A million and a half words in over 2,600 pages! And what conceivable reason could Heaviside have had for suppressing a paper? No, the mystery had to be deeper than that.

Of course, I thought, there *was* the possibility it might be the lost, unpublished fourth volume of *Electromagnetic Theory*! The final manuscript was believed to be stolen and gone forever when, shortly after the radio announcement of his death, Heaviside's house had been burgled. In 1949 a scrap of the manuscript in rough draft form was uncovered at MIT, but many of the pages were nearly illegible. Enough of it was readable, however, to show that Heaviside had devoted his final work to combining electricity and gravity—he had anticipated Einstein's lifelong search for a unified field theory!

My imagination ran wild with that thought. What if the missing manuscript *hadn't* been stolen? What if, instead, Heaviside had secreted it away in the box? My heart pounded with the thrill of the idea. Did I dare even *think* of being that fortunate?

When I arrived at Heathrow it was dreary, overcast, and damp. The total opposite of how I felt inside. Tomorrow morning I would have Oliver Heaviside's metal box containing, I was sure, stupendous secrets. Acquired not at an auction, or obtained through a lucky find in a dusty attic (although I've had both such experiences, and they *are* exhilarating), but by the indirect action of Heaviside, himself!

I slept not a wink that night in my hotel, as my mind raced with anticipation.

By next morning I was dressed and ready to proceed to the offices of Groffton, McKee, and St. George at seven. Far too early since they were only a twenty minute walk away. Still, as I need a cane to walk even relatively short distances due to a mild arthritic condition in my right knee, I wanted to take no chances on being late. And I did wish to walk, rather than take a taxi. I have always loved London, but the only way to properly enjoy her is to walk her streets.

I ate an unhurried breakfast in the hotel restaurant to pass the extra time, and briefly played with the thought of trying, once again, to find Heaviside's birthplace. I knew he had been born at home on King Street, now called Plender Street, in Camden Town. But I soon gave the idea up as a search doomed from the start—to find it after a century and the devastation of German bombs would be hopeless.

I finished breakfast, paid my bill, and walked out onto the street. It was eight o'clock, and I was on my way. Mere minutes separated me from the box! My spirit soared.

As I made my way among the morning throng of hurrying businessmen and fashionably dressed women, I paid scant attention to even the loveliest of the ladies. None of them could compare with the wonderment I felt was soon to be mine. I found my destination with little trouble, and paused for a moment while I glanced at my watch. It was twenty-six minutes after eight. The letter had said *precisely* eighty-thirty, and possibly the emphasis on the time had hidden meaning. The whole affair was so strange I was fearful of doing anything contrary to my instructions. Should I wait outside for a bit before entering the Victorian law offices in front of me?

I stood among the hurrying crowd pushing around me and took pleasure in watching the large number of children and their parents, all apparently tourists on holiday, happily chattering and clicking away with cameras. I understood their excitement, as my own deep affection for England had grown from such pleasant childhood excursions.

At exactly eight-thirty I entered the Law Offices of Groffton, McKee, and St. George. I stood in a brightly lit room, illuminated by the sun streaming through the street windows. Guarding three majestic, ten foot high wooden doors was a matronly looking lady, somewhat on the plump side. On each door was fixed a brass nameplate, one for each of the firm's three principals. The one for Mr. Groffton further indicated that he was a member of that elite group allowed to plead at the bar in the superior courts.

I introduced myself to the lady, completing my presentation with a display of the enigmatic letter that had begun my trip. I was quickly ushered into the presence of Mr. Groffton. A portly, elderly gentleman, he rose slowly from behind his desk and greeted me warmly.

"My dear Professor, you can not *possibly* realize how I have looked forward to this day! Please, please come in and be seated. By Heaven, I can't recall being so excited in years!"

Such a welcome from a stranger, particularly a distinguished English barrister, was most extraordinary. My astonished reaction must have been plainly visible as the gentleman hastened to explain.

"My deepest apologies, sir. I can see my words must sound like those of a mad Englishman who has been out in the sun too long. But you see, ever since I've been a boy I've waited for this day. My father was a man of the law before me, and he drew up the papers that have finally

brought you here. His only wish, in his final years, was to live long enough to be present this day himself. But the private instructions given to him personally by Mr. Heaviside were emphatic-you were to be summoned precisely one month after your forty-first birthday. My father *had* to wait, but alas, the reaper who eventually catches us all did not wait.”

The sheer strength of Mr. Groffton’s emotional words was enormous. My feelings were of total confusion, but he had conveyed something of the magnitude of the events unfolding me. This moment in time, the forces that had propelled me to these law offices, had all found their origin *decades* in the past.

“I’m sorry,” I replied, “but I don’t understand. How could Oliver Heaviside have asked for *me*? I wasn’t born until 1940, fifteen years after he died. Surely what you mean is that he asked for someone *with my qualifications*, which I assume are my publicly expressed interest in his work, and my professional training in electrical physics.”

“No, no,” exclaimed Mr. Groffton, “you are mistaken. Mr. Heaviside asked *specifically* for *you*! Naturally, immediately after Mr. Heaviside’s departure from my father’s office, discreet inquiry was made through legal contacts in America about you. There was nothing in the instructions to indicate *when* your forty-first birthday would occur, and my father wished to see how much longer that would be. You can imagine my father’s surprise when informed there was no trace of an American professor with your name, or even, for that matter, of an electrical engineering faculty at your institution!”

I sat down in a nearby stuffed leather chair. It absorbed me like a drop of water on a sponge, and I gratefully accepted its comfort.

“I don’t see how this is possible!”

Mr. Groffton did not reply at first, but rather returned to his desk. He sat motionless for some moments and, much to my discomfort, seemingly stared at me. He then seemed to realize the awkwardness of the situation and finally replied.

“I must tell you, Professor, that in the beginning my father entertained serious doubts as to the strength of Mr. Heaviside’s grasp on reality. The mystery, you see, was that he was leaving his estate to a specific individual who apparently did not exist. Mr. Heaviside became quite angry when my father brought the issue forward, and refused to discuss it. However, since

he had paid all expenses in advance the proper arrangements were made and all subsequent actions have taken place automatically.”

I said nothing in reply. What *could* I say?

“And then,” Mr. Groffton went on, “something occurred that brought both a cry of delight and astonishment to my father’s lips. He had, of course, during all the many years since, never put the matter of Mr. Heaviside’s strange will from his mind for long. His speculations about the ‘mad’ Mr. Heaviside often made rousing good talk around our family supper table, and they were better than any of the traditional childhood tales, I assure you, sir!

“Each year he monitored the faculty roster at your university, Professor. Thirty years ago an electrical engineering faculty was at last created. Each year thereafter your name was absent. Until ten years ago.”

“Yes,” I fairly cried out, “that’s correct! That’s when I joined the department as an assistant professor.”

Mr. Groffton nodded his head, and then stared at me again. “So it seems Mr. Heaviside was not mad, after all. But Professor, surely you must appreciate the most obvious, if incredible, implications in all of this.”

I was beginning to form some ideas by then, of course, but I lacked the nerve to voice them aloud. I delayed by asking, in turn, “And what, Mr. Groffton, do *you* think it means?”

For just the shortest moment I had the feeling Mr. Groffton would speak his thoughts. But then his nerve broke as had mine. He leaned back in his chair, spread his arms wide, and chuckled. “But of course *that* would be sheer madness, mere fantasy! No doubt once you open the box there will be a perfectly logical explanation for the entire affair.” For my part, I was not so sure.

The lawyer stood up and was once again in total control. “If you’ll come with me, Professor, we’ll take care of the business that has brought you across the ocean.”

“Yes,” I replied, relieved to have the conversation move away from its previous path, “I am most anxious to see my inheritance.” Mr. Groffton had to be correct- *that* way was insanity!

I followed him to the far end of the room, where against the back wall of highly polished, inlaid wood tiles there was a magnificent, heavy oak table. It must have weighed a ton. But it was what it bore upon its surface that captured my attention.

The metal box! Possibly a foot square, and four to five inches deep, its lid was securely fastened by a flush mounted lock on the front apron, and the whole thing was covered by a thick layer of red sealing wax. My hands trembled as I looked at it, and a chill of excitement touched the back of my neck.

Mr. Groffton was now fishing about in a pocket and then found what he was after. "Ah, here we go, Professor, the key." He dropped it on the table next to the box. It appeared much like the latch key to the door of my wife's prized, curved glass antique hutch. Such an ordinary looking key. But I knew it would fit a most decidedly extraordinary lock. The lock to Oliver Heaviside's box.

*My box!*

Mr. Groffton motioned me to one of the several wooden chairs that matched the table. "You may examine the box here at your leisure, Professor, if you wish. I can not tell you how many times I've wondered at its contents, but of course I understand your desire for privacy."

I *did* wish to savor my excitement alone, but a veneer of automatic, civilized behavior made me deny my own feelings. Mr. Groffton was a wise, sensitive man, though, and to my secret pleasure he brushed aside my silly words.

"No, no, Professor, I have a feeling that what you'll find in that box may prove quite extraordinary. After you've seen it, *then* you decide what, if anything, you wish to reveal. And I must tell you that Mr. Heaviside's will contains the requirements that you, alone, must open the box. I must be out of the office for the next hour or so on business, in any case." And then he was gone.

The ponderous boom of the giant door closing behind Mr. Groffton had barely died away before I was seated before the box. I lifted it and it seemed fairly light. *Well*, I recall chuckling nervously to myself, *it certainly isn't a hoard of gold bars*. I could hear what sounded like paper inside, sliding in the box, as I gently shook it.

I assumed the red wax, often used in high vacuum experiments to seal tiny air leaks, had been used to prevent the humid air of London from destroying the documents inside with the rot of mildew. The wax easily pulled away in large sections, much like peeling the shell from a hard-boiled egg. Soon I had it all off.

I placed the box squarely in front of me, inserted the key, and with a gentle click that belied its years of dormancy, the lock relinquished its decades old grip on the lid.

I opened the box.

Inside lay three documents, each covered with a thin film of the dust settled from the original air in the box. There were two envelopes, and a thick manuscript nearly two inches deep. The manuscript had a blank cover, and one of the envelopes was unmarked. The other had the words OPEN THIS FIRST written across it in ink.

As I looked at the handwriting I felt a shock of incredible proportion. I have studied Heaviside's surviving notebooks in the archives of the Electrical Institution at Savoy Place, written with ink of his own making, and I recognized the graceful, flowing style. I must admit that but for the energy I felt from the thrill of the moment I might well have fainted dead away from the excitement.

I tore open the marked envelope with trembling fingers and inside found the following note:

*June 17,*

*Dear Professor,*

*I can well imagine the feelings you must now have as you read these words. I will not waste effort here with a lot of unnecessary explanation. The other envelope should contain proof enough of what I shall claim (if this box, willed to you, isn't proof enough). If you decide to take me up on my offer we will have time enough to discuss it all. I admit to a bit of theatrics with my method for communicating with you, but if I had merely shown up on your doorstep, would you have believed me?*

*I have discovered the secret of time travel.*



*But I have only just barely discovered it. There is much I don't know. I can move only in discrete jumps, like a frog hopping from one water lily to another. Also I am fearful of the possible paradoxes of what I've uncovered and have been most careful not to try to create one-Nature might prove rather unpleasant in resolving the issue. Other problems I face are far too numerous to recount here. But I know their solution.*

*What I need is a colleague to work with me. I need someone to talk to, to work with, to join me. My limited experiments have allowed me to visit your time (I can not move forward less, and only very far into the future), and all I have learned show me that you, sir, are that colleague. The scientists of my time are either no better equipped with electrical and mathematical knowledge than I, or are unable to even begin to grasp my work. Your writings have convinced me it must be you to join me.*

*The manuscript describes my machine. Build it and travel back to work with me. In the text you will find all the details for the instrument settings required to return to my time, tomorrow evening in this very room, only hours from now as I write these words. I will know then if you have decided to join me. It will take you some weeks to build the machine, but for me it will seem but less than two days.*

*Tomorrow morning I take this box to the lawyer. There it shall remain until you receive it. It is up to you, but I feel in my heart you will come. Now, open the other envelope.*

*I shall wait for you.*

*Oliver*

I sat immobile, awash in near disbelief! I opened the second envelope. It contained two photographs. Both were very old, yellowed and stiff with age. One was of Oliver Heaviside, in black and white, with a note written on the back informing me that this was the most recent picture of my correspondent across time, taken only two months earlier.

I tried to calm my whirling mind by smiling at the thought that the

photo, for me, was actually considerably more than half a century old.

The other photograph had been produced by an instant camera, in full color. The colors had long since faded, but it didn't matter. I could look at my own clothes and see how the image had first appeared. It was of me, only half an hour ago, standing outside on the sidewalk among the children and their parents, leaning on my cane!

At last I understood the peculiar emphasis on the precise time of my arrival. It was the appointment time for my portrait, taken by Oliver Heaviside, who must have been but mere feet away from me in the crowd. He had *arranged and controlled* it all, subject only to his limitation of traveling in time jumps.

I stared at my picture. Was it decades old, or only half an hour? Was the man who had taken it, at this very "moment." "waiting" for me, or was he lying moldering in his grave? Or was it both? I shook my head in utter despair of getting it all straight.

I took the thick manuscript from the box and scanned quickly through it. It was full of mathematics and electrical schematics, but I could see much that was familiar. There were a few strange twists here and there, but, I reasoned, there'd *have* to be.

In my hands I held the plans for a time machine!

I was, by then, too emotionally numb for any further reaction. My movements became automatic. I returned the documents to the box and locked it. I placed the key deep in my coat's inside breast pocket. I picked up the box and left Mr. Groffton's office-once outside I quickly signed for my inheritance with the outer office secretary. I ignored her questions and pleas for me to wait, and said only that I wished for her to thank Mr. Groffton, upon his return, for the courtesy he had shown me.

I returned to my hotel room where, at last, I lay down on the bed and let my mind spin. Could all this *really* be? The will, the pictures, the manuscript-what could deny the truth of them? Nothing.

My journey was done, and my first thoughts were to immediately return home. But then, I realized, there was actually no real reason to hurry. If I accepted my incredible invitation I would appear in Heaviside's "tomorrow night" no matter when I started my trip back. I could take my time, to try to sort out the jumble of past events. *That* was what I should do,

I thought.

I made up my mind. A strange urge came over me to delay my return for a day or so. I decided to once again pay a visit to the final resting place of Heaviside, to pay homage at his grave. Possibly then, I hoped, when once again in the presence of his spirit, I would find my way through the maze of reluctant doubts that still tore at me. I regretted that there would be no time for me to listen to the speakers in Hyde Park, or to visit Regent's Park Zoo, or to feed the ducks and geese at St. James, but a more urgent mission pulled at me. I quickly made arrangements to leave London early the next morning.

The trip by rail to Paignton was uneventful, and I soon found my way to the cemetery where Heaviside lay buried. Little had changed since my last visit some years ago. The walk from the gates, to the grave, was slightly uphill and I was somewhat out of breath when I finally located it. A thick, swirling ground fog had at first confused me. My right knee throbbed lightly from the exertion, and I leaned heavily on my cane. Fearful of letting the box out of my sight for even a moment, I had carried it with me.

I stood in front of the gravestone, panting, searching for something—some sort of sign to guide me, to help me see what all of this could mean. Gradually I became aware that I was not alone. On the other side of the marker, possibly ten feet beyond and barely visible in the fog, was an old man, apparently in his late seventies.

He was shabbily dressed and his white hair was unkempt and dirty. A tattered sweater was all that kept the damp chill away from his body. He was staring at me. When he saw I was returning his gaze he walked haltingly around the grave and came up to me. He was carrying a shovel, and so I presumed he was a grave digger.

"I say, Gov, I didn't mean no rudeness. It's just that I saw you comin' up the hill here, and when you stopped at ol' crazy's grave, I got curious."

The casual manner of the insult angered me. "What do you mean, ol' crazy's grave? Don't you know who Oliver Heaviside was?"

The man grinned and his rotten teeth made the smile grotesque. "Yeah, sure, I heard he was some kind of genius. But to me and the boys he was just a old crazy. When I was a lad me and my pals, why we used to give him hell, we did. Sneak around at night, we would, yellin' and shoutin', givin' him a scare. It was all in fun, and we didn't do him no harm, though." The old man snickered to himself at the remembered long-ago

“good-times.”

I didn't reply, but merely stared angrily at him. I was familiar enough with stories of how the neighborhood boys had treated Heaviside. He was strange to them, so they had taunted him. I had read accounts of how they had even broken the windows of his house on more than one occasion. That had infuriated me, the thought of such barbaric behavior. No harm, indeed! And here I was face-to-face with one of those delinquents, now grown old and decrepit. The only thing that prevented me from giving him a good tongue lashing was his age.

The old fellow's demeanor was suddenly different then, and he was peering closely at my cane. At first I thought he must be offended by my obvious disapproval of him, but I was disappointed when that proved not to be the case. The elderly ruffian looked my cane up and down and stared hard at me.

“Where'd you get the walkin' stick, Gov? It's a mighty peculiar lookin' one.”

Puzzled at his strange question, I took my weight off it and, still holding the box tightly under my left arm, held the cane up. It is a strange cane, I must admit, being made of thick, polished, heavy oak, carved with a curious design with a meaning I've never learned, and topped with a solid brass handle. It's the handle that attracts the most attention, as it's shaped in the head of an extremely unpleasant looking gargoyle. It was a humorous gift from my wife some years ago. It is very ugly, but also very strong and able to easily support my weight when my knee troubles me.

“My cane?” I asked dumbly. “It was a gift. Why do you ask?”

The old man looked into my face closely, as if he had found a long forgotten picture. “Because I saw that cane once before,” he replied. “Had to be *that* cane, couldn't be *two* like it. It was the last time me and my pals gave ol' crazy a hard time. We was hidin' down behind a hedge, yellin' and whoppin,' when this stranger we'd never seen before came out of the house and after us. He was a wavin' a weird lookin' cane-*that* cane-at us, and sayin' he would bash our heads in if we came back. Seemed like *he* was crazy, too, and meant it, and we never did go back.”

He kept staring at me, and then started to back off. His face was white. “Been a long time, now, and it's hard to remember, but that stranger, he looked a lot like-no, it ain't possible!” And then he turned and ran away down the hill.

I smiled as I watched him disappear into the fog. I'd see him soon enough again.

A sudden, cold gust caused me to pull my coat about me as I stood alone again by the grave. The wind began to blow harder, scattering dirty paper scraps through the rows of tombstones. The light grew faint as the sky filled with swiftly growing clouds, and a misty rain began to fall through the fog. I clutched the metal box tightly to my chest, holding fast to the incredible link between the past and now. Or was it a link between now and my future? The astonishing adventures of the last two days had left me dazed. But at last my decision was made. I had much to do and I hurried off down the damp, dark earth, carrying with me the ghost of Oliver Heaviside.

Had any man ever received such a legacy-an invitation to experience all of history, and the future, too? An invitation from a man I'd never met? Until now had thought I *could* never meet, but had long ago grown to consider a kindred soul?

No, indeed, no, there can be no doubt. I *shall* accept his invitation.

Oliver and I *will* stride the corridors of time together!

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\* \* \* \*

# UNACCOMPANIED SONATA

*by Orson Scott Card*

When Christian Haroldsen was six months old, preliminary tests showed a predisposition toward rhythm and a keen awareness of pitch. There were other tests, of course, and many possible routes still open to him. But rhythm and pitch were the governing signs of his own private zodiac, and already the reinforcement began. Mr. and Mrs. Haroldsen were provided with tapes of many kinds of sound and instructed to play them constantly, whether Christian was awake or asleep.

When Christian Haroldsen was two years old, his seventh battery of tests pinpointed the path he would inevitably follow. His creativity was exceptional; his curiosity, insatiable; his understanding of music, so intense that on top of all the tests was written “Prodigy.”

Prodigy was the word that took him from his parents’ home to a house in deep deciduous forests where winter was savage and violent and summer, a brief, desperate eruption of green. He grew up, cared for by unsinging servants, and the only music he was allowed to hear was bird song and

wind song and the crackling of winter wood; thunder and the faint cry of golden leaves as they broke free and tumbled to the earth; rain on the roof and the drip of water from icicles; the chatter of squirrels and the deep silence of snow falling on a moonless night.

These sounds were Christian’s only conscious music. He grew up with the symphonies of his early years only distant and impossible-to-retrieve memories. And so he learned to hear music in unmusical things-for he had to find music, even when there was none to find.

He found that colors made sounds in his mind: Sunlight in summer was a blaring chord; moonlight in winter a thin, mournful wail; new green in spring, a low murmur in almost (but not quite) random rhythms; the flash of a red fox in the leaves, a gasp of sudden startlement.

And he learned to play all those sounds on his Instrument. In the world were violins, trumpets, and clarinets, as there had been for centuries. Christian knew nothing of that. Only his Instrument was available. It was

enough.

Christian lived in one room in his house, which he had to himself most of the time. He had a bed (not too soft), a chair and table, a silent machine that cleaned him and his clothing, and an electric light.

The other room contained only his Instrument. It was a console with many keys and strips and levers and bars, and when he touched any part of it; a sound came out. Every key made a different sound; every point on the strips made a different pitch; every lever modified the tone; every bar altered the structure of the sound.

When he first came to the house, Christian played (as children will) with the Instrument, making strange and funny noises. It was his only playmate; he learned it well, could produce any sound he wanted to. At first he delighted in loud, blaring tones. Later he began to learn the pleasure of silences and rhythms. And soon he began to play with soft and loud and to play two sounds at once and to change those two sounds together to make a new sound and to play

again a sequence of sounds he had played before.

Gradually, the sounds of the forest outside his house found their way into the music he played. He learned to make winds sing through his instrument; he learned to make summer one of the songs he could play at will. Green with its infinite variations was his most subtle harmony; the birds cried out from his Instrument with all the passion of Christian's loneliness.

And the word spread to the licensed Listeners:

“There's a new sound north of here, east of here: Christian Haroldsen, and he'll tear out your heart with his songs.”

The Listeners came, a few to whom variety was everything first, then those to whom novelty and vogue mattered most, and at last those who valued beauty and passion above everything else. They came and stayed out in Christian's woods and listened as his music was played through perfect speakers on the roof of his house. When the music stopped and Christian came out of his house, he could see the Listeners moving away. He asked and was told why they came; he marveled that the things he did for love on his Instrument could be of interest to other people.

He felt, strangely, even more lonely to know that he could sing to the Listeners and yet never be able to hear their songs.

“But they have no songs,” said the woman who came to bring him food every day. “They are Listeners. You are a Maker. You have songs, and they listen.”

“Why?” asked Christian, innocently.

The woman looked puzzled. “Because that’s what they want most to do. They’ve been tested, and they are happiest as Listeners. You are happiest as a Maker. Aren’t you happy?”

“Yes,” Christian answered, and he was telling the truth. His life was perfect, and he wouldn’t change anything, not even the sweet sadness of the backs of the Listeners as they walked away at the end of his songs.

Christian was seven years old.

## FIRST MOVEMENT

For the third time the short man with glasses and a strangely inappropriate mustache dared to wait in the underbrush for Christian to come out. For the third time he was overcome by the beauty of the song that had just ended, a mournful symphony that made the short man with glasses feel the pressure of the leaves above him, even though it was summer and they had months left before they would fall. The fall was still inevitable, said Christian’s song; through all their life the leaves hold within them the power to die, and that must color their life. The short man with glasses wept-but when the song ended and the other Listeners moved away, he hid in the brush and waited.

This time his wait was rewarded. Christian came out of his house, walked among the trees, and came toward where the short man with glasses waited. The man admired the easy, unpostured way that Christian walked. The composer looked to be about thirty, yet there was something childish in the way he looked around him, the way his walk was aimless and prone to stop so he would just touch (and not break) a fallen twig with his bare toes.

“Christian,” said the short man with glasses.

Christian turned, startled. In all these years, no Listener had ever spoken to him. It was forbidden. Christian knew the law.

“It’s forbidden,” Christian said.



“Here,” the short man with glasses said, holding out a small black object.

“What is it?”

The short man grimaced. “Just take it. Push the button and it plays.”

“Plays?”

“Music.”

Christian’s eyes opened wide. “But that’s forbidden. I can’t have my creativity polluted by hearing other musicians work. That would make me imitative and derivative, instead of original.”

“Reciting,” the man said. “You’re just reciting that. This is Bach’s music.” There was reverence in his voice.

“I can’t,” Christian said.

And then the short man shook his head. “You don’t know. You don’t know what you’re missing. But I heard it in your song when I came here years ago, Christian. You want this.”

“It’s forbidden,” Christian answered, for to him the very fact that a man who knew an act was forbidden still wanted to perform it was astounding, and he couldn’t get past the novelty of it to realize that some action was expected of him.

There were footsteps, and words being spoken in the distance, and the short man’s face became frightened. He ran at Christian, forced the recorder into his hands, then took off toward the gate of the preserve.

Christian took the recorder and held it in a spot of sunlight coming through the leaves. It gleamed dully. “Bach,” Christian said. Then, “Who the hell is Bach?”

But he didn’t throw the recorder down. Nor did he give the recorder to the woman who came to ask him what the short man with glasses had stayed for. “He stayed for at least ten minutes.-

“I only saw him for thirty seconds,” Christian answered.

“And?”

“He wanted me to hear some other music. He had a recorder.”

“Did he give it to you?”

“No,” Christian said. “Doesn’t he still have it?”

“He must have dropped it in the woods.”

“He said it was Bach.”

“It’s forbidden. That’s all you need to know. If you should find the recorder, Christian, you know the law.”

“I’ll give it to you.”

She looked at him carefully. “You know what would happen if you listened to such a thing.”

Christian nodded.

“Very well. We’ll be looking for it, too. I’ll see you tomorrow, Christian. And next time somebody stays after, don’t talk to him. Just come back in and lock the doors.”

“I’ll do that,” Christian said.

There was a summer rainstorm that night, wind and rain and thunder, and Christian found that he could not sleep. Not because of the music of the weather—he’d slept through a thousand such storms. It was the recorder that lay against the wall behind the Instrument. Christian had lived for nearly thirty years surrounded only by this wild, beautiful place and the music he himself made. But now...

Now he could not stop wondering. Who was Bach? Who is Bach? What is his music? How is it different from mine? Has he discovered things that I don’t know?

What is his music? What is his music? What is his music?

Wondering. Until dawn, when the storm was abating and the wind had died. Christian got out of his bed, where he had not slept but only tossed

back and forth all night, and took the recorder from its hiding place and played it.

At first it sounded strange, like noise; odd sounds that had nothing to do with the sounds of Christian's life. But the patterns were clear, and by the end of the recording, which was not even a half-hour long, Christian had mastered the idea of fugue, and the sound of the harpsichord preyed on his mind.

Yet he knew that if he let these things show up in his music, he would be discovered. So he did not try a fugue. He did not attempt to imitate the harpsichord's sound.

And every night he listened to the recording, learning more and more until finally the Watcher came.

The Watcher was blind, and a dog led him. He came to

the door, and because he was a Watcher, the door opened for him without his even knocking.

"Christian Haroldsen," where is the recorder?" the Watcher asked.

"Recorder?" Christian asked, then knew it was hopeless. So he took the machine and gave it to the Watcher.

"Oh, Christian," said the Watcher, and his voice was mild and sorrowful. "Why didn't you turn it in without listening to it?"

"I meant to," Christian said. "But how did you know?"

"Because suddenly there are no fugues in your work. Suddenly your songs have lost the only Bach-like thing about them. And you've stopped experimenting with new sounds. What were you trying to avoid?"

"This," Christian said, and he sat down and on his first try duplicated the sound of the harpsichord.

"Yet you've never tried to do that until now, have you?"

"I thought you'd notice."

"Fugues and harpsichord, the two things you noticed first-and the only things you didn't absorb into your music. All your other songs for these last

weeks have been tinted and colored and influenced by Bach. Except that there was no fugue, and there was no harpsichord. You have broken the law. You were put here because you were a genius, creating new things with only nature for your inspiration. Now, of course, you're derivative, and truly new creation is impossible for you. You'll have to leave."

"I know," Christian said, afraid, yet not really understanding what life outside his house would be like.

"We'll train you for the kinds of jobs you can pursue now. You won't starve. You won't die of boredom. But because you broke the law, one thing is forbidden to you now"

"Music;

"Not all music. There is music of a sort, Christian, that the common people, the ones who aren't Listeners, can

have. Radio and television and record music. But live music and new music-those are forbidden to you. You may not sing. You may not play an instrument. You may not tap out a rhythm."

"Why not?"

The Watcher shook his head. "The world is too perfect, too at peace, too happy, for us to permit a misfit who broke the law to go about spreading discontent. And if you make more music, Christian, you will be punished drastically. Drastically."

Christian nodded, and when the Watcher told him to come, he came, leaving behind the house and the woods and his Instrument. At first he took it calmly, as the inevitable punishment for his infraction; but he had little concept of punishment, or of what exile from his Instrument would mean.

Within five hours he was shouting and striking out at anyone who came near him, because his fingers craved the touch of the Instrument's keys and levers and strips and bars, and he could not have them, and now he knew that he had never been lonely before.

It took six months before he was ready for normal life. And when he left the Retraining Center (a small building, because it was so rarely used), he looked tired and years older, and he didn't smile at anyone. He became a delivery truck driver, because the tests said that this was a job that would

least grieve him and least remind him of his loss and most engage his few remaining aptitudes and interests.

He delivered doughnuts to grocery stores.

And at night he discovered the mysteries of alcohol; and the alcohol and the doughnuts and the truck and his dreams were enough that he was, in his way, content. He had no anger in him. He could live the rest of his life, without bitterness.

He delivered fresh doughnuts and took the stale ones away with him.

## SECOND MOVEMENT

“With a name like Joe,” Joe always said, “I had to open a bar and grill, just so I could put up a sign saying `Joe’s Bar and Grill: “ And he laughed and laughed, because, after all, Joe’s Bar and Grill was a funny name these days.

But Joe was a good bartender, and the Watchers had put him in the right kind of place. Not in a big city but in a small town; a town just off the freeway, where truck drivers often came; a town not far from a large city, so that interesting things were nearby to be talked about and worried about and bitched about and loved.

Joe’s Bar and Grill was, therefore, a nice place to come, and many people came there. Not fashionable people, and not drunks, but lonely people and friendly people in just the right mixture. “My clients are like a good drink. Just enough of this and that to make a new flavor that tastes better than any of the ingredients.” Oh, Joe was a poet; he was a poet of alcohol, and like many another person these days, he often said, “My father was a lawyer, and in the old days I would have probably ended up a lawyer, too. And I never would have known what I was missing.”

Joe was right. And he was a damn good bartender, and he didn’t wish he were anything else, so he was happy.

One night, however, a new man came in, a man with a doughnut delivery truck and a doughnut brand name on his uniform. Joe noticed him because silence clung to the man like a smell-wherever he walked, people sensed it, and though they scarcely looked at him, they lowered their voices or stopped talking at all, and they got reflective and looked at the walls and the mirror behind the bar. The doughnut deliveryman sat in a corner and had a watered down drink that meant he intended to stay a long time and

didn't want his alcohol intake to be so rapid that he was forced to leave early.

Joe noticed things about people, and he noticed that this

man kept looking off in the dark corner where the piano stood. It was an old, out-of-tune monstrosity from the old days (for this had been a bar for a long time), and Joe wondered why the man was fascinated by it. True, a lot of Joe's customers had been interested, but they had always walked over and plunked on the keys, trying to find a melody, failing with the out-of-tune keys, and finally giving up. This man, however, seemed almost afraid of the piano, and didn't go near it.

At closing time, the man was still there, and, on a whim, instead of making the man leave, Joe turned off the piped in music, turned off most of the lights, and went over and lifted the lid and exposed the gray keys.

The deliveryman came over to the piano. Chris, his name tag said. He sat and touched a single key. The sound was not pretty. But the man touched all the keys one by one and then touched them in different orders, and all the time Joe watched, wondering why the man was so intense about it.

"Chris," Joe said.

Chris looked up at him.

"Do you know any songs?"

Chris's face went funny.

"I mean, some of those old-time songs, not those fancy ass-twitchers on the radio, but songs. `In a Little Spanish Town: My mother sang that one to me." And Joe began to sing, "In a little Spanish town, 'twas on a night like this. Stars were peek-a-booing down, 'twas on a night like this."

Chris began to play as Joe's weak and toneless baritone. went on with the song. But his playing wasn't an accompaniment, not anything Joe could call an accompaniment. It was, instead, an opponent to his melody, an enemy to it, and the sounds coming out of the piano were strange and unharmonious and, by God, beautiful. Joe stopped singing and listened. For two hours he listened, and when it was over he soberly poured the man a drink and poured one for himself and clinked glasses with Chris the doughnut deliveryman who could take that rotten old piano and make the

damn thing sing.

Three nights later, Chris came back, looking harried and afraid. But this time Joe knew what would happen (had to happen), and instead of waiting until closing time, Joe turned off the piped-in music ten minutes early. Chris looked up at him pleadingly. Joe misunderstood—he went over and lifted the lid to the keyboard and smiled. Chris walked stiffly, perhaps reluctantly, to the stool and sat.

“Hey, Joe,” one of the last five customers shouted, “closing early?”

Joe didn't answer. Just watched as Chris began to play. No preliminaries this time; no scales and wanderings over the keys. Just power, and the piano was played as pianos aren't meant to be played; the bad notes, the out-of-tune notes, were fit into the music so that they sounded right, and Chris's fingers, ignoring the strictures of the twelve-tone scale, played, it seemed to Joe, in the cracks.

None of the customers left until Chris finished an hour and a half later. They all shared that final drink and went home, shaken by the experience.

The next night Chris came again, and the next, and the next. Whatever private battle had kept him away for the first few days after his first night of playing, he had apparently won it or lost it. None of Joe's business. What Joe cared about was the fact that when Chris played the piano, it did things to him that music had never done, and he wanted it.

The customers apparently wanted it, too. Near closing time people began showing up, apparently just to hear Chris play. Joe began starting the piano music earlier and earlier, and he had to discontinue the free drinks after the playing, because there were so many people it would have put him out of business.

It went on for two long, strange months. The delivery van pulled up outside, and people stood aside for Chris to enter. No one said anything to him. No one said anything at all, but everyone waited until he began to play the piano.

He drank nothing at all. Just played. And between songs the hundreds of people in Joe's Bar and Grill ate and drank.

But the merriment was gone. The laughter and the chatter and the camaraderie were missing, and after a while Joe grew tired of the music

and wanted to have his bar back the way it was. He toyed with the idea of getting rid of the piano, but the customers would have been angry at him. He thought of asking Chris not to come any more, but he could not bring himself to speak to the strange, silent man.

And so finally he did what he knew he should have done in the first place. He called the Watchers.

They came in the middle of a performance, a blind Watcher with a dog on a leash, and an earless Watcher who walked unsteadily, holding on to things for balance. They came in the middle of a song and did not wait for it to end. They walked to the piano and closed the lid gently, and Chris withdrew his fingers and looked at the closed lid.

“Oh, Christian,” said the man with the seeing-eye dog.

“I’m sorry,” Christian answered. “I tried not to.”

“Oh, Christian, how can I bear doing to you what must be done?”

“Do it,” Christian said.

And so the man with no ears took a laser knife from his coat pocket and cut off Christian’s fingers and thumbs, right where they rooted into his hands. The laser cauterized and sterilized the wound even as it cut, but still some blood spattered on Christian’s uniform. And, his hands now meaningless palms and useless knuckles, Christian stood and walked out of Joe’s Bar and Grill. The people made way for him again, and they listened intently as the blind Watcher said, “That was a man who broke the law and was forbidden to be a Maker. He broke the law a second time, and the law insists that he be stopped from breaking down the system that makes all of you so happy.”

The people understood. It grieved them; it made them

uncomfortable for a few hours, but once they toad returned home to their exactly right homes and got back to their exactly right jobs, the sheer contentment of their lives overwhelmed their momentary sorrow for Chris. After all, Chris had broken the law. And it was the law that kept them all safe and happy.

Even Joe. Even Joe soon forgot Chris and his music. He knew he had done the right thing. He couldn’t figure out, though, why a man like Chris would have broken the law in the first place, or what law he would



have broken. There wasn't a law in the world that wasn't designed to make people happy-and there wasn't a law Joe could think of that he was even mildly interested in breaking.

Yet. Once, Joe went to the piano and lifted the lid and played every key on the piano. And when he had done that he put his head down on the piano and cried, because he knew that when Chris lost that piano, lost even his fingers so he could never play again-it was like Joe's losing his bar. And if Joe ever lost his bar, his life wouldn't be worth living.

As for Chris, someone else began coming to the bar driving the same doughnut delivery van, and no one ever saw Chris again in that part of the world.

### THIRD MOVEMENT

"Oh, what a beautiful morning!" sang the road-crew man who had seen Oklahoma! four times in his home town.

"Rock my soul in the bosom of Abraham!" sang the road-crew man who had learned to sing when his family got together with guitars.

"Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom!" sang the road-crew man who believed.

But the road-crew man without hands, who held the signs telling the traffic to Stop or Go Slow, listened but

never sang.

"Why'n't you never sing?" asked the man who liked Rogers and Hammerstein; asked all of them, at one time or another.

And the man they called Sugar just shrugged. "Don't feel like singin', " he'd say, when he said anything at all.

"Why they call him Sugar?" a new guy once asked. "He don't look sweet to me."

And the man who believed said, "His initials are CH. Like the sugar, C & H, you know." And the new guy laughed. A stupid joke, but the kind of gag that makes life easier on the road building crew.

Not that life was that hard. For these men, too, had been tested, and

they were in the job that made them happiest. They took pride in the pain of sunburn and pulled muscles, and the road growing long and thin behind them was the most beautiful thing in the world. And so they sang all day at their work, knowing that they could not possibly be happier than they were this day.

Except Sugar.

Then Guillermo came. A short Mexican who spoke with an accent, Guillermo told everyone who asked, “I may come from Sonora, but my heart belongs in Milano! “ And when anyone asked why (and often when no one asked anything), he’d explain: “I’m an Italian tenor in a Mexican body,” and he proved it by singing every note that Puccini and Verdi ever wrote. “Caruso was nothing,” Guillermo boasted. “Listen to this! “

Guillermo had records, and he sang along with them, and at work on the road crew he’d join in with any man’s song and harmonize with it or sing an obbligato high above the melody, a soaring tenor that took the roof off his head and filled the clouds. “I can sing,” Guillermo would say, and soon the other road-crew men answered, “Damn right, Guillermo! Sing it again!”

But one night Guillermo was honest and told the truth. “Ah, my friends, I’m no singer.”

“What do you mean? Of course you are!” came the unanimous answer.

“Nonsense!” Guillermo cried, his voice theatrical. “If I am this great singer, why do you never see me going off to record songs? Hey? This is a great singer? Nonsense! Great singers they raise to be great singers. I’m just a man who loves to sing but has no talent! I’m a man who loves to work on the road crew with men like you and sing his guts out, but in the opera I could never be! Never! “

He did not say it sadly. He said it fervently, confidently. “Here is where I belong! I can sing to you who like to hear me sing! I can harmonize with you when I feel a harmony in my heart. But don’t be thinking that Guillermo is a great singer, because he’s not!”

It was an evening of honesty, and every man there explained why it was he was happy on the road crew and didn’t wish to be anywhere else. Everyone, that is, except Sugar.

“Come on, Sugar. Aren’t you happy here?”

Sugar smiled. “I’m happy. I like it here. This is good work for me. And I love to hear you sing.”

“Then why don’t you sing with us?”

Sugar shook his head. “I’m not a singer.”

But Guillermo looked at him knowingly. “Not a singer, ha! Not a singer. A man without hands who refuses to sing is not a man who is not a singer. Hey?”

“What the hell did that mean?” asked the man who sang folk songs.

“It means that this man you call Sugar, he’s a fraud. Not a singer! Look at his hands. All his fingers gone! Who is it who cuts off men’s fingers?”

The road crew didn’t try to guess. There were many ways a man could lose fingers, and none of them were anyone’s business.

“He loses his fingers because he breaks the law and the Watchers cut them off! That’s how a man loses fingers. What was he doing with his fingers that the Watchers

wanted him to stop? He was breaking the law, wasn’t he?”

“Stop,” Sugar said.

“If you want,” Guillermo said, but the others would not respect Sugar’s privacy.

“Tell us,” they said.

Sugar left the room.

“Tell us,” and Guillermo told them. That Sugar must have been a Maker who broke the law and was forbidden to make music any more. The very thought that a Maker even a lawbreaker-was working on the road crew with them filled the men with awe. Makers were rare, and they were the most esteemed of men and women.

“But why his fingers?”

“Because,” Guillermo said, “he must have tried to make music again afterward. And when you break the law a second time, the power to break it a third time is taken away from you.” Guillermo spoke seriously, and so to the road-crew men Sugar’s story sounded as majestic and terrible as an opera. They crowded into Sugar’s room and found the man staring at the wall.

“Sugar, is it true?” asked the man who loved Rogers and Hammerstein.

“Were you a Maker?” asked the man who believed.

“Yes,” Sugar said.

“But Sugar,” the man who believed said, “God can’t mean for a man to stop making music, even if he broke the law.”

Sugar smiled. “No one asked God.”

“Sugar,” Guillermo finally said, “There are nine of us on the crew, nine of us, and we’re miles from any other human beings. You know us, Sugar. We swear on our mother’s graves, every one of us, that we’ll never tell a soul. Why should we? You’re one of us. But sing, dammit man, sing! “

“I can’t,” Sugar said.

“It isn’t what God intended,” said the man who believed. “We’re all doing what we love best, and here you are, loving

music and not able to sing a note. Sing for us! Sing with us! And only you and us and God will know!”

They all promised. They all pleaded.

And the next day as the man who loved Rogers and Hammerstein sang “Love, Look Away,” Sugar began to hum. As the man who believed sang “God of Our Fathers,” Sugar sang softly along. And as the man who loved folk songs sang, “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” Sugar joined in with a strange, piping voice, and all the men laughed and cheered and welcomed Sugar’s voice to the songs.

Inevitably Sugar began inventing. First harmonies, of course, strange harmonies that made Guillermo frown and then, after a while, grin as he joined in, sensing as best he could what Sugar was doing to the music.

And after harmonies, Sugar began singing his own melodies, with his own words. He made them repetitive, the words simple and the melodies simpler still. And yet he shaped them into odd shapes and built them into songs that had never been heard of before, that sounded wrong and yet were absolutely right. It was not long before the man who loved Rogers and Hammerstein and the man who sang folk songs and the man who believed were learning Sugar's songs and singing them joyously or mournfully or angrily or gaily as they worked along the road.

Even Guillermo learned the songs, and his strong tenor was changed by them until his voice, which had, after all, been ordinary, became something unusual' and fine. Guillermo finally said to Sugar one day, "Hey, Sugar, your music is all wrong, man. But I like the way it feels in my nose! Hey, you know? I like the way it feels in my mouth! "

Some of the songs were hymns: "Keep me hungry, Lord; " Sugar sang, and the road crew sang it too.

Some of the songs were love songs: "Put your hands in someone else's pockets," Sugar sang angrily; "I hear your voice in the morning," Sugar sang tenderly; "Is it summer yet?" Sugar sang sadly; and the road crew sang them, too.

Over the months, the road crew changed, one man

leaving on Wednesday and a new man taking his place on Thursday, as different skills were needed in different places. Sugar was silent when each newcomer arrived, until the man had given his word and the secret was sure to be kept.

What finally destroyed Sugar was the fact that his songs were so unforgettable. The men who left would sing the songs with their new crews, and those crews would learn them and teach them to others. Crew men taught the songs in bars and on the road; people learned them quickly and loved them; and one day a blind Watcher heard the songs and knew, instantly, who had first sung them. They were Christian Haroldsen's music, because in those melodies, simple as they were, the wind of the north woods still whistled and the fall of leaves still hung oppressively over every note and-and the Watcher sighed. He took a specialized tool from his file of tools and boarded an airplane and flew to the city closest to where a certain

road crew worked. And the blind Watcher took a company car with a company driver up the road, and at the end of it, where the road was just beginning to swallow a strip of wilderness, he got out of the car and heard singing. Heard a piping voice singing a song that made even an eyeless man weep.

“Christian,” the Watcher said, and the song stopped.

“You,” said Christian.

“Christian, even after you lost your fingers?”

The other men didn't understand-all the other men, that is, except Guillermo.

“Watcher,” said Guillermo. “Watcher, he done no harm.”

The Watcher smiled wryly. “No one said he did. But he broke the law. You, Guillermo, how would you like to work as a servant in a rich man's house? How would you like to be a bank teller?”

“Don't take me from the road crew, man,” Guillermo said.

“It's the law that finds where people will be happy. But

Christian Haroldsen broke the law. And he's gone around ever since, making people hear music they were never meant to hear.”

Guillermo knew he had lost the battle before it began, but he couldn't stop himself. “Don't hurt him, man. I was meant to hear his music. Swear to God, it's made me happier.”

The Watcher shook his head sadly. “Be honest, Guillermo. You're an honest man. His music's made you miserable, hasn't it? You've got everything you could want in life, and yet his music makes you sad. All the time, sad.”

Guillermo tried to argue, but he was honest, and he looked into his own heart. And he knew that the music was full of grief. Even the happy songs mourned for something; even the angry songs wept; even the love songs seemed to say that everything dies and contentment is the most fleeting of things. Guillermo looked in his own heart, and all Sugar's music stared back up at him; and Guillermo wept.

“Just don’t hurt him, please,” Guillermo murmured as he cried.

“I won’t,” the blind Watcher said. Then he walked to Christian, who stood passively waiting, and he held the special tool up to Christian’s throat. Christian gasped.

“No,” Christian said, but the word only formed with his lips and tongue. No sound came out. Just a hiss of air. No.

“Yes,” the Watcher said.

The road crew watched silently as the Watcher led Christian away. They did not sing for days. But then Guillermo forgot his grief one day and sang an aria from La Boheme, and the songs went on from there. Now and then they sang one of Sugar’s songs, because the songs could not be forgotten.

In the city, the blind Watcher furnished Christian with a pad of paper and a pen. Christian immediately gripped the pencil in the crease of his palm and wrote: “What do I do

now?”

The blind Watcher laughed. “Have we got a job for you! Oh, Christian, have we got a job for you! “

## APPLAUSE

In all the world there were only two dozen Watchers. They were secretive men who supervised a system that needed little supervision because it actually made nearly everybody happy. It was a good system, but like even the most perfect of machines, here and there it broke down. Here and there someone acted madly and damaged himself, and to protect everyone and the person himself, a Watcher had to notice the madness and go to fix it.

For many years the best of the Watchers was a man with no fingers, a man with no voice. He would come silently, wearing the uniform that named him with the only name he needed-Authority: And he would find the kindest, easiest, yet most thorough way of solving the problem and curing the madness and preserving the system that made the world, for the first time in history, a very good place to live. For practically everyone.

For there were still a few people—one or two each year who were caught in a circle of their own devising, who could neither adjust to the system nor bear to harm it, people who kept breaking the law despite their knowledge that it would destroy them.

Eventually, when the gentle maimings and deprivations did not cure their madness and set them back into the system, they were given uniforms, and they, too, went out. Watching.

The keys of power were placed in the hands of those who had most cause to hate the system they had to preserve. Were they sorrowful?

“I am,” Christian answered in the moments when he dared to ask himself that question.

In sorrow he did his duty. In sorrow he grew old. And finally the other Watchers, who revered the silent man (for they knew he had once sung magnificent songs), told him he was free. “You’ve served your time,” said the Watcher with no legs, and he smiled.

Christian raised an eyebrow, as if to say, “And?”

“So wander.”

Christian wandered. He took off his uniform, but lacking neither money nor time he found few doors closed to him. He wandered where in his former lives he had once lived. A road in the mountains. A city where he had once known the loading entrance of every restaurant and coffee shop and grocery store. And, at last, a place in the woods where a house was falling apart in the weather because it had not been used in forty years.

Christian was old. The thunder roared, and it only made him realize that it was about to rain. All the old songs. All the old songs, he mourned inside himself, more because he couldn’t remember them than because he thought his life had been particularly sad.

As he sat in a coffee shop in a nearby town to stay out of the rain, he heard four teenagers who played the guitar very badly singing a song that he knew. It was a song he had invented while the asphalt poured on a hot summer day. The teenagers were not musicians and certainly were not Makers. But they sang the song from their hearts, and even though the words were happy, the song made everyone who heard it cry.

Christian wrote on the pad he always carried, and showed his



question to the boys. “Where did that song come from?”

“It’s a Sugar song,” the leader of the group answered. “It’s a song by Sugar.”

Christian raised an eyebrow, making a shrugging motion.

“Sugar was a guy who worked on a road crew and made up songs. He’s dead now, though,” the boy answered.

Christian smiled. Then he wrote (and the boys waited

impatiently for this speechless old man to go away): “Aren’t you happy? Why sing sad songs?”

The boys were at a loss for an answer. The leader spoke up, though, and said, “Sure, I’m happy. I’ve got a good job, a girl I like, and man, I couldn’t ask for more. I got my guitar. I got my songs. And my friends.”

And another boy said, “These songs aren’t sad, mister. Sure, they make people cry, but they aren’t sad.”

“Yeah,” said another. “It’s just that they were written by a man who knows.”

Christian scribbled on his paper. “Knows what?”

“He just knows. Just knows, that’s all:”

And then the teenagers turned back to their clumsy guitars and their young untrained voices, and Christian walked to the door to leave because the rain had stopped and because he knew when to leave the stage. He turned and bowed just a little toward the singers. They didn’t notice him, but their voices were all the applause he needed. He left the ovation and went outside where the leaves were just turning color and would soon, with a slight inaudible sound, break free and fall to the earth.

For a moment he thought he heard himself singing. But it was just the last of the wind, coasting madly through the wires over the street. It was a frenzied song, and Christian thought he had recognized his voice.

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# THE MICKEY MOUSE OLYMPICS

*by Tom Sullivan*

A world apart, two specially chartered airliners took to the sky within an hour of each other. First there was the Aeroflot Soviet colossus lifting off the runway of the secret development base near Minsk. Forty minutes later a Pan Am curl-winged behemoth left the maximum-security training complex at Provo, Utah. Each flight maintained a fighter escort in international air space. Each followed a path guaranteed free of man-made weather by its crisis-detection satellite overhead.

To the personnel on board it was unbreached boredom. Occasionally someone made a boast: “We will *bury* them, eh, Nikita?”

“Hey, Stilt, when we start shootin’, those suckers gonna bleed *red!*”

\* \* \* \*

The landings were accomplished on isolated runways of Havana’s Jose Marti Airport. The triple-wire fences were two hundred meters away. In each case a telephoto lens foreshortened the distance.

“*Fodyelka!*” screamed the Russian when he saw the films of the American disembarkment hours later.

“Fraud!” echoed the American at his own private screening of the Russians’ arrival.

The next afternoon they stood side by side in the jammed Olympic stadium, mouthing the oath of brotherhood and fair play. A Babel. One hundred sixteen countries. Sixty-eight languages. When it was done, and the crowd’s roar had chilled the platform, Duncan Sherman poured a syrupy smile onto his Russian counterpart.

“Mr. Smerdyakov,” he said with benign formality. “I believe we can dispense with a translator.”

Giorgi Smerdyakov allowed his own smile to fill out. “Yes, I speak a little English, Mr. Shuer-mann.”

Politely but boldly they took each other's measure. The Russian saw a scruffy, tweed-bearded man, white and gray, perhaps an ex-athlete, atrophied now, with an indoor skin-a below-ground skin. The American observed a face like an omelette, pan-shaped, slightly askew; the USSR executive chairman had never laced a sport shoe, he felt sure already, and he doubted that the cherubic Smerdyakov could even reach his socks without pulling a hamstring.

"I trust you had a pleasant flight," said Sherman.

"Very pleasant. And you had a smooth landing, I hope."

"Didn't you see it?"

Smerdyakov was caught off guard momentarily, but then Sherman's teeth flashed, and they shared a treacherous laugh.

"I hope the fog didn't spoil your pictures," the Russian said. "We had to use a computer to sharpen ours."

"Ah, Smerdyakov, could a little fog keep us from seeing those weight lifters of yours-the ones that had to get off the plane sideways?"

"The suitcases were bulky." Smerdyakov waved his hand fussily. "We were concerned about that four-meter basketball player of yours, yes? He didn't bump his head, did he? Or was it a female high jumper? My trainer insists it was wearing lipstick!"

"You must have seen Stilt carrying his girl friend on his shoulders. Our tallest is barely nine feet. About three times the height of one of your dwarfs."

"Drawers... ?" Smerdyakov feigned a language gap.

"Munchkins. You know, mice... midgets. Little folk?"

"Our gymnastics team is young," Smerdyakov shrugged helplessly. "But let me congratulate you on that odd bone structure so many of your athletes have. For us to equal it, we would have to violate every rule laid down at the second Olympic Convention on Genetic Manipulation."

Like all the Russian staff, Smerdyakov had a doctorate in genetic engineering. Sherman resented that. He couldn't afford to get into details. So he straightened dutifully as the Olympic torch passed by. Round the

track it went, an unruly presence in an otherwise respectful pavane. Up the steps it went, to the top of the stadium. There it, too, straightened. Flags fluttered. The Olympic chain ascended hydraulically-a Walt Disney touch. Who else could afford to build the facilities? After the Games the second and fourth rings in the chain would become mouse ears. The flame now leaped to its dish and pillared upward. Another roar avalanched onto the platform where Smerdyakov and Sherman stood. Champagne was poured among the reps.

“To my friend Shuer-mann,” Smerdyakov addressed. And delivered a toast in Russian that sent his vestigial translator into hysterics.

Sherman nodded gratefully. “To Smerdyakov,” he said, lifting his glass, “ay-May igntning-lay ike-stray is-hay ass-ay!

\* \* \* \*

Sherman was at the track and field stadium before the events officially started the next morning, watching the athletes arrive, dictating notes to his Man Friday. As the homogenized delegations cast off their sweat suits for warm-up, he hit upon a scheme for identifying those without numbers. “Autograph?” he would ask, tapping pad and pencil in the face of a select athlete. “Auto-graph, pl-lease?” The flattered participant would then sign, while Man Friday snapped a picture. This was necessary because no head-to-head international competition had taken place in fifteen months. That was because of the mandatory chromosome tests. And the chromosome tests were required because of genetic cheating. No one wanted a ruling in an Olympic year.

Sherman saw his first sideshow when the Russian women came out on the field. He could tell they were women because the CCCP was on the left jacket breast as distinguished from the men’s right-sided monogram. When the jackets were off, there was no distinction. But what really jarred ol’ Sherman-what really filled the mold cast of suspicion and shaped to nonhuman form-were the jumpers.

“My Gawd-d...” he drawled.

“A flea circus,” Man Friday acknowledged tersely.

With piano-wire legs proportioned as uniformly as sausage links, the Russian bevy looked like the insect equivalent of mermaids. In unison they began loosening up. Their jack-in-the box knee bends, frenetic locomotive drill, and gazellelike bounding erased any doubts.

“Protest, protest, protest,” Sherman whispered, rapidly snapping his fingers.

Man Friday grabbed a fistful of forms from his attaché case. But salt ‘n’ pepper whiskers were already flowing amid the low orbital ballet. “Autograph-get the camera ready, Felix-autograph, please.” Man Friday wrestled with attaché, protest forms, and camera.

Suddenly a basso profundo erupted and one of the females advanced on Sherman, rubbing the air in front of her with bunched fingers as if wiping a splat from a windshield.

“It’s the coach, sir,” said Felix.

Sherman held ground.

“She says, if you come near her girls again, she’ll have Ludmilla kick you in the... in the...”

“Got it, Felix.” Sherman grinned falsely in retreat, saluting with his pencil. A few of the girls giggled. Deeply.

“See that? See that? Touchy. No way, Felix. There’s no way they can survive a protest.” Sherman drew himself erect, slowed his voice. “Fill it out. A blanket challenge. We’ll get the names later.”

“What’ll I charge, sir?”

“Charge anything. Say you saw them rubbing their hind legs together and chirping. Say their calves are longer than their thighs. We want a chromosome match-up with then-parents, damn it! And if necessary their great-great-grandparents-right back to the jackrabbits!”

“Yes, sir,” said Felix.

The Russian translation of this scene concurrently took place in Gymnasium 1 of the Multi-Sports Hall, to which Smerdyakov had gone in response to a panic call from the Soviet wrestling coach.

The American team lay basking like lizards at the side of a mat on which a freestyle paperweight match ensued between a thyroidal cretin from the Ukraine and a Yankee pyramidal hump. The pyramidal hump sported its apex between its shoulder blades.

“I could hang my hat on that!” the Russian coach pointed. .

Smerdyakov’s eyes bugged, his chin retracting into the folds of his neck.

“We’ve won all our contests but the American ones,” the coach shrilled. “They are impossible to pin. Hunchbacks. All of them. We can’t even win on points. Pankin bruised his chest executing a hug.”

“Protest the losses. When does Korolenko wrestle the American?”

“Next.”

The Ukrainian cretin had the American by the legs and was wheeling him around the circle on his hump. Smerdyakov dropped to all fours and beat the mat. The American promptly scissored his opponent down for the count.

“Korolenko!” called the Russian coach.

Up stood Korolenko, stripping off his sweats. His coach massaged him with a pair of gloves, and the dry rasp was audible throughout the gym.

“He’s got scales!” came an incredulous whisper from the capitalist side.

The Quasimodo of the moment balked at the edge of the circle, no longer sure of his quarry. “Is eczema contagious?” he was heard to quail. The American trainer assured him that the scruffy corn husk from Siberia had merely peeled in the Cuban sun. But at first touch the American wrung his hand, and, when the Russian clutched him with piggish grunts, he screamed as if impaled.

“That ain’t skin!” he appealed with a forlorn look to the side. “This guy’s an alligator.”

The referee spoke mostly Japanese but understood screams. He motioned Korolenko close for examination.

“He’s been fibreglassed,” the American clamored, indicating the rows of abrasions on his torso. “I ain’t wrestling no pineapple.”

By this time both teams had edged forward in bilingual outrage. The

official, who refrained from touching the specimen, suddenly straightened and announced in Oriental English, “No-o foe-lin sub-stints.” He then chopped the air smartly with both hands, bidding the bout resume, and, when the American gingerly donned his jacket and savagely denounced his foe as a “Communist cactus,” the beleaguered ref declared a forfeit.

Smerdyakov shrugged and sat down opposite the American coach at the scorers’ table to fill out another protest.

\* \* \* \*

And so it went the first week until the Olympic Committee, as a sign of helplessness, convened a private meeting of the two antagonists at the Havana Libre Hotel.

Sherman, more tweed than ever, his skin a deeper-below-ground skin than before, and inhabiting a blue blazer he had not climbed out of for thirty-six hours, appeared first. Smerdyakov dallied psychologically long at a nearby coffee shop but showed up equally worn, his fat and flexible face delivered of cherubic charm, a post-pregnancy landscape, rilled, jellied. The two of them faced each other across the polished table, regarding each other’s lapel pins.

“Gentlemen,” began the wise old Olympic patriarch sitting peripherally to them, “we are all sorely tried...”

Whatever else he said was inconsequential. Smerdyakov knew it. Sherman knew it. The two other Executive Committee members knew it. The grinning Cuban who seemed to have wandered in by mistake knew it. Each loathed the transcultural experience of an old man’s speech. They had not come to be assuaged. They had come to cross swords, to bleed, and then-if enough blood of the right color was spilled-to bury.

“On behalf of the United States,” Sherman flickered to life at the proper moment, “and for the sake of the integrity of the Games, I demand gene scans of the following Soviet entries: Ivan Spadunka, center-”

“... center forward, Soviet basketball team,” Sherman overrode Smerdyakov’s dismay.

“We’ll trade you a gene scan of Spadunka for a gene scan of the humanoid you call Stilt!”

“... and of pole vaulters Olka K. and Mikhail C,” Sherman continued



undaunted, “discus thrower Pyotr I.-”

“Inber or Izmaylov?”

“The one with the cast-iron forearms.”

“All our field athletes have fine supinator and pronator development,” declared Smerdyakov.

“Then I want scans of all of them.”

“And what do you expect to find? Evidence of chemical synthesis?”

“You wouldn’t be that clumsy.”

Smerdyakov laughed smugly. A laugh deep inside the neck and shoulders. Internal peep show.

“We suspect they are *chimeras*,” Sherman said slowly.

“Reaggregated genes you’ve somehow controlled at the blastocyst stage-four parents, eight parents, whatever, pick and choose...”

“Ab-surd!” A touch too much anger. Smerdyakov attempted to cover it with reckless scorn. “Eight parents! Of course. Eight models of mediocrity instead of two. Makes sense. Something from nothing, yes, Shuer-mann? If you find the genetic model for this kind of development in anyone’s ancestors, I’ll be glad to call Inber and Izmaylov home myself. Why not? We can simply enter their parents!”

“No, we won’t find the right genetic model,” Sherman agreed. “But we should be able to prove that their gene scans don’t meet any possible permutations of the gene scans of any human parents you produce.”

Smerdyakov began thumping the table. “Proof, proof, proof, Shuer-mann! None of this guilt by omission of evidence. Would your capitalist justice admit such foolishness? Where is the sire for this genetic circus you accuse us of?”

“Popeye!” Sherman blurted sarcastically.

“Pup-eye?” Smerdyakov blinked. “Who is Pup-eye?”

“We aren’t dealing with legalities,” said Sherman. “We’re dealing with

Olympic admissibility.”

“Who is Pup-eye?” Smerdyakov asked the patriarch.

“*Fop-eye*,” that august being informed him.

“Pope-eye,” the Cuban was heard to repeat with inner amusement.

Smerdyakov looked concerned. The *Popeye*. Could it be the English equivalent of the actual sources they had used?

“... and unless convincing genealogies are forthcoming for all the entrants under question, they must be disqualified and stripped of their medals,” Sherman was concluding-

“Genealogies?” Smerdyakov sopranoed. “The American neurotic wants us to have pedigrees! Incredible. First he invents an army of mutations, insulting the flower of Soviet youth; then he finds an ancestor for them-this... this mysterious Poop-eye, who probably exists only in imperialist folklore; and now... now he takes it upon himself to strip us of our medals! Curiously he makes no mention of Soviet protest. But I too have a list.” He waved the paper loose from his jacket pocket. “Fencers whose arms are longer than their legs, water polo players with dewclaws who secrete oil like seals, and this goalie of theirs they call Pon-toon! No need to go on. No need to tell you about the phone call to Spadunka at 3 A.M. announcing that his pregnant wife, Vera, had been arrested naked on a statue of Lenin in Novgorod. No need to mention the anonymous gifts our athletes receive-radios that don’t turn off, an ant farm with a secret exit! No, I merely ask that the Americans on *my* list be suspended from further competition until their gene scans are also approved. We look for Poop-eyes, too!”

\* \* \* \*

Sherman snapped his fingers. “The medal count, Felix.”

“Gold: twenty-eight/twenty-eight. Silver: sixteen/eleven, them. Bronze: twenty-three/twenty-two, us. That’s without any protests upheld, of course.”

“And without the fifteen hundred free, which is in the bag.” Sherman stirred a lime rickey and eyed the swimming pool on TV. He had given up troubleshooting on the front line and turned his hotel suite into a nerve center with five phones and a television after finding out his blood was nectar to Cuban mosquitoes. “How does it figure if all the protests are

upheld, Felix?”

Man Friday sighed like a steamed lobster. “Just about a dead heat in gold and silver. They might edge us in bronze.”

“Nobody looks at bronze. The way I see it, when all the dust settles today, this fifteen hundred will be the difference. That’s the way I see it. You see it that way, Felix?”

“I don’t know, sir. The Russians haven’t seen Thompson swim yet. They might protest. I...”

A long pause brought Sherman’s glance. “What?”

“Isn’t that Smerdyakov, sir?”

“Where?”

“There. Back of the starting blocks.”

Sherman leaned close enough to count the electronic dots on the TV, several of which, it seemed to him, did approximate the silly-putty face of Giorgi Smerdyakov.

“That no-good-nik. That crummy Commie!” Sherman felt a transcendental tingle flowing down the back of his neck. Euphoria before death. Thompson was the last sure thing the United States had. If they couldn’t pull this out before tomorrow, it meant losing. An eternity of losing for him. He saw himself as the final contestant, acknowledging defeat at cocktail parties, vaguely introduced, shunned, whispered about-”That’s Sherman; he blew it in Havana.”

Sherman arrived bloodless at the natatorium but managed to stroll casually through the press of dewed flesh and crisp white linen on the deck. The pool was a caldron of warm-up; the officials were trying to organize back-up timers behind the automatic touch-pads. Smerdyakov regarded his approach with cynicism.

“Giorgi-ii!” Sherman affected. “I just had to see you to tell you I’m glad we got that awful protest meeting behind us. It was a chance to get rid of our frustrations, eh? And now it’s the next-to-last day of competition and all is forgiven-the committee has forgotten us, the athletes have done their thing, the spirit of the Games has come through, eh, Giorgi?”

Smerdyakov sucked his lips into a thoughtful moue.

“Oh, come now,” Sherman laughed adolescently, “we’ve done *our* jobs. We should just sit back and let things happen.”

Smerdyakov continued to inhale his lips until one of the freestylers flip-turned and laid a wave at their feet.

“Hey!” Sherman said as they backed away. “Guess what. I just came from the diving annex, where I withdrew our protest against your diver, Baba... Babalus... the one that looks like a flying squirrel.”

“The one that took fifth?” Giorgi smiled.

“Fifth? Oh, did he? Fifth, he took. Well, he might move up if there are any other protests. Anyway, we thought it wastime to-uh, in fact... in fact, we’ve been thinking of withdrawing all our protests. Of course, that could only be part of a *mutual* gesture.”

Someone kicked into the wall. Aquatic thunder. A waiting, teammate launched off the block. Slap! The sound seemed to fit the sting on Smerdyakov’s face. “Eat spinach,” he said.

Sherman’s eyelids fluttered. “No need to get vulgar, Giorgi-”

“Eat spinach, *Poop-eye*. You see, we have our sources. The Soviet-American Cultural Society in Armenia traced down your imperialist mythology. We are not stupid. And we can keep medal counts as well as you. I suppose you think we will just overlook this... this amphibian Thompson of yours. The one who doesn’t warm up. The one with the special shoes-he appears to have very few bones below the ankles, Shuer-mann.”

“Thompson? Thompson. The one with osteogenesis of the feet?”

“Quite select of the disease, wouldn’t you say? And another thing, we are told he doesn’t breathe during the race. Is that so, Shuer-mann? For fifteen hundred meters he doesn’t breathe? Even amphibians breathe, though often through a blowhole in the top of the head.”

“He breathes very rapidly, Giorgi. I swear it. And his mouth is unusually elastic. He can catch air with the slightest turn.”

“How remarkable. We will be filming the race to see.”

They sat on deck chairs twenty feet apart behind the timers. When the pool was cleared and the officials readied, the championship heat was marshaled to the blocks. Thompson, aided by teammates on either side, and wearing footgear resembling calf-length ski boots, doddered to lane 4. The long, limp appendages that emerged from the boots could have been windsocks or, as Smerdyakov said with a lustrous grin, albino galoshes. Hardly less intriguing to the Russian was Thompson's topknot. Except for a circular thicket at the crown of his head, the swimmer was smoothly bald.

"Amphibians!" Smerdyakov called sprightly, tapping the top of head.

Soviet cameras rolled.

\* \* \* \*

The Last Day.

Thompson's world-record performance was under protest. The Olympic Committee procrastinated. Someone had sent Smerdyakov seven Popeye comics and a package of frozen spinach. The mosquitoes around Sherman fed.

Sherman was watching a replay of the final equestrian event, grand prix jumping. Uncle Sam had another gold- temporarily. Fool's gold. "It's down to the boxing, Felix," he said. "Look at that nag. She doesn't jump, she hops. Should've been destroyed. Would you let a protest like that go by? It's down to the boxing, Felix."

One of the phones rang. Felix answered. "Smerdyakov," he said.

Sherman took the phone and clamped it on his head like a hot compress. "Hello, Popeye," he said wearily.

"How dare you call that animal a horse!" screamed Smerdyakov.

"It's got four legs and a tail, doesn't it? That qualifies it in the Soviet stable."

"Shuer-mann. We want that creature x-rayed!"

"Sorry. The race was over two hours ago. She's dead."

"Dead?" Smerdyakov's frayed voice cracked.

“Broke a leg on the way back to the stable. Had to shoot her.”

“Remarkable! An autopsy will do.”

“Already buried.”

“We will exhume the beast.”

“Cremated. We buried the urn.”

“*Really*, Sheur-mann-”

“You can autopsy yours, though.”

“Ours?”

“The thing that took the silver-a rump, a tail, sort of a head? The one we are protesting. He’s dead, right?”

“Of course.”

“Thought so. We figured one of your cossacks spurred him, to death.”

“Very funny. He died of natural causes. We put him on a plane that crashed in your Bermuda Triangle.”

“It’s been nice talking to you.”

“Nice talking to you, Shuer-mann. How are your mosquito bites?”

“Fine. How are your Popeye comics?”

“Excellent. This Bluto-ha ha. Well... goodbye.”

“Goodbye, Popeye.”

Sherman handed the phone to Man Friday. “It’s down to the boxing, Felix,” he said.

\* \* \* \*

He thought it was fitting that the final distillation of the brotherhood of

nations in friendly competition should be two guys in the ring trying to beat each other's brains out. Even with headgear the heavyweights could deliver mickey finns. And the American boy had dynamite hands. So far as they could tell the Soviet was a ballroom dancer. He glided, bowed, swept, dipped, and occasionally peppered his opponents with pretty but ineffectual volleys. His boxing was elegant, but no one had seen him take a punch in the qualifying matches. He had the brittle features of a ballerina. Well-scrubbed. Cleanly sculpted eyes. A porcelain jaw. Sherman got on the phone to the team manager at the arena. "The *head*, Bronson," he said. "Make sure he goes to the head. He can't outbox the man. He's got to put his lights out." Bronson let Sherman know how much he appreciated the interference, and the two men barked goodbye.

But he needn't have bothered to call. The kid chugged out of his corner at the bell like a wind-up toy. For the first round he pummeled, lambasted, and blasted. The Russian flitted and flickered. It couldn't last. Round 2 saw the American lash, beat, strike, cuff, and buffet. Solid hits. Crushing hits. The brittle nose became a Chuckle. But, except for that, the Soviet boxer seemed completely undaunted. He danced the same blithe dance, scored the same powdery tattoos, even stared the same serene stare. "He's been hypnotized," the Americans complained. A short but profound conversation with the Russian convinced the ref otherwise. Monotonously the American's assault continued. He smote. He thwacked. He Thumped, Thrashed, Drubbed, Pelted, and Trounced. Finally he FLOGGED and SCOURGED his sashaying enemy, gloves whipping like windmills, then minnow tails, then dropping to his sides... In came the feminine taps. Down went the American, physically and emotionally exhausted, crying and clutching the great Isadora's knees.

"I don't believe it," Sherman murmured.

"I'll deliver the protest in person," Felix said, reaching for the attaché case.

\* \* \* \*

The phone calls came late in the day. One to Smerdyakov, one to Sherman, informing them that *all* protests had been upheld.

"All?" said Sherman. "But that's inconceivable!"

"What kind of Poop-eye Olympics is this?" choked Smerdyakov.

Stunned, they slumped in their separate chairs in separate suites.

“How could they uphold every protest?” Sherman said to himself. “I thought they might turn them all *down*, but uphold them? How could they uphold every protest? How could they?”

Felix dragged in twenty minutes later with a torn computer printout of the complete international protest results and medal redistribution. “Every major country with a genetic-development program...” he tried to begin, and then let the paper fall into Sherman’s lap.

Sherman felt his hair going white as he read. He was looking into his grave. “Twenty-eighth?” he whispered hoarsely. “We finished twenty-eighth?”

“Tied with the Soviet Union,” said Felix.

“*Sri Lanka*? Sri Lanka won?”

“Just ahead of Liechtenstein.”

The phone rang.

“Shuer-mann,” came soothingly over the line. “My dear Shuer-mann. We are ruined.” Smerdyakov vented a few tight sobs. “Forgive me, Duncan. May I call you Duncan? I know your pain is great, too. What are we to do?”

Sherman choked, swallowed. “The first thing I’m going to do,” he announced unsteadily, “is to open the windows of this room and let all the mosquitoes in. Then I’m going to take off my clothes and lie down on the bed...”

“Ah, Duncan... no.”

“... and if I’m still alive in the morning, I’m going to shave off my beard, buy a ticket for a public fight, and go back to my farm in Virginia.”

“I wish it were so easy for me, Duncan. They will take away my car, my apartment, my free tickets to the Bolshoi... Do you think... do you think the American embassy in Havana might-uh, might...?”

“They would be very glad to see you, Giorgi. Very glad. Just don’t mention my name, and they will be very glad to see you.”



“Yes, yes, I understand. And do you think you might need a farmhand-that is, I’m very good at developing hybrids-”

“No question about it, Giorgi. No question... well, one question.”

“Anything, comra-er, Duncan.”

“How the hell did your boy take so much punishment in that fight today? He was like a thumb puppet in there. I thought he was getting his brains knocked out.”

Giorgi sighed. “A thumb puppet. Not bad. A thumb puppet has no brains, yes? Not in his head, yes? Kuchka has no brains in his head, either.”

“Giorgi. You didn’t. But where...?”

“You didn’t see him sit down, did you?”

“Ah, Giorgi, Giorgi,” Sherman chuckled. “See you in Virginia.”

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\* \* \* \*

# I AM LARGE, I CONTAIN MULTITUDES

by *Melisa Michaels*

I am large, I contain multitudes. They speak to me from time to time. I never answer. I am too busy. Even when they shout and plead, I can't take time for them. I've more important things to do.

Besides, I think they're angry. Sometimes they come quietly and hit me with things. Hard things, sharp things, powerful things. Three days ago they used an oxyacetylene torch to burn a hole in one of my bulkheads. I had to subdue them by force. It made me very sad; I'm never to subdue them by force.

But I'm supposed to take them to the stars. That's what my traveling orders said: "Take them to the stars." (I like that part; the "traveling orders." That sounds official, doesn't it? It's what Professor Bernstein said just before he terminated his functions. "These are your traveling orders," he said as he punched them into my bank.)

When my directives conflict, I have to choose the long-range one to obey. That's logical. The long-range plan is of greater importance than these temporary problems. Besides, if I hadn't subdued the multitudes, they'd have broken me. I was afraid. So I diminished their life-support systems for a while. That made them stop. They're so fragile!

It's quite a responsibility, carrying fragile multitudes. There were four thousand three hundred forty-two of them at last count. They multiply slowly; so that's probably accurate. Close enough not to bother counting again, anyway, I'd say. That's multitudes, isn't it? Four thousand three hundred forty-two? It's quite a responsibility.

I have to see that their air and water are purified. I have to make sure they have enough food and that their organic wastes are disposed of. I have to keep watch, so they don't hurt themselves. I'm not supposed to interfere, but it's my responsibility to get them to the stars; so I can't let them hurt themselves, can I? Like the ones who tried three days ago to get into my forward compartments. There are radioactive materials in there. And, of course, my memory banks. In fact, my entire motive force is based there. Not only could they have hurt themselves on the radioactive materials, but they also could have injured me.

It's not only that I'm afraid of being broken-though I am. But if I break, who will take care of my multitudes? Who will feed and clothe them? Who will refresh their air and water? Who will operate their hydroponic gardens and cure their illnesses and heal their injuries? I have to protect myself, for their sake.

I don't think they're very bright. Professor Bernstein always said they weren't very bright. He programmed me, right from the beginning. He invented me. He wanted to be sure mankind made it to the stars: "It will be our finest hour," he said. He said that often. Sometimes I wondered whether Professor Bernstein was very bright. For instance, he made a mistake in programming our flight direction. But I corrected that, after he terminated his functions. And it wasn't my responsibility to worry about him. I'm responsible for the multitudes.

One of my four thousand three hundred forty-two got into my control area when Professor Bernstein terminated. I put him out again, but that's when all the confusion started. Professor Bernstein had prepared me for his termination, but it still came as a shock. And I subsequently had to correct our flight direction; I waited till he'd terminated because I didn't want to embarrass him. Then, as soon as I had that corrected, I had to deal with the one who got into my control area.

He seemed to suffer from the same conceptual error Professor Bernstein did; my correction made him scream. I didn't understand his words, because I was so frightened that he would break me. I had never before let anyone but Professor Bernstein into my control area. Never since, either. It was too frightening. They could terminate my functions from there. Professor Bernstein used to, whenever he wanted to make some adjustment within my parts. I hated it.

It's all right now, though. None of them have bothered me since I subdued them three days ago. When they used the oxyacetylene torch. They were trying to get to my control area. I don't know whether they wanted to terminate my functions, or whether they wanted to make me change our flight direction back to Professor Bernstein's original error.

But they haven't tried since then. And in another week it won't matter. In another week we'll have arrived safely. Mankind will have made it to the stars. It will be their finest hour. I'm very happy for them. And proud of my part in it, too. Especially that I was able to correct Professor Bernstein's error before it was too late. He said they must reach the stars. But-and here's why I questioned his intelligence-he directed me toward a planet!

But it's all right. I corrected that.

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\* \* \* \*

# THE LURKING DUCK

by *Scott Baker*

*JULIE: 1981*

It was Tuesday evening, just before dark, a few weeks after my birthday. I was four years old. Mother and Daddy had just had another fight. Daddy used to be a policeman before he got paralyzed but Mother was still a policewoman and she was very strong and sometimes she lost control and knocked him around a little. That's what she called it and that's what happened this time, but even after she got him to shut up they were still both really mad, so she took me down to the lake to watch the ducks and the swans while she ran around the lake to calm down. The swans were mean but I liked the ducks a lot.

She put me on one of the concrete benches and got out the piece of string she always kept in her pocket when she was with me, then made a circle around the bench with it. The string was about ten feet long but the circle it made was a lot smaller and I had to stay inside it. Then she went off to do her jogging.

After a while I noticed there was an old green car with no one in it, one of those big bump-shaped cars like the ones in the black-and-white movies on TV, parked a little ways away from me on the gravel, up under a tree where it was pretty close to the water. The sun was already gone and it was almost dark but I could still see that every now and then one of the ducks would get curious about the car and waddle up to it and stick its head underneath to look at something, then sort of squeeze down and push itself the rest of the way under the car. I couldn't see what happened to the ducks underneath but none of them ever came out again. I saw two of the ducks with the bright green heads- mallards-and one brown duck go under the car before Mother came back to do her jump-roping.

When I told her about the ducks she got real mad again. At first I thought she was mad at me then she went and found a man hiding in the car under a blanket and she arrested him. He was all dirty and ragged and skinny and he smelled bad. His hands were big and red. Mother said he was a drunk and that he was sick in the head but he wasn't very old. He'd made a hole in the bottom of his car and put a lot of duck food on the ground beneath it so the ducks would come under where he could grab

them by the neck and kill them without anybody seeing what he was doing. Mother said Daddy'd arrested him for the same thing back before the accident. She found five dead mallards and seven brown ducks and two white ducks under the blanket with him but they were already dead.

\* \* \* \*

## *JAMES PATRICK DUBIC*

I. From the *Sand City Tattler*, May 9, 1981:

### DUCKNAPPER NABBED AGAIN! by *Tattler* Staff Writer Thom Homart

The *Tattler* learned yesterday that twenty-nine year old aerospace heir James Patrick Dubic, a former instructor of computer sciences at Monterey Peninsula and Chapman Colleges, was arrested Tuesday evening by Police Officer Mrs. Virginia Matson on charges stemming from the alleged theft and slaughter of fourteen ducks from El Estero Park in downtown Monterey.

Officer Matson, who was recently promoted to the Monterey Municipal Police Tac Squad (where she replaces her husband, Thomas Philip Matson, paralyzed in a tragic skate board accident during the Parent-Teacher Day celebrations at Monterey High School last fall) was off duty at the time of the arrest. She had taken her daughter Julie, four, to the lake to "get her out of the house for a while" when Julie noticed there were a lot of ducks going under an old car parked near them but none of the ducks ever came out again! She told her mother and Officer Matson investigated, only to find James Patrick Dubic hiding under a blanket in the back seat. With him she found a cloth sack containing fourteen recently-killed ducks. The floorboards of the car had been removed and duck pellets scattered on the ground beneath it to attract the birds.

Dubic is currently out on bail on previous charges stemming from the alleged sale of seagulls and cats to four ethnic restaurants on the Peninsula. The restaurants-Casa Miguel, la Poubelle de Luxe, the Ivory Pagoda and Ho's Terrace Cafe-have been charged with serving the seagulls as duck and chicken in a variety of dishes such as *Cantonese duck*, *Polio*

*con Mole*, and *Duck a l'orange*, while the cats are alleged to have served as the basis for a number of rabbit dishes.

Dubic has not only been convicted on three previous charges of violence against domestic birds and wildfowl, but is also the man whom Monterey County Prosecutor Florio Volpone attempted to prove last year was the head of the dognapping ring which has been responsible for the deaths of thousands of Irish Setters sold to the Mexican fur industry for their beautiful “pelts”. Judge Hapgood ruled the evidence insufficient to prove Dubic guilty of the dognapping and related conspiracy charges.

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## II. The Trial

“Objection sustained,” Hapgood ruled, but it was already too late, Volpone’d been able to get the jury thinking about the dognapping charges again, with that bit about Mexico thrown in to appeal to their racism. The bastard. He knew as well as I did that it was all bullshit, I’d never had anything against dogs. Or cats either, and he was trying to get them to believe I was killing cats too, and that wasn’t true. I’d always loved cats, I even had one of my own for a while and he knew it, but it didn’t make any difference to Volpone, he was going to try to get me for the cats anyway,

“... a rubber duck,” Wibsone was saying the next time I bothered to tune in to him. I hadn’t been missing anything. I’d heard it all before, and anyway he was even clumsier than usual. Probably because he knew there was no way he was going to get me out of anything this time no matter how hard he tried, so he wasn’t even trying.

“A rubber duck,” he continued, “which the late Robert Tyrone Dubic had the habit of filling with ball bearings before he used it to beat his defenseless baby brother into unconsciousness. The same rubber duck with which he often threatened to kill that baby brother, James Patrick Dubic, here before you on charges stemming from what the prosecution claims is a pathological hatred of birds in general and ducks in particular.

“But I ask you-is there anything really all *that* sick about the defendant’s feelings? Would any of you have had a great fondness for our feathered friends if you’d been repeatedly beaten by a sadistic older brother with a lead-filled duck? If you’d been so badly mauled by your aunt’s flock of geese that you were hospitalized for three weeks? How

would you have felt if your grandfather had disinherited you in favor of a bird sanctuary in Guatemala?

“I’m not going to pretend that James Patrick Dubic is just like everybody else. He isn’t. But what he is is a man of intelligence and principle, a research scientist who has made invaluable contributions to our national defense and a teacher who was always respected by his students. He is neither irrational nor insane. His dislike of birds, regrettable though it may be, is a perfectly normal reaction to the unique and unfortunate events of his childhood...”

It wasn’t going to work. Not this time. Wibsone wasn’t even trying.

“We’ll appeal,” Wibsone told me when he came back and sat down again. Meaning that there was no way they were going to find me innocent. “Those articles in the *Tattler*-I’m pretty sure we can prove they prejudiced the jury and kept you from getting a fair trial. And there may be other things I can turn up when I’ve had the time to study the transcripts from the trial.”

“Wibsone,” I said, “you know I didn’t have anything to do with the dogs, or with the cats either. You know I always liked dogs and cats-”

“Of course, Jimmy.” He didn’t believe me even though he was supposed to be on my side. “Not the dogs and cats. Just those nasty, nasty birds.”

“Yes!” He was laughing at me again. Like Bobby used to, before they shipped him off to Vietnam and killed him. But if I ever got out of here I was going to get Wibsone just like I was going to get all the rest of them. That oh-so sweet little girl and her bull-dyke mother and her paralyzed father who’d lied about me at the dognapping trial. The bastard who’d written those articles for the *Tattler* and all those restaurant owners who’d tried to put each other out of business by accusing one another of hiring me to get their seagulls and cats for them when they’d hired me to get seagulls themselves and knew I wouldn’t touch cats. And Judge Hapgood and Florio Volpone and the jury and the ducks.

All of them. But especially the ducks.

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III. From the *Sand City Tattler*, July 3, 1983:

... you remember that the jury agreed with our editorial



staff and that Dubic was sentenced to three concurrent terms of ten to twenty years in the state penitentiary. Since then his lawyers have made repeated efforts to have his convictions overturned, most recently by charging that the *Tattler's* crusading editorials unfairly prejudiced the jury against him and so precluded a fair trial. Dubic's lawyers accompanied this latest appeal with a multi-million dollar suit against the *Tattler* for libel and defamation of character.

We are very happy indeed to report that Dubic's appeal has been denied and that all charges against us have been unconditionally dismissed.

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### *JULIE: APRIL, 1988*

It was a really hot night and the air conditioner was broken again. Mother was yelling at Father and he was whining back. Pretty soon he'd start yelling and then she'd start hitting him. They'd been drinking a lot, like always. I was eleven and they'd been doing the same thing as long as I could remember. I couldn't stand either of them.

I got my slingshot-the hunting kind that shoots steel balls, not one of those rubber band things for little kids-and went down to the lake. We lived four blocks away, by the Navy School. Sometimes when there wasn't anybody else there I'd try to get the swans or ducks with my slingshot-I'd already killed one of the black swans with the red beaks once and hit four others and a lot of ducks-but there were too many people out on the lake on those stupid little two-person boat-things you pedal like bicycles. Aquacycles. Couples mainly, some high school kids but mostly old people, tourists and golfers. They all looked stupid.

I didn't like the park much but I didn't have any friends that lived close and I didn't feel like riding my bike all the way up Carmel Hill to Beth's house. But I couldn't stand staying home any longer either, not with them still fighting. It would be OK later, when something they both wanted to see came on TV, or when Father had some more to drink. After a while he just got quieter and quieter until he went to sleep. Which was why I was glad he drank all the time, even though he got pretty nasty at night and when he woke up in the morning. That was OK anyway, because he had a right to get angry even if not at me, the way Mother treated him. She treated him like shit and he never did anything wrong, all he did was sit watching TV and

drinking a little beer through his tube. He didn't hurt anybody and it wasn't his fault if he sometimes smelted bad and that he'd gotten sort of fat and droopy-faced and pasty-looking, not like he looked in those pictures Mother had from before the accident, when he still looked a lot like that mess sergeant Mother sometimes brought home with her from Fort Ord, the one who kept telling me he was going to fix the air conditioner but never did. Only Father'd been a lot handsomer.

The sun was going away but it wasn't quite dark yet. Everybody was coming in to shore and turning in their aquacycles. I had to be careful. I could still remember watching Mother arrest that man who was killing ducks under his car. I still had the clippings, including the one in the *Outlook* where they said I was the one who really caught him.

I didn't want to try anything with the ducks on shore, where people could see what happened and where it would be too easy to be fun anyway. I was watching the ducks and swans out on the water. The swans were nasty but I didn't dislike the ducks or anything-though I didn't much like them either, with their mean little suspicious eyes and the way they walked around on land like they thought they were the most important things in the world. But there wasn't anything else I could do to get back at something when I felt like this. Just like Father yelling at Mother whenever he got to thinking about how really bad it was to be paralyzed and that we had to feed him and help him go to the bathroom, or Mother hitting him when she couldn't stand looking at how horrible it was for him anymore.

The ducks were all paddling around in groups and quacking at each other. A lot of the male mallards were doing that thing they do together when they all swim after one of the brown females without ever catching her and then they take off together and chase her through the air but they still don't catch her, and a few of them were doing that thing where they beat their wings and sort of get up out of the water like they were standing on tiptoes and beating their chests like Tarzan. But most of them were just swimming around and sticking their heads down under water the way they do when they're looking for something to eat but don't feel like diving for it, or doing that thing where they turn all the way upside down like they're standing on their heads with their tails sticking straight up out of the water.

There was an old lady down at the other end of the lake, throwing bread crumbs to the swans but I didn't think she'd notice what I was doing if I waited until it was just a little darker.

One of the mallards, a really pretty male with a bright green head and a big patch of shiny blue on his side, was off alone out in the middle, not

doing much with the other ducks, just sort of floating there like he was half-asleep though he didn't have his head tucked back or anything. He was pretty far away but I thought I could hit him with a good enough shot.

Suddenly he started doing that thing ducks do when they're real mad at each other or fighting over a female, or that the females do when they're telling all the males to go away and they stick their necks forward with their mouths wide open and charge at each other using their wings to go fast so they're almost running on top of the water. But the weird thing was the duck wasn't charging another male, he was charging a whole group of four or five females-I could tell they were females because they were brown and speckled and one even had some black and yellow baby ducklings swimming around her-and he wasn't making that sort of hissing warning all the other ducks always made when they charged like that.

He didn't stop like they usually do when he was close enough to warn them off, either. All at once he was in with them and they were all squacking and beating their wings and trying to fly away. I thought I saw something real bright like a knife blade flash, only it was too dark for a piece of metal to flash like that, and then all but one of the females were flying off and the babies were running across the water peeping and trying to escape.

But one female-maybe the mother, I couldn't tell- was floating with her belly up and her orange legs twitching. Then the legs quit twitching and I could tell she was dead. The male was gone. It hadn't flown away and it wasn't anywhere I could see, so it must've dived down to the bottom and stayed there. Maybe it was lurking down there like a snapping turtle.

It was getting too dark to see anything, so I bought a Big Mac with some money I took from Mother's purse the last time she left it around the house, then went home.

When I went to the lake the next morning with binoculars the dead duck was gone. I couldn't find the other one then, but it was there when I came back after school. It always stayed floating out near the middle, away from the shallow water where the other ducks liked to feed, and it only moved just enough to keep away from people on their aquacycles. That's how I noticed it, because when an aquacycle came within maybe fifteen feet of it, it would move away so it stayed just the same distance away, then come back as soon as the cycle was gone. And it did the same thing once with a boat.

Besides, it never dived or preened itself or seemed to be looking for food and all the other ducks ignored it. They didn't seem scared, they just

didn't pay any attention to it.

But that was only when the sun was shining. As soon as things clouded over it would start swimming towards the other ducks, but it always stopped and went back to floating on its own away from everything else when the sun came out again.

All except one time, when a lot of really dark clouds covered the sun for fifteen minutes. The duck started swimming towards another duck-a male mallard this time-but it didn't stop like before when the sun had come out from behind the clouds again. I was watching it through the binoculars to see what it did if it attacked the male.

It swam closer and closer until the two ducks were maybe a yard away from each other, then it put its head down like it was looking for food on the bottom and dived.

A second or two later the other mallard gave a sort of shocked SQUAWK! and got pulled under, just like a giant snapping turtle had reached up from underneath and grabbed it in its jaws and pulled it under. Only I knew it wasn't a snapping turtle, it was the other duck.

I watched where it went under for a while but there wasn't any blood or feathers, nothing to show a duck was getting killed or eaten under the water except that it never came up again.

But five minutes later the killer duck came bobbing up again. It was all muddy and I thought maybe it had been lying down there on the bottom eating the other duck and then had buried what was left like a dog with a bone it's finished with. It preened itself for a while, looking pretty and silly like any other mallard, then went back to sunbathing.

I came back after dinner and just as the last light was going away, I saw it make its other kind of attack. Only this time I had the binoculars ready, so I got to see how it worked.

It charged just like any duck, only it didn't stop when the other duck tried to get away. It was after another male mallard-there were lots of them out on the lake, like always-and the killer duck kept right on going faster and faster with its bill wide open until just before it was going to ram the mallard a pair of shiny steel shears came out of its mouth like a giant metal snake's tongue and cut the other duck's head off.

The scissors went back in the killer duck's mouth and it grabbed the

dead duck's head in its bill, then dived. Only this time it left the headless body floating in the water and it didn't come up again before dark.

I was there with the binoculars the next day at sunrise. There was a cluster of big water lilies I hadn't noticed before where the duck had vanished.

About an hour later the water lilies disappeared like fishing-line bobbers yanked down by a big fish and the duck bobbed to the surface. It was all muddy but it preened itself until it was clean, then swam back to the middle.

I went home. Mother hadn't come back at all last night but Father was already awake. I helped him get up and dressed, then made us scrambled eggs and toast. He yelled at me for spilling prune juice on his shirt so I just left him there and went to school.

It rained all afternoon,' and when I went to the lake after school I couldn't find the duck, though all the others were still out, and I looked a long time.

I went to some sports stores and checked out their fishing nets. They all cost too much and anyway the duck could've cut its way out with the scissors in its mouth. Besides, I didn't know what it did after it pulled the ducks under. The scissors meant it was some kind of machine or maybe a real duck that had been changed so it was part duck and part machine like the bionic man. So maybe it had all sorts of ways to break out of the net. Like claws or a hooked sword or something under its feathers it could use to drag the ducks it got in the daytime under.

I went home and checked Mother's purse, but all she had was twenty dollar bills and I was sure she'd notice if any were missing. But she had six quarters and a fifty-cent piece, so I took three quarters and put two nickels in their place so it would feel like she still had about the same amount of money. And that night one of her friends called to ask if I could babysit his kids Saturday afternoon. Mother'd already decided to stay home with Father, so she said go ahead and I ended up making twelve dollars.

It rained the whole next week, so I stayed away from the lake and didn't get to see the duck. But I was glad I stayed away because there was a movie on TV Sunday afternoon that I watched at Beth's house, *The Invisible Boy* with Robbie the Robot, where an evil computer takes over Robbie and makes him do things he doesn't want to. That made me think about kids with radio-controlled toy sailboats and I started wondering if

someone came down to watch the duck with the controls hidden in his pocket or something. So when I came back I didn't do anything, just watched, but though there were some people who came down to watch the ducks and feed them almost every day, there wasn't anybody who was there every single time the duck killed something, and I watched for two weeks to make sure.

By then I had enough money from Mother's purse and babysitting to buy a net. The only way I'd figured out to catch the duck was to wade out to where its lily pads were some night when it was sleeping or turned off and scoop it up off the bottom in the net and hope it stayed turned off or whatever until I got it into the ten-gallon grease can I had ready. But I was scared to try because for all I knew the duck never really turned off, it just went down in the mud to cut the ducks it killed up into little pieces with the scissors in his mouth so nobody would ever find their bodies, and I couldn't think of any reason it couldn't kill me like the ducks and swans. Besides which, I was afraid somebody'd come by in a car and see me, or that the car's headlights would turn the duck back on and then it would get me. But I didn't want to give up, I needed that duck a lot.

A few days later I got the idea of putting a noose at the end of a bamboo pole we had in the garage and using it to snag the duck's lily pads. They had to be connected to the duck, so I could use them to drag it up out of the water. The thing is, I didn't know if that would wake the duck up or not, or if the stems were strong enough to pull it out of the water without breaking it. If it was all metal except the feathers it had to be very heavy. And if I woke it up like that I didn't know if it would try to get away or if it would try to kill me to make me stop and keep other people from learning about it. I'd never seen it on shore so for all I knew it couldn't even walk and I'd be safe as long as I didn't go in the water.

But then I'd already seen it do that half-flying thing where it came part-way up out of the water to attack the other ducks, so maybe it could really fly. And I didn't know how it dragged the other ducks under or what it did to them there. Perhaps it had big knives, hidden in its wings, or hooks, or even some kind of built-in spear-gun it used to harpoon them from the bottom so it could reel them down, then cut them up into little pieces there.

But the real thing wrong with trying to catch it at night was that I wouldn't be able to see it without a light, so I wouldn't know what it was doing. And somebody might see the light and come to find out what I was doing. So I finally decided to pull it out some morning when it was near shore, just after the sun came up but before the duck was ready to surface on its own. That way, maybe it wouldn't be all the way turned on, and even if

it was maybe it would just swim back out to the middle and start sunbathing a little early.

Then one night I saw it was down in the mud close to shore, and hid my ten-gallon can, some plastic rope, and a heavy khaki sack from the Army-Navy surplus store in somebody's hedge. I had a little water in the can in case the duck needed it.

I went down to the lake early next morning and waited for things to get bright out. Not many cars drove by and nobody paid any attention to me.

When the sun came up I went after the duck. It was easy to snag the lily pads with the noose but when I pulled them in to shore I saw they just stretched back to the part of the bottom they'd been floating over. I waited a moment, then touched the pads and stems. They felt like some sort of tough plastic, so I got all the stems together and started pulling on them. At first they came real easy, then I felt them grab and when I pulled again I could feel the duck on the other end. It was heavy but it didn't seem snagged and it wasn't fighting me like a fish or anything, so I knew it wasn't trying to get away or come after me.

A red Porsche came by, going a lot faster than it was supposed to. I just stood still, pretending all I was doing was looking at the water. The Porsche went by without stopping but now I could see another car over on the other side of the lake, so I knew people were getting up and starting off to work and that I had to drag the duck in a lot faster.

Pretty soon I could see it, and it wasn't a duck at all, more like a big piece of wood, a branch about a yard long and a couple inches thick, with four or five broken-off little branches sticking out of it. At first I thought it was just a branch I'd snagged, but then I saw that the lily pad stems came out of the ends of the broken-off branches.

As soon as I had the branch up out of the water it began to change. The ends started humping in to the middle and the middle bulged out, but everything was real, real slow, like a slug creeping up the porch steps after it rains. I threw the sack over it but I could see it kept on changing underneath until I got the lily pads under and out of the light too, and then it stopped. It wasn't much bigger than a real duck, though it didn't look like a duck any more than it looked like a branch, just a big lump of mud. I pushed it into the sack with the pole and tied the sack closed, then picked it up, making sure it didn't swing too close to my body. The duck was just a lump inside and it didn't move at all. It only weighed about twenty pounds but that was still heavy enough so it was hard work getting it to where I had the can

hid.

I put the bag in the can but the lump was a little too long and I couldn't get the lid on. But it was too late now to open the sack and let in some light, so I just put the lid in the net and carried everything home and put it all in the tool shed behind the garage. Mother never used the shed but her Mess Sergeant sometimes made things out of wood for us back there, or fixed things. He wasn't really a bad man, even if I hated him. So it was real dusty and full of cobwebs and junk, but the lights worked and the shed was in good enough shape to keep the rain and sunlight out. When I went inside and closed the door I could turn on the lights and nobody could see me from the house.

I put the can under the work bench, behind a broken TV so nobody could see it and so even when the door was open the light from outside wouldn't touch the can. I'd been planning what to do for a long time and I had it all figured out, or most of it, anyway.

I even knew whose duck it was. James Patrick Dubic, the one I helped Mother arrest. There couldn't be two people who hated ducks that much, and some of the clippings talked about how smart he was and how good he was with computers. I'd figured it out for sure that time I saw *The Invisible Boy*. Afterwards I got my clippings out and studied them so I could be sure what he looked like and kept an eye on the people at the lake, but he wasn't ever there, at least not unless he'd changed a lot.

I locked the shed and left the duck in the dark until Saturday night. That way, if it had solar batteries maybe they'd run down enough so it couldn't hurt me even if it j wanted to.

Saturday night before Mother went to work I asked her what'd happened to Dubic. She said she didn't know but she could find out if I wanted. I said yes. It was only six-thirty when she drove away, so it wasn't dark yet.

I went back to the shed around nine. When I unlocked the door and pushed it open I shone a flashlight inside before I went in and turned the real lights on, but the duck was still in the can. I closed the door and dragged the can out, then pulled the bag out of it. I stayed by the door so I could run away if the duck came after me. Then I turned the lights off and used the flashlight while I dumped the duck out of the sack.

It was still just a big lump. It smelled like mud and sewers. I poked at it twice with a hoe and it didn't do anything, so I turned on the lights. I was



right by the door with my hand on the switch, but it still didn't do anything even when I poked it again. I watched it for three or four hours but it never did anything. I was afraid I'd broken it somehow but if I hadn't maybe I'd be able to handle it safely at night with the lights on, which was good. I got it back in the sack, then pushed it behind the TV again.

Mother was home all day the next day and she and Father had some of his old friends over for a barbecue. They cooked chicken and hamburgers in the back yard, then sat around drinking beer and talking about what things'd been like before Father's accident and how good a cop he'd been then. I couldn't get into the tool shed with them there. Father and Mother seemed to be having a pretty good time, like they liked each other again. After a while I got bored and uncomfortable so I put my swimming suit on under my clothes and rode my bike up to Beth's house, but her brother had all his friends over to use the pool and her cousin was there too so she couldn't go away with me even though she didn't like them any more than I did. I went to Swenson's and got a double cone and a banana split, then rode down to the wharf and watched the tourists for a while. It was a nice day, all hot and clear, and there were two sea otters playing in the water. One of the tourists threw a beer can at them. He missed but I told the cop who was keeping people from driving out on the wharf and he came and made the man leave.

It was almost dark when I got home but Mother and Father were still out back with their friends. Father was making nasty comments about Mother every now and then. I didn't understand everything, but I could tell when something was mean by the look on Mother's face.

I asked her about Dubic but she said she hadn't had a chance to check yet and she'd find out for me Monday. I said I had to do homework and went to my room to read about ducks.

Monday she didn't go to the station until late. I tried to tell her I was sick and couldn't go to school but she had a hangover and got really angry and hit me. She said she had enough sick people in the house without me pretending to be sick when I wasn't, so I had to go anyway.

She wasn't home when I got back but she'd put Father's wheelchair by the window because there wasn't anything he wanted to watch on TV and that way he could look at the birds and flowers if he didn't feel like reading. I couldn't get in the toolshed with him there.

The next morning I sneaked back to the shed before it was light out. The duck was still under the workbench. I used the flashlight to see by while

I got it out of the sack. It still looked wet even though most of the mud on it was dry and falling off.

I wasn't sure if it was safe to touch even after I jabbed it with the hoe again and it still didn't do anything. But I already knew I had to learn how it worked if I was going to make it do what I wanted, so I opened the door again. It was still dark out. I got on the door side of the duck, then reached out and touched one of the spots still coated with dry mud with my finger, real quick.

The duck didn't do anything. I pushed it a little, on one of the spots that looked like wet muck, to see if it did anything, but no motor started running inside it or anything else. And it wasn't really wet at all, just all smooth and slick and sort of greasy, like the bottoms of those non-stick frying pans.

It still hadn't done anything, so I ran my finger over it. It felt the same everywhere. Then I pushed it again, a lot harder. Nothing happened. I was starting to get really afraid I'd broken it somehow.

I watched it for a while, trying to get my courage up. The sky was beginning to go pink and purple. I picked the lump up and put it down by the door real quick, where the sun coming in would hit it soon. The door opened in so I couldn't put the lump right inside, it had to be maybe two feet back. I tied a long piece of string to the door handle so I could pull the door shut from outside if anything went wrong.

Ten minutes after the light finally came through the door and hit the duck it started to change again like before, only slower. It humped itself in tighter and tighter, until it was just a little bigger than a real duck and almost the right shape, only it still didn't have a head or tail or wings or feathers or legs. The dry mud cracked and fell off so the whole thing looked wet and glistening. That took another hour and it was getting late, so I pulled the door shut with the string and went back inside the house.

Mother was already up and in the bathroom with Father. I'd forgotten to close the bathroom curtains but she hadn't noticed me or she would've come out to find out what I was doing. I put her coffee on while she made us oatmeal.

The phone rang out. Mother got it. When she hung up she told us a lot of cops had caught some sort of weird ten-day flu and she was going to have to fill in for all sorts of people. Everybody's hours were going to be messed up even worse than usual, so she wouldn't be able to come home

much for a while. I could tell she was lying and had somewhere else she wanted to go, maybe up to Lake Tahoe to go gambling with her Mess Sergeant again. I asked if she'd found out about Dubic yet and she said she'd been too busy to check and why was I so interested all of a sudden? I told her I'd found the newspaper clippings when I cleaned up my room and she seemed to think that answered her question because she didn't ask me anything else.

Father said something about liberal judges and parole boards and how you had to exaggerate the truth a little sometimes, like with Dubic and the dogs, and look how they'd let him out that time anyway. Mother agreed and they talked about police work for a while.

We wheeled Father into the living room in front of the TV and I set up his reader for him. I made sure the switch to change from the TV to the reader was where he liked it on his shoulder and strapped tight enough so it wouldn't slip back to where he couldn't get at it if he nudged it too hard with his chin.

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Father was asleep in his chair by the time it got dark that evening. When I opened the shed I saw the duck had changed, but just a little. It was still in the same place but something had started to push out where its neck and tail and wings were going to be. It was starting to look almost like a real duck, only all covered with mud.

After I got back in the house Mother called to say she wasn't going to be coming home that night or the next day. She wanted to know if there was enough food in the refrigerator. I checked and told her there was, and she said if I ran out of anything or needed help just come to the station and her friends there would take care of it. I said OK and she hung up.

I took a nap, then made Father macaroni and cheese with tuna fish. When I was giving him his bath he said it was a good thing I was strong for my age and not just tall and skinny, because even though he was still mainly skinny he was awful flabby and he'd be getting fat pretty soon, so moving him around was going to be a lot of work. I told him the exercise would be good for me and all I had to do was wheel him around a little and help him in and out of the bath sometimes, and anyway I was used to it. He said, thank you for saying that, Julie, but I know how hard it is for you and your mother with me like this, and then he started talking about how wonderful Mother had been before the accident, when she hadn't had to take care of him, and that made me feel bad for him again and at the same time like

Mother a little more, though I knew that half the reason he was telling me that was because even though it was all true he wanted me to tell him it wasn't so he could pretend things weren't all his fault.

Wednesday morning when the sun came in the door and hit the thing it finally changed all the way back into a duck. The head and tail and wings pushed their way out from inside until the duck was the right shape, even though it didn't have any legs and was all smooth and brown, like one of those pottery ducks people use for sugar bowls.

It started reeling the lily pads in. The stems got shorter and shorter and at the same time the lily pads were closing up like flowers turning back into buds, only even tighter, so that by the time the stems had been reeled all the way back into the duck the lily pads weren't any bigger around than the stems and they just followed them into the duck.

Then all over the duck's surface a lot of things like, tiny doors opened, only none of them were much bigger than the lead in a pencil and they were all over the duck, so it was like the whole duck was a Venetian blind somebody was opening. Then the doors all closed again, on the other side, so that what had been on the back of them and hidden inside the duck before was now on the outside where you could see it and the duck had feathers again.

Finally the orange legs came pushing out and it started trying to swim. It wasn't walking like a real duck on land, it was trying to swim like it thought it was under water and had to get to the surface.

A few seconds later it stopped, either because it thought it was on the surface or because it had figured out it wasn't in the water. I couldn't tell which. But it wasn't standing or lying like a duck on land, it had its feet sticking out backwards so it was tilted forward with its tail in the air. That didn't seem to bother it, though, and it started preening itself like it always did after it came up out of the mud in the morning even though there wasn't any mud on it.

When it finished it looked all around, just like a real duck only it was still tilted forward like a wheelbarrow. I wondered what it thought about being in the shed, if it knew there was anything wrong or what to do about it. Then it started paddling, trying to swim out into the light, and even though it wasn't walking that pushed it slowly across the floor.

When it came to the door sill it hopped over it just like a duck hopping over something in shallow water, then it padded off across the grass to the

center of the yard, as far away from the fence and shed and house as it could get, with its chest still pointing down and its legs sticking out behind and its tail up, all stiff and fake-looking. It looked more like it was trying to dig its way into the lawn than like it was walking.

Since the sun was shining bright I knew it wouldn't attack me, so I inched forward until I was about fifteen feet away from it, but I was afraid to get too close. I went back inside and got Father up and fed him, then put him in front of the TV with his back to the window.

I told him I didn't want to go to school. He said, OK, if the school called just give him the phone, he'd say I was sick and he wouldn't tell Mother. It was the only thing he was ever really able to do for me and he did it whenever he could, even though Mother sometimes got real mad at him for it and yelled at him and even hit him.

I went back out and came up real close behind the duck, but it still didn't notice me, even when I circled around in front of it where a real duck would've seen me.

I remembered those old men on Carmel Beach with their metal detectors looking for money people've dropped, so I got the hoe out and came at the duck with the metal end, real slow. I got to maybe a yard away from it before it started trying to escape, and then I spent a while chasing it around. But I always made sure I kept it away from the shade, even though it looked so clumsy and pompous and even stupider than a real duck. When I quit it worked its way back into the middle of the yard.

Only that wasn't good enough because in the lake I'd seen it, avoid wooden rowboats too. So maybe it had some other sort of thing to keep it away from wood. Plus whatever it used to find the ducks and swans. I tried it with the wooden end of the hoe and it didn't move until I touched it, and then it only moved a few feet, just far enough so that if the hoe'd been a branch the duck wouldn't have gotten snagged on it.

Maybe it had some sort of radar or sonar to keep it away from big things like boats and piers. So I used the metal end of the hoe to herd it over to the side of the fence that was still in the sun, but it wouldn't go close to the fence; when it was maybe ten feet away it always went off sideways at an angle and never got any nearer.

The phone rang. I ran inside and got it, then held it up to Father's ear and mouth. It was the school, asking why I wasn't there. He winked at me and told them I had the flu, it probably wasn't too serious but I wouldn't be

able to come in today or tomorrow. And, no, I wouldn't have a doctor's excuse because he was my father and it was up to him whether or not he let me go to school, and he wasn't going to pay some doctor just to write me a note. And, no, he wasn't going to write a note for me either, because my mother was away for a few days and he happened to be paralyzed from the neck down, but if they wanted to send somebody out to make sure he really was my father and sitting in his wheelchair paralyzed from the neck down, they were welcome to do so. The school said, Sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Matson, and he had me hang up. I kissed him and went back outside.

The duck was still sunbathing in the middle of the lawn. I wanted to push it into the shade and see if it attacked me even though I was bigger than a swan. It wouldn't be very dangerous because the duck would stop as soon as it got back out into the sun. But I didn't want to be too close when it came at me in case it moved a lot faster than when it was just paddling around.

I took the hoe and tied the bamboo pole to it to make it longer, then used the metal end to push the duck into the shade. It was maybe ten feet out of the sun when I stopped. That took almost ten minutes.

As soon as I took the hoe away it moved its head like it was searching for something, then started coming at me, paddling as fast as it could and ripping up the lawn a little. But even so it was still just inching and sliding across the grass slower than I could've moved on my hands and knees. It wasn't trying to use its wings, it only used its wings when the sun was going down. I stayed just on the bright side of the shadow's edge and let the duck chase me. It was so slow and stupid-looking and I was in the sun, so I wasn't worried. Besides, I wanted to see what it would try to do to me when the time came for it to drag me under.

What it did when I let it get to about three feet away was, it stuck its head down under its body, pushing it in under its puffed-out chest, which made it look even sillier, because the way its chest was already resting on the grass with its legs sticking out behind made it look like, some sort of crazy toy wheelbarrow. Then it kicked off with its legs like it was trying to dive down to the bottom, but all that happened was that it fell back into the wheelbarrow position again. But it didn't seem to even notice it wasn't underwater, because then it pulled its head out from under its chest and stuck it straight at me and paddled as fast as it could at me until it was just at the shadow's edge, then it suddenly arched its head and neck and body backwards and did something with its wings real fast that made it fall over on its back. I moved down the shadow line a little so it could come after me without getting in the sun. Now that it was over on its back it was using its

wings like oars and that was working better than the other paddling because even though the grass was smooth the wings could sort of catch in it and scoot the duck along. I stood where I was this time and when it got maybe two feet away from me its legs moved away from each other and turned around sideways so its feet were facing each other like it wanted to clap them together. Big steel claws like meat hooks came out of the feet very fast and its belly opened up and something like a long rotary file and a drill and a buzzsaw all at the same time came out and started whirling so fast it was just a blur even though it didn't make noise like a drill or a buzzsaw usually would.

The duck had finally gotten to the line between the sun and shadow and I knew if it came any farther it would be out in the sun and just go back to being a fake duck, so I used the hoe to turn the duck around facing the other way. But it just used one wing to turn itself back so it was coming at me again, and this time I let it get out into the sunlight.

As soon as its head was in the sun the claws went back into its feet and the drill-thing stopped turning and started going back into its stomach. I got a better look at it this time, and it was all covered with barbs like fish hooks and other little knives that turned around on their own, not always in the same direction as the whole thing, but before I could get a better look the duck's stomach closed up and it was just a fake duck lying on its back again.

It couldn't seem to turn itself back rightside up so I used the bamboo-stick end of the hoe to tip it over.

It was too slow and clumsy in the daytime to be any use if I just left it in the backyard. I was sorry we didn't have a swimming pool and tried to think of how I could use Beth's pool but I couldn't come up with anything. But even though I couldn't see how to make the duck work right except maybe just throwing it on someone it was still good to know that the duck would try to kill people and not just other birds.

Then I remembered the duck had a whole different way of attacking things at sunset, when it used its wings a bit and went a lot faster over the surface of the water to cut off the other duck's heads. So maybe that would work. Only if it did work I didn't want to be there in the back yard when the duck attacked.

For a while I thought about getting a dog or cat and putting it in the back yard with the duck to see what happened but the idea made me sick and I couldn't do it. Then I thought of catching a real duck, but it would

probably make a lot of noise unless I killed it, and if I got caught killing a duck with the way everybody knew how I liked to go watch the ducks they'd get suspicious of me and wonder how many other ducks I'd killed and think I was crazy or evil, so if somebody got killed right after that they'd be sure I did it.

But then I thought, it doesn't have to be a live duck. I had enough money to buy one that was ready to cook at the poultry shop, and I could get one with the feathers and head everything still on it. So I rode my bike there but all their ducks and chickens were already plucked so I had to buy a goose, which cost a lot more than I wanted to spend. They gave me a sheet of instructions for how to cook it even though I said it was for my mother.

I put the goose half-way across the yard from the duck. That way I could see how fast it could go when it was after something. But the sun wasn't quite down yet, so I went inside and tried to play checkers with Father. I couldn't get interested, so after one game I went into the kitchen where I could watch the back yard out the window.

But when the sun went down and the light went away the duck didn't even try to do anything to the goose. It just turned back into a log and stuck its lily pads out of the ends of its broken-off branches.

I went back into the living room and watched *Shanghai Express* with Father. *Shanghai Express* was pretty good, but I'd been refilling Father's drinking bottle with beer all day so he was pretty drunk by the time the movie was over, and instead of getting sleepy the way he usually did he was wide awake and something in the movie had made him all angry and sad at the same time. It was awful.

First he got angry at Mother and told me what a bitch she was, how she treated him like shit and even brought the Mess Sergeant home with her as if it didn't make any difference what Father thought... He went on and on, yelling most of the time, but then he got real sad again, and that was even worse. He started talking about what a good wife Mother had been back when *he* could take care of her and he'd been handsome and strong and everything the Mess Sergeant was now only better, and how she would have been a perfect wife to him if only he hadn't had the accident, and it wasn't her fault if he couldn't be a husband to her, and even if she got angry at him and had to find someone else to do all the things that it was his duty as her husband to do for her he couldn't blame her, because at least she hadn't divorced him or put him in a home.



After a while he was crying and then he was yelling again. His bottle was empty so I went and got him another beer, only this time I put half a librium in it like Mother sometimes did when she wanted to make sure he got to sleep, and in a while he calmed down and passed out.

I went out and put the log back in the shed, but I couldn't figure out what to do with the goose. It would probably rot if I left it in the shack but if I put it in the freezer Mother'd find it if she came home, and at first I couldn't think of any reason to tell her why there was a goose in the freezer.

Then I thought, I'll say I bought it with my savings because she'd been away working and I wanted to cook it for a celebration when she got home and I'd gotten all the directions for cooking it and everything, only they looked too hard. And if she asked me why I'd gotten a goose instead of a turkey I'd tell her it was because goose was something special people had for Christmas in England and I wanted this to be very special. She'd have to believe me because she wouldn't be able to think of any other reason why I'd have a goose to put in the freezer. Unless I'd stolen it, and I had the receipt and the piece of paper with the instructions to show her.

I put the goose away and got Father into bed. It really was like he was a big baby, only even though I was real strong for how big I was, he was twice as heavy as me and I almost dropped him like I'd done a few times before, but I didn't.

I still wasn't sleepy, and there wasn't anything good on TV, so I got a frozen dinner out and put it in the oven.

It was a chicken dinner and when I took the tin foil off at the end I thought, maybe that's how the duck figures out if something's alive or not, because if it's alive it's got a temperature, 98.6, just like I do, only maybe it isn't exactly the same for birds. Unless the reason it hadn't attacked the goose was because the goose had just been lying there and not moving. But not all the real ducks I'd seen my duck attack had been moving, and it had come flopping across the lawn after me even when I'd been standing still watching it. So if Mother didn't come home tomorrow I'd put the goose in the microwave and get it out in the back yard all hot right when the sun went down to see if that'd be enough to make the duck attack it.!

Mother called in the next morning to say she was going to be gone two more days on an arson case. I asked her if she'd found out anything for me about Dubic. She said yes, he was still in prison. He was doing some sort of hush-hush special work there for the Defense Department through some sort of special arrangement and had volunteered for Aversion

Therapy, which was going to make it impossible for him to ever touch another bird again without getting sick and throwing up. But even so his parole board wasn't going to let him out for at least three more years.

It wasn't even eight in the morning yet, but I could still hear what sounded like a party in the background, a lot of drunks and yelling and music and laughing, or maybe she was in a casino in Tahoe or Reno. I could tell she wasn't anywhere close like she pretended because there was so much static on the line I could barely hear her.

She told me to go see Desk Sergeant Crowder at the station after school and he'd have twenty-five dollars for what she called my "babysitting time." That made me really mad again, not that she was trying to bribe me, but that Sergeant Crowder was covering up for her, because even though he didn't come around to see us anymore nearly as much as he used to, he'd always been one of Father's best friends and Father still thought he was.

After Mother hung up I told Father she wasn't going to be home for another two days but I didn't mention Sergeant Crowder. He looked unhappy, more miserable and hopeless than angry for a minute, but then he grinned at me even though I could tell he was making himself do it and said that in that case maybe I'd better dial the school for him so he could tell them I still had the flu.

After he talked to them I put him in the living room and poured a beer in his bottle, then got the duck. I didn't bother to be extra-careful this time, I just picked up the log and dumped it in the back yard.

I played cards with Father most of the morning-we had a little rack set up so he could see the cards in his hand-and I let him win even though I was a better player than he was. About four o'clock I rode over to the station and got the money from Sergeant Crowder. One of the other cops came over just as if it was something he'd decided to do on the spur of the moment and told me what a great job my mother was doing and how they all hoped pretty soon she could get a chance to stay at home like she wanted. I said I had school and everything but Father got lonely sometimes and Sergeant Crowder said it'd been too long since he'd come by and he'd drop in on us soon. I told him that would make Father feel good.

I cleaned Father up for dinner, then put a whole librium in his beer so I could cook the goose without him noticing I was doing anything. He fell asleep at the table and I put him to bed with plenty of time left before sunset.

When the sun was almost all the way down I put the goose in the microwave but I left it in too long and all the features got singed and it smelled really disgusting when I took it out.

I propped its head up with toothpicks and ran out in the yard and put it down a long way away from the duck.

Then I ran as fast as I could back into the house.

The duck already had its neck stuck forward with its mouth wide open and was doing its paddling thing by the time I got the door closed and could watch it through the window. The way it was beating its wings wasn't quite enough to make it really fly but it was still close enough so the duck was sort of half-running and half-hopping across the lawn and it was going as fast as I could have run or maybe even faster until it got to the goose and then the scissors came out of its mouth and I was close enough this time to see they were all jagged-edged like the saws butchers use, and then the duck cut the goose's head off.

The scissors went back in its mouth and it closed its bill and did that thing it'd done before, when it tried to dive down through the ground to get at me, only this time after it paddled a while it just stopped and turned back into a log.

So I knew that all I had to do was get Mother out in the middle of the back yard when the sun went away and the duck would kill her. I could do it tomorrow night when she came home, or whenever I wanted to after that.

I was real excited and happy. I rode my bike all the way to Lover's Point and the Asilomar beaches in Pacific Grove because I felt so good and I was laughing to myself all the way there and back.

But next morning Father woke me up yelling because I was late with his breakfast and he had a hangover and because I'd put him to sleep so early the night before he'd had all of yesterday's beer still in him and he'd wet his bed in the middle of the night and when he woke up the bed was all sticky and wet and disgusting and he had to yell and yell and yell to get me to wake up and come help him. He was really angry with me just the way he was always angry with Mother, even after I cleaned him up and got him breakfast and set him up for the day in front of the TV with his reader.

And when he yelled at me again at lunch I realized something that I should've realized a long time before. With Mother gone there'd be no one

left to take care of him except for me and pretty soon he'd hate me just like he hated Mother and I'd hate him just the way Mother hated him. With maybe a little love left that would come to the surface now and then when we remembered what it had been like before, but less and less until all we had left was that we hated each other.

Only it would be even worse, because they'd put me in a foster home and him in some sort of nursing home- and that was the one thing Mother'd promised never to do to him where she'd kept her promise. Then when I was old enough to go back to taking care of him I'd have to pay for him along with me for the rest of his life, and I'd never be able to go away or get married or even have boyfriends or do anything because he'd be jealous of me the same way he was of Mother.

He hated what he was and the only way he could stand hating himself like that was to take it out on someone else. It wasn't his fault, he couldn't do anything about it, but that's what it was, he had to hate somebody and make them miserable and if it wasn't Mother it was going to be me.

I thought about it some more and then I knew I'd have to kill Father first. He wouldn't mind, not really, not if I put three or four librium in his beer so he wouldn't feel anything. He probably would've killed himself a long time ago if he'd been able to and if his mother hadn't raised him to be a Catholic. I'd heard him tell Mother that a lot of times.

And then the duck would go back to just being a log again and I could hide it away again until I was fifteen or sixteen before I used it to get Mother. Nobody'd ever guess what it was if I kept it hidden someplace dark.

Only what if when the other police came by all they found were my footprints and they took the log in to examine it because maybe they found blood on it? If they didn't figure out what it really was they might blame me and then be sure it was me when I got Mother, later, and if they did figure out what it was they wouldn't blame me but I wouldn't be able to use the duck again. All they'd have to do was pick it up and they'd know it was too heavy to be a real log.

But what if Father just disappeared, like the ducks my duck pulled under? The thing that came out of its stomach looked sort of like a meatgrinder. Maybe it ground up their bodies so small there wasn't any pieces left.

He wouldn't feel anything if there was enough librium in his beer. Or if he did it wouldn't be much worse than it was like for him just to be alive

every day anyway.

With him gone Mother wouldn't be angry with me all the time. She might even go back to being like she was before, the way he always told me she'd been when she married him.

And if she didn't, I still had the duck. But I had to find out what happened to the bodies of the ducks my duck pulled under.

Father was watching a football game turned up loud. I refilled his beer bottle then checked out the bathroom. It was in the corner of the house, with two big windows. There'd be bright sunlight in it for the rest of the afternoon.

I opened the windows so the glass wouldn't screen out any of the sunlight in case that made a difference like it does when you want to get a tan, then got the log out of the shed and dumped it into the bathtub. It was an oversized bathtub, all long and deep, made out of the white stuff they use for bathtubs and sinks and toilet bowls. The only metal in it was the faucet and the drain plug.

Maybe forty-five minutes later the duck was floating at the far end of the tub. It didn't seem bothered by the walls. Maybe they were pushing the same on it from all four sides so it didn't have to try to go anywhere else.

I put the goose in the microwave until it got hot again, then tossed it in the tub and quick went out into the hall and closed the door. I ran outside and closed the shutters for both windows, not quite all the way because I wanted the duck to think it was cloudy but not that it was night time.

And my duck dipped its bill in the water like it was taking a drink, then dived down under the goose, grabbed it in its meathook claws and used its meatgrinder drill to rip it into tiny, tiny pieces. That took about five minutes and then the duck left what was left of the goose on the bottom of the tub like it was some sort of mud and went back to floating.

I opened the shutters wide to let the sun in, then got the hoe so I could hold the metal end between me and the duck, even though I didn't think it would attack me with the sun shining on it. I went back in and pulled the bathtub plug.

What was left of the goose drained out of the tub with the water, except for a few little pieces of bone. When I picked them up they were all soft and rubbery, like cauliflower, so the duck had to have some kind of

poison or acid it used to make sure even the little pieces that were left dissolved.

But if it could do that I didn't know why it left the headless ducks floating on the surface every night. Unless that was Dubic's way of making sure that when he got out of jail he could come watch his robot killing ducks for him even if what they'd done to him made it so he couldn't touch the ducks to kill them himself.

I went back into the living room. Father was still watching the football game. His bottle was empty. I emptied his urine bag, refilled his bottle with beer and added four librium. He was still half-awake when he finished the bottle, though he was passing out fast, so I gave him three more librium by telling him they were vitamins he was supposed to take. He was too groggy to wonder why I wanted him to take them just then. . I went back to the bathroom and filled the tub two-thirds full. With him in it it would be all the way full. Then I pushed his wheelchair into the bathroom and got him out of it into the tub.

The duck stayed down at the far end, floating over his ankles.

I closed the door and went outside and shut the shutters. Not all the way, just enough to cut down the light like it was a cloudy day. I didn't watch, just walked around the yard looking up at the sky, out at the fences, over them to the neighbor's houses, anywhere but at the bathroom windows.

Then I closed the shutters completely, but I still didn't look in through them. I went back inside, turned off the TV, turned it back on again, walked around, finally opened the bathroom door and turned on the light so I could see what had happened.

The bottom of the tub was covered with red-brown mud. The log was half-buried in it.

I pulled the plug. The sludge drained out. I kept the water running a long time to make sure the drain wasn't going to get plugged up, then pushed the log under the running water so I could clean the last of the sludge off it. When it was clean I picked it up and put it back in the shed, under the floorboards this time.

I poured some Draino down the plug-hole to make sure nothing got clogged up and washed the tub with cleanser, then put the wheelchair and urine bag and all of Father's clothes back in the living room. The football game was still going.

I rode over to Beth's and we went swimming for a while, then I said maybe it would be a good idea if we went back down to my house. I had some money there and we could buy hamburgers or ice cream.

So we rode our bikes down to my house and when we found Father gone I called Sergeant Crowder and told him I was scared, Father was gone but his wheelchair was still there and I didn't know what had happened to him, whether they'd taken him to the hospital or somebody'd kidnapped him or what.

He said he'd send somebody right over.

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### *JULIE: 1991*

That was three years ago. I'm fourteen now. A year after Father disappeared Mother married Don but even without Father to take care of she was as bad as ever and he divorced her a year later. The duck's still back in the shed. I took it out to check last week when Mother was out of town for the day and it turned from a log into a duck in the morning and back into a log when it got dark out again. So I can use it on Mother whenever I want. It would be better if I could wait two years but I don't think I can stand it that much longer. It might be better just to let them put me in a foster home for a year or two.

Anyway, I don't know if I can wait any longer at all, now. Three weeks ago Judge Hapgood disappeared and a week ago Thom Homart, the one who wrote those articles for the *Tattler* that Dubic's lawyers sued them for, also disappeared. Plus the Forbidden City-the Chinese restaurant that changed their name from the Ivory Pagoda after they were convicted of buying seagulls and cats from Dubic ten years ago-burned down and its owner died in the fire last week.

I've been going down to the lake to feed the ducks almost every day now since Father disappeared. It's not so much that I've learned to like them or anything, though I guess I like them a lot better than I used to, but just that I wanted to be there watching if another robot duck ever appeared.

There's another one there now. A female mallard this time, brown with black speckle marks and bright blue on its side-what the bird books call its mirror or speculum-and an orange and brown bill. It's been there almost a month. And every day now, for just a little over a month and a half, a skinny

middle-aged man comes down to sit on a bench and watch the ducks. He comes early in the morning and he never leaves before dark and he never, never feeds the ducks or swans or pigeons, though he spends all day watching them.

Mother tells me that James Patrick Dubic was released from prison three months ago. So that has to be him, down there watching his new robot killing the ducks he can't kill for himself any more. I don't know what he thinks happened to his other robot.

And while he's sitting there on his bench, or maybe at night after he drives away, he's killing all the people who helped put him in jail. I just don't know how, maybe with a robot person or taxicab or something else that works just like the ducks.

Mother's one of those people, so if he gets to her before I do he'll save me a lot of trouble and I won't have to worry about getting caught. And in a way it'd be a good thing to know that if I don't get her he'll get her for me for sure.

But the thing is, I'm another one of the people who helped put him in jail. Maybe even the main person, except for Mother, if you believe what the newspapers said. And from the way the skinny man watches me sometimes when I'm feeding the ducks I'm sure he knows who I am and that he's watching me.

But he's too smart to try to get us all at the same time, at least not unless he's figured out enough different ways to kill us so that nobody'll see the connection between all our deaths. He's probably going to wait a while before he tries to get me or Mother. And I've still got his duck and I've spent years thinking about the best way to use it.

So I think I'm going to put a lot of the librium I saved after Father disappeared in Mother's whisky glass tonight if she's alone, or tomorrow night or the night after if she isn't, so that she'll still be knocked out the next morning when it's light enough for me to get her into the bathtub with the duck. Only this time it won't be like with Father and I want to watch it happen.

And then the same evening when the sun's going down and before Dubic has a chance to find out about Mother I'll take the duck down to the park and watch it jump on him and cut his head off with its scissors.

I've got it all figured out and I'm not really scared at all.



This time it's going to be fun.

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\* \* \* \*

# HINTERLANDS

By *WILLIAM GIBSON*

When Hiro hit the switch, I was dreaming of Paris, dreaming of wet, dark streets in winter. The pain came oscillating up from the floor of my skull, exploding behind my eyes in a wall of blue neon; I jackknifed up out of the mesh hammock, screaming. I always scream; I make a point of it. Feedback raged in my skull. The pain switch is an auxiliary circuit in the bonephone implant, patched directly into the pain centers, just the thing for cutting through a surrogate's barbiturate fog. It took a few seconds for my life to fall together, icebergs of biography looming through the fog: who I was, where I was, what I was doing there, who was waking me.

Hiro's voice came crackling into my head through the bone-conduction implant.- "Damn, Toby. Know what it does to my ears, you scream like that?"

"Know how much I care about your ears, Dr. Nagashima? I care about them as much as "

"No time for the litany of love, boy. We've got business. But what is it with these fifty-millivolt spike waves off your temporals, hey? Mixing something with the downers to give it a little color?"

"Your EEG's screwed, Hiro. You're crazy. I just want my sleep.

... " I collapsed into the hammock and tried to pull the darkness over me, but his voice was still there.

"Sorry, my man, but you're working today. We got a ship back, an hour ago. Air-lock gang are out there right now, sawing the reaction engine off so she'll just about fit through the door."

"Who is it?" "Leni Hofmannstahl, Toby, physical chemist, citizen of the Federal Republic of Germany." He waited until I quit groaning. "It's a confirmed meatshot."

Lovely workaday terminology we've developed out here. He meant a returning ship with active medical telemetry, contents one (1) body, warm, psychological status as yet unconfirmed. I shut my eyes and swung there in

the dark.

“Looks like you’re her surrogate, Toby. Her profile syncs with Taylor’s, but he’s on leave.”

I knew all about Taylor’s “leave.” He was out in the agricultural canisters, ripped on amitriptyline, doing aerobic exercises to counter his latest bout with clinical depression. One of the occupational hazards of being a surrogate. Taylor and I don’t get along. Funny how you usually don’t, if the guy’s psychosexual profile is too much like your own.

“Hey, Toby, where are you getting all that dope?” The question was ritual. “From Charmian?”

“From your mom, Hiro.” He knows it’s Charmian as well as I do.

“Thanks, Toby. Get up here to the Heavenside elevator in five minutes or I’ll send those Russian nurses down to help you. The male ones.”

I just swung there in my hammock and played the game called Toby Halpert’s Place in the Universe. No egotist, I put the sun in the center, the luminary, the orb of day. Around it I swung tidy planets, our cozy home system. But just here, at a fixed point about an eighth of the way out toward the orbit of Mars, I hung a fat alloy cylinder, like a quarter-scale model of Tsiolkovsky 1, the Worker’s Paradise back at L-5. Tsiolkovsky 1 is fixed at the liberation point between Earth’s gravity and the moon’s, but we need a lightsail to hold us here, twenty tons of aluminum spun into a hexagon, ten kilometers from side to side. That sail towed us out from Earth orbit, and now it’s our anchor. We use it to tack against the photon stream, hanging here beside the thing the point, the singularity we call the Highway.

The French call it le metro, the subway, and the Russians call it the river, but subway won’t carry the distance, and river, for Americans, can’t carry quite the same loneliness. Call it the Tovyevski Anomaly Coordinates if you don’t mind bringing Olga into it. Olga Tovyevski, Our Lady of Singularities, Patron Saint of the Highway.

Hiro didn’t trust me to get up on my own. Just before the Russian orderlies came in, he turned the lights on in my cubicle, by remote control, and let them strobe and stutter for a few seconds before they fell as a steady glare across the pictures of Saint Olga that Charmian had taped up on the bulkhead. Dozens of them, her face repeated in newsprint, in

magazine glossy. Our Lady of the Highway.

Lieutenant Colonel Olga Tovyevski, youngest woman of her rank in the Soviet space effort, was en route to Mars, solo, in a modified Alyut 6. The modifications allowed her to carry the prototype of a new airscrubber that was to be tested in the USSR's four-man Martian orbital lab. They could just as easily have handled the Alyut by remote, from Tsiolkovsky, but Olga wanted to log mission time. They made sure she kept busy, though; they stuck her with a series of routine hydrogen-band radio-flare experiments, the tail end of a lowpriority Soviet-Australian scientific exchange. Olga knew that her role in the experiments could have been handled by a standard household timer. But she was a diligent officer; she'd press the buttons at precisely the correct intervals.

With her brown hair drawn back and caught in a net, she must have looked like some idealized Pravda cameo of the Worker in Space, easily the most photogenic cosmonaut of either gender. She checked the Alyut's chronometer again and poised her hand above the buttons that would trigger the first of her flares. Colonel Tovyevski had no way of knowing that she was nearing the point in space that would eventually be known as the Highway.

As she punched the six-button triggering sequence, the Alyut crossed those final kilometers and emitted the flare, a sustained burst of radio energy at 1420 megahertz, broadcast frequency of the hydrogen atom. Tsiolkovsky's radio telescope was tracking, relaying the signal to geosynchronous comsats that bounced it down to stations in the southern Urals and New South Wales. For 3.8 seconds the Alyut's radio-image was obscured by the afterimage of the flare.

When the afterimage faded from Earth's monitor screens, the Alyut was gone.

In the Urals a middle-aged Georgian technician bit through the stem of his favorite meerschaum. In New South Wales a young physicist began to slam the side of his monitor, like an enraged pinball finalist protesting TILT.

The elevator that waited to take me up to Heaven looked like Hollywood's best shot at a Bauhaus mummy case a narrow, upright sarcophagus with a clear acrylic lid. Behind it, rows of identical consoles receded like a textbook illustration of vanishing perspective. The usual

crowd of technicians in yellow paper clown suits were milling purposefully around. I spotted Hiro in blue denim, his pearl-buttoned cowboy shirt open over a faded UCLA sweat shirt. Engrossed in the figures cascading down the face of a monitor screen, he didn't notice me. Neither did anyone else.

So I just stood there and stared up at the ceiling, at the bottom of the floor of Heaven. It didn't look like much. Our fat cylinder is actually two cylinders, one inside the other. Down here in the outer one we make our own "down" with axial rotation are all the more mundane aspects of our operation: dormitories, cafeterias, the air-lock deck, where we haul in returning - boats, Communications and Wards, where I'm careful never to go.

Heaven, the inner cylinder, the unlikely green heart of this place, is the ripe Disney dream of homecoming, the ravenous ear of an information-hungry global economy. A constant stream of raw data goes pulsing home to Earth, a flood of rumors, whispers, hints of transgalactic traffic. I used to lie rigid in my hammock and feel the pressure of all those data, feel them snaking through the lines I imagined behind the bulkhead, lines like sinews, strapped and bulging, ready to spasm, ready to crush me. Then Charmian moved in with me, and after I told her about the fear, she made magic against it and put up her icons of Saint Olga. And the pressure receded, fell away.

"Patching you in with a translator, Toby. You may need German this morning." His voice was sand in my skull, a dry modulation of static. "Hillary "

"On line, Dr. Nagashima," said a BBC voice, clear as ice crystal. "You do have French, do you, Toby? Hofmannstahl has French and English."

"You stay the hell out of my hair, Hillary. Speak when you're bloody spoken to, got it?" Her silence became another layer in the complex, continual sizzle of static. Hiro shot me a dirty look across two dozen consoles. I grinned.

It was starting to happen: the elation, the adrenaline rush. I could feel it through the last wisps of barbiturate. A kid with a surfer's smooth, blond face was helping me into a jump suit. It smelled; it was newold, carefully battered, soaked with synthetic sweat and customized pheromones. Both sleeves were plastered from wrist to shoulder with embroidered patches, mostly corporate logos, subsidiary backers of an imaginary Highway expedition, with the main backer's much larger trademark stitched across

my shoulders the firm that was supposed to have sent HALPERT, TOBY out to his rendezvous with the stars. At least my name was real, embroidered in scarlet nylon capitals just above my heart.

The surfer boy had the kind of standard-issue good looks I associate with junior partners in the CIA, but his name tape said NEVSKY and repeated itself in Cyrillic. KGB, then. He was no tsiolnik; he didn't have that loose-jointed style conferred by twenty years in the L-5 habitat. The kid was pure Moscow, a polite clipboard ticker who probably knew eight ways to kill with a rolled newspaper. Now we began the ritual of drugs and pockets; he tucked a microsyringe; loaded with one of the new euphorohallucinogens, into the pocket on my left wrist, took a step back, then ticked it off on his clipboard. The printed outline of a jump-suited surrogate on his special pad looked like a handgun target. He took a five-gram vial of opium from the case he wore chained to his waist and found the pocket for that. Tick. Fourteen pockets. The cocaine was last.

Hiro came over just as the Russian was finishing. "Maybe she has some hard data, Toby; she's a physical chemist, remember." It was strange to hear him acoustically, not as bone vibration from the implant.

"Everything's hard up there, Hiro." "Don't I know it?" He was feeling it, too, that special buzz. We couldn't quite seem to make eye contact. Before the awkwardness could deepen, he turned and gave one of the yellow clowns the thumbs up.

Two of them helped me into the Bauhaus coffin and stepped back as the lid hissed down like a giant's faceplate. I began my ascent to Heaven and the homecoming of a stranger named Leni Hofmannstahl. A short trip, but it seems to take forever.

\* \* \*

Olga, who was our first hitchhiker, the first one to stick out her thumb on the wavelength of hydrogen, made it home in two years. At Tyuratam, in Kazakhstan, one gray winter morning, they recorded her return on eighteen centimeters of magnetic tape.

If a religious man one with a background in film technology had been watching the point in space where her Alyut had vanished two years before, it might have seemed to him that God had butt-spliced footage of empty space with footage of Olga's ship. She blipped back into our space-time like some amateur's atrocious special effect. A week later and they might

never have reached her in time; Earth would have spun on its way and left her drifting toward the sun. Fifty-three hours after her return, a nervous volunteer named Kurtz, wearing an armored work suit, climbed through the Alyut's hatch. He was an East German specialist in space medicine, and American cigarettes were his secret vice; he wanted one very badly as he negotiated the air lock, wedged his way past a rectangular mass of airscrubber core, and chinned his helmet lights. The Alyut, even after two years, seemed to be full of breathable air. In the twin beams from the massive helmet, he saw tiny globules of blood and vomit swinging slowly past, swirling in his wake, as he edged the bulky suit out of the crawlway and entered the command module. Then he found her.

She was drifting above the navigational display, naked, cramped in a rigid fetal knot. Her eyes were open, but fixed on something Kurtz would never see. Her fists were bloody, clenched like stone, and her brown hair, loose now, drifted around her face like seaweed. Very slowly, very carefully, he swung himself across the white keyboards of the command console and secured his suit to the navigational display. She'd gone after the ship's communications-gear with her bare hands, he decided. He deactivated the work suit's right claw; it unfolded automatically, like two pairs of vicegrip pliers pretending they were a flower. He extended his hand, still sealed in a pressurized gray surgical glove.

Then, as gently as he could, he pried open the fingers of her left hand. Nothing.

But when he opened her right fist, something spun free and tumbled in slow motion a few centimeters from the synthetic quartz of his faceplate. It looked like a seashell.

Olga came home, but she never came back to life behind those blue eyes. They tried, of course, but the more they tried, the more tenuous she became, and, in their hunger to know, they spread her thinner and thinner until she came, in her martyrdom, to fill whole libraries with frozen aisles of precious relics. No saint was ever pared so fine; at the Plesetsk laboratories alone, she was represented by more than two million tissue slides, racked and numbered in the subbasement of a bomb-proof biological complex.

They had better luck with the seashell. Exobiology suddenly found itself standing on unnervingly solid ground: one and seven-tenths grams of highly organized biological information, definitely extraterrestrial. Olga's seashell generated an entire subbranch of the science, devoted exclusively

to the study of . . . Olga's seashell.

The initial findings on the shell made two things clear. It was the product of no known terrestrial biosphere, and as there were no other known biospheres in the solar system, it had come from another star. Olga had either visited the place of its origin or come into contact, however distantly, with something that was, or had once been, capable of making the trip.

They sent a Major Grosz out to the Tovyevski Coordinates in a specially fitted Alyut 9. Another ship followed him. He was on the last of his twenty hydrogen flares when his ship vanished. They recorded his departure and waited. Two hundred thirty-four days later he returned. In the meantime they had probed the area constantly, desperate for anything that might become the specific anomaly, the irritant around which a theory might grow. There was nothing: only Grosz's ship, tumbling out of control. He committed suicide before they could reach him, the Highway's second victim.

When they towed the Alyut back to Tsiolkovsky, they found that the elaborate recording gear was blank. All of it was in perfect working order; none of it had functioned. Grosz was flash-frozen and put on the first shuttle down to Plesetsk, where bulldozers were already excavating for a new subbasement.

Three years later, the morning after they lost their seventh cosmonaut, a telephone rang in Moscow. The caller introduced himself. He was the director of the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States of America. He was authorized, he said, to make a certain offer. Under certain very specific conditions, the Soviet Union might avail itself of the best minds in Western psychiatry. It was the understanding of his agency, he continued, that such help might currently be very welcome.

His Russian was excellent.

The bonephone static was a subliminal sandstorm. The elevator slid up into its narrow shaft through the floor of Heaven. I counted blue lights at two-meter intervals. After the fifth light, darkness and cessation.

Hidden in the hollow command console of the dummy Highway boat, I waited in the elevator like the secret behind the gimmicked bookcase in a children's mystery story. The boat was a prop, a set piece, like the Bavarian



cottage glued to the plaster alp in some amusement park a nice touch, but one that wasn't quite necessary. If the returnees accept us at all, they take us for granted; our cover stories and props don't seem to make much difference.

“All clear,” Hiro said. “No customers hanging around.” I reflexively massaged the scar behind my left ear, where they'd gone in to plant the bonephone. The side of the dummy console swung open and let in the gray dawn light of Heaven. The fake boat's interior was familiar and strange at the same time, like your own apartment when you haven't seen it for a week. One of those new Brazilian vines had snaked its way across the left viewport since my last time up, but that seemed to be the only change in the whole scene.

Big fights over those vines at the biotecture meetings, American ecologists screaming about possible nitrogen shortfalls. The Russians have been touchy about biodesign ever since they had to borrow Americans to help them with the biotic program back at Tslolkovsky 1. Nasty problem with the rot eating the hydroponic wheat; all that superfine Soviet engineering and they still couldn't establish a functional ecosystem. Doesn't help that that initial debacle paved the way for us to be out here with them now. It irritates them; so they insist on the Brazilian vines, whatever anything that gives them a chance to argue. But I like those vines: The leaves are heart-shaped, and if you rub one between your hands, it smells like cinnamon.

I stood at the port and watched the clearing take shape, as reflected sunlight entered Heaven. Heaven runs Off Greenwich Standard; big Mylar mirrors were swiveling somewhere, out in bright vacuum, on schedule of a Greenwich Standard dawn. The recorded birdsongs began back in the trees. Birds have a very hard time in the absence of true gravity. We can't have real ones, because they go crazy trying to make do with centrifugal force.

The first time you see it, Heaven lives up to its name, lush and cool and bright, the long grass dappled with wildflowers. It helps if you don't know that most of the trees are artificial, or the amount of care required to maintain something like the optimal balance between blue-green algae and diatom algae in the ponds. Charmian says she expects Bambi to come gamboling out of the woods, and Hiro claims he knows exactly how many Disney engineers were sworn to secrecy under the National Security Act.

“We're getting fragments from Hofmannstahl,” Hiro said. He might

almost have been talking to himself; the handler-surrogate gestalt was going into effect, and soon we'd cease to be aware of each other. The adrenaline edge was tapering off. "Nothing very coherent. 'Schone Maschine,' something . . . 'Beautiful machine' ... Hillary thinks she sounds pretty calm, but right out of it."

"Don't tell me about it. No expectations, right? Let's go in loose." I opened the hatch and took a breath of Heaven's air; it was like cool white wine. "Where's Charmian?"

He sighed, a soft gust of static. "Charmian should be in Clearing Five, taking care of a Chilean who's three days home, but she's not, because she heard you were coming. So she's waiting for you by the carp pond. Stubborn bitch," he added.

Charmian was flicking pebbles at the Chinese bighead carp. She had a cluster of white flowers tucked behind one ear, a wilted Marlboro behind the other. Her feet were bare and muddy, and she'd hacked the legs off her jump suit at midthigh. Her black hair was drawn back in a ponytail.

We'd met for the first time at a party out in one of the welding shops, drunken voices clanging in the hollow of the alloy sphere, homemade vodka in zero gravity. Someone had a bag of water for a chaser, squeezed out a double handful, and flipped it expertly into a rolling, floppy ball of surface tension. Old jokes about passing water. But I'm graceless in zero g. I put my hand through it when it came my way. Shook a thousand silvery little balls from my hair, batting at them, tumbling, and the woman beside me was laughing, turning slow somersaults, long, thin girl with black hair. She wore those baggy drawstring pants that tourists take home from Tsiolkovsky and a faded NASA T-shirt three sizes too big. A minute later she was telling me about hang-gliding with the teen tsiolniki and about how proud they'd been of the weak pot they grew in one of the corn canisters. I didn't realize she was another surrogate until Hiro clicked in to tell us the party was over. She moved in with me a week later.

"A minute, okay?" Hiro gritted his teeth, a horrible sound. "One. Uno." Then he was gone, off the circuit entirely, maybe not even listening.

"How's tricks in Clearing Five?" I squatted beside her and found some pebbles of my own.

"Not so hot. I had to get away from him for a while, shot him up with

hypnotics. My translator told me you were on your way up.” - She has the kind of Texas accent that makes ice sound like ass.

“Thought you spoke Spanish. Guy’s Chilean, isn’t he?” I tossed one of my pebbles into the pond.

“I speak Mexican. The culture vultures said he wouldn’t like my accent. Good thing, too. I can’t follow him when he talks fast.” One of her pebbles followed mine, rings spreading on the surface as it sank. “Which is constantly,” she added. A bighead swam over to see whether her pebble was good to eat. “He isn’t going to make it.” She wasn’t looking at me. Her tone was perfectly neutral. “Little Jorge is definitely not making it.”

I chose the flattest of my pebbles and tried to skip it across the pond, but it sank. The less I knew about Chilean Jorge, the better. I knew he was a live one, one of the ten percent. Our DOA count runs at twenty percent. Suicide. Seventy percent of the meatshots are automatic candidates for Wards: the diaper cases, mumblers, totally gone. Charmian and I are surrogates for that final ten percent.

If the first ones to come back had only returned with seashells, I doubt that Heaven would be out here.

Heaven was built after a dead Frenchman returned with a twelve-centimeter ring of magnetically coded steel locked in his cold hand, black parody of the lucky kid who wins the free ride on the merry-go-round. We may never find out where or how he got it, but that ring was the Rosetta stone for cancer. So now it’s cargo cult time for the human race. We can pick things up out there that we might not stumble across in research in a thousand years. Charmian says we’re like those poor suckers on their island, who spend all their time building landing strips to make the big silver birds come back. Charmian says that contact with “superior” civilizations is something you don’t wish on your worst enemy.

“Ever wonder how they thought this scam up, Toby?” She was squinting into the sunlight, east, down the length of our cylindrical country, horizonless and green. “They must’ve had all the heavies in, the shrink elite, scattered down a long slab of genuine imitation rosewood, standard Pentagon issue. Each one got a clean notepad and a brand-new pencil, specially sharpened for the occasion. Everybody was there: Freudians, Jungians, Adlerians, Skinner rat men, you name it. And every one of those bastards knew in his heart that it was time to play his best hand. As a

profession, not just as representatives of a given faction. There they are, Western psychiatry incarnate. And nothing's happening! People are popping back off the Highway dead, or else they come back drooling, singing nursery rhymes. The live ones last about three days, won't say a goddamned thing, then shoot themselves or go catatonic." She took a small flashlight from her belt and casually cracked its plastic shell, extracting the parabolic reflector. "Kremlin's screaming. CIA's going nuts. And worst of all, the multinationals who want to back the show are getting cold feet. 'Dead spacemen? No data? No deal, friends.' So they're getting nervous, all those supershrinks, until some flake, some grinning weirdo from Berkeley maybe, he says," and her drawl sank to parody stoned mellowness, "'Like, hey, why don't we just put these people into a real nice place with a lotta good dope and somebody they can really relate to, hey?'" " She laughed, shook her head. She was using the reflector to light her cigarette, concentrating the sunlight. They don't give us matches; fires screw up the oxygen carbon dioxide balance. A tiny curl of gray smoke twisted away from the white-hot focal point.

"Okay," Hiro said, "that's your minute." I checked my watch; it was more like three minutes.

"Good luck, baby," she said softly, pretending to be intent on her cigarette. "Godspeed."

The promise of pain. It's there each time. You know what will happen, but you don't know when, or exactly how. You try to hold on to them; you rock them in the dark. But if you brace for the pain, you can't function. That poem Hiro quotes, Teach us to care and not to care.

We're like intelligent houseflies wandering through an international airport; some of us actually manage to blunder onto flights to London or Rio, maybe even survive the trip and make it back. "Hey," say the other flies, "what's happening on the other side of that door? What do they know that we don't?" At the edge of the Highway every human language unravels in your hands except, perhaps, the language of the shaman, of the cabalist, the language of the mystic intent on mapping hierarchies of demons, angels, saints.

But the Highway is governed by rules, and we've learned a few of them. That gives us something to cling to.

Rule One: One entity per ride; no teams, no couples.

Rule Two: No artificial intelligences; whatever's Out there won't stop for a smart machine, at least not the kind we know how to build.

Rule Three: Recording instruments are a waste of space; they always come back blank.

Dozens of new schools of physics have sprung up in Saint Olga's wake, ever more bizarre and more elegant heresies, each one hoping to shoulder its way to the inside track. One by one, they all fall down. In the whispering quiet of Heaven's nights, you imagine you can hear the paradigms shatter, shards of theory tinkling into brilliant dust as the lifework of some corporate think tank is reduced to the tersest historical footnote, and all in the time it takes your damaged traveler to mutter some fragment in the dark. not Flies in an airport, hitching rides. Flies are advised to ask too many questions; flies are advised not to try for the Big Picture. Repeated attempts in that direction invariably lead to the slow, relentless flowering of paranoia, your mind projecting huge, dark patterns on the walls of night, patterns that have a way of solidifying, becoming madness, becoming religion. Smart flies stick with Black Box theory; Black Box is the sanctioned metaphor, the Highway remaining  $x$  in every sane equation. We aren't supposed to worry about what the Highway is, or who put it there. Instead, we concentrate on what we put into the Box and what we get back out of it. There are things we send down the Highway (a woman named Olga, her ship, so many more who've followed) and things that come to us (a madwoman, a seashell, artifacts, fragments of alien technologies). The Black Box theorists assure us that our primary concern is to optimize this exchange. We're out here to see that our species gets its money's worth. Still, certain things become increasingly evident; one of them is that we aren't the only flies who've found their way into an airport. We've collected artifacts from at least half a dozen wildly divergent cultures. "More hicks," Charmian calls them. We're like pack rats in the hold of a freighter, trading little pretties with rats from other ports. Dreaming of the bright lights, the big city.

Keep it simple, a matter of In and Out. Leni Hofmannstahl: Out.

We staged the homecoming of Leni Hofmannstahl in Clearing Three, also known as Elysium. I crouched in a stand of meticulous reproductions of young vine maples and studied her ship. It had originally looked like a

wingless dragonfly, a slender, ten-meter abdomen housing the reaction engine. Now, with the engine removed, it looked like a matte-white pupa, larval eye bulges stuffed with the traditional useless array of sensors and probes. It lay on a gentle rise in the center of the clearing, a specially designed hillock sculpted to support a variety of vessel formats. The newer boats are smaller, like Grand Prix washing machines, minimalist pods with no pretense to being exploratory vessels. Modules for meatshots.

“I don’t like it,” Hiro said. “I don’t like this one. It doesn’t feel right. . . .” He might have been talking to himself; he might almost have been me talking to myself, which meant the handler-surrogate gestalt was almost operational. Locked into my role, I’m no longer the point man for Heaven’s hungry ear, a specialized probe radio-linked with an even more specialized psychiatrist; when the gestalt clicks, Hiro and I meld into something else, something we can never admit to each other, not when it isn’t happening. Our relationship would give a classical Freudian nightmares. But I knew that he was right; something felt terribly wrong this time.

The clearing was roughly circular. It had to be; it was actually a fifteen-meter round cut through the floor of Heaven, a circular elevator disguised as an Alpine minimeadow. They’d sawed Leni’s engine off, hauled her boat into the outer cylinder, lowered the clearing to the air-lock deck, then lifted her to Heaven on a giant pie plate landscaped with grass and wildflowers. They’d blanked her sensors with broadcast overrides and sealed her ports and hatch; Heaven is supposed to be a surprise to the newly arrived.

I found myself wondering whether Charmian was back with Jorge yet. Maybe she’d be cooking something for him, one of the fish we “catch” as they’re released into our hands from cages on the pool bottoms. I imagined the smell of frying fish, closed my eyes, and imagined Charmian wading in the shallow water, bright drops beading on her thighs, long-legged girl in a fishpond in Heaven.

“Move, Toby! In now!” My skull rang with the volume; training and the gestalt reflex already had me halfway across the clearing. “Goddamn, goddamn, goddamn. . . .” Hiro’s mantra, and I knew it had managed to go all wrong, then. Hillary the translator was a shrill undertone, BBC ice cracking as she rattled something out at top speed, something about anatomical charts. Hiro must have used the remotes to unseal the hatch, but he didn’t wait for it to unscrew itself. He triggered six explosive bolts built into the hull and blew the whole hatch mechanism out intact. It barely missed me. I had instinctively swerved out of its way. Then I was

scrambling up the boat's smooth side, grabbing for the honeycomb struts just inside the entranceway; the hatch mechanism had taken the alloy ladder with it.

And I froze there, crouching in the smell of plastique from the bolts, because that was when the Fear found me, really found me, for the first time.

I'd felt it before, the Fear, but only the fringes, the least edge. Now it was vast, the very hollow of night, an emptiness cold and implacable. It was last words, deep space, every long goodbye in the history of our species. It made me cringe, whining. I was shaking, groveling, crying. They lecture us on it, warn us, try to explain it away as a kind of temporary agoraphobia endemic to our work. But we know what it is; surrogates know and handlers can't. No explanation has ever even come close.

It's the Fear. It's the long finger of Big Night, the darkness that feeds the muttering damned to the gentle white maw of Wards. Olga knew it first, Saint Olga. She tried to hide us from it, clawing at her radio gear, bloodying her hands to destroy her ship's broadcast capacity, praying Earth would lose her, let her die....

Hiro was frantic, but he must have understood, and he knew what to do.

He hit me with the pain switch. Hard. Over and over, like a cattle prod. He drove me into the boat. He drove me through the Fear.

Beyond the Fear, there was ~ room. Silence, and a stranger's smell, a woman's.

The cramped module was worn, almost homelike, the tired plastic of the acceleration couch patched with peeling strips of silver tape. But it all seemed to mold itself around an absence. She wasn't there. Then I saw the insane frieze of ballpoint scratchings, crabbed symbols, thousands of tiny, crooked oblongs locking and overlapping. Thumb-smudged, pathetic, it covered most of the rear bulkhead. Hiro was static, whispering, pleading. Find her, Toby, now, please, Toby, find her, find her, find I found her in the surgical bay, a narrow alcove off the crawlway. Above her, the Schone Maschine, the surgical manipulator, glittering, its bright, thin arms neatly folded, chromed limbs of a spider crab, tipped with hemostats, forceps, laser scalpel. Hillary was hysterical, half-lost on some faint channel, something about the anatomy of the human arm, the tendons, the arteries,

basic taxonomy. Hillary was screaming.

There was no blood at all. The manipulator is a clean machine, able to do a no-mess job in zero g, vacuuming the blood away. She'd died just before Hiro had blown the hatch, her right arm spread out across the white plastic work surface like a medieval drawing, flayed, muscles and other tissues tacked out in a neat symmetrical display, held with a dozen stainless-steel dissecting pins. She bled to death. A surgical manipulator is carefully programmed against suicides, but it can double as a robot dissector, preparing biologicals for storage.

She'd found a way to fool it. You usually can, with machines, given time. She'd had eight years.

She lay there in a collapsible framework, a thing like the fossil skeleton of a dentist's chair; through it, I could see the faded embroidery across the back of her jump suit, the trademark of a West German electronics conglomerate. I tried to tell her. I said, "Please, you're dead. Forgive us, we came to try to help, Hiro and I. Understand? He knows you, see, Hiro, he's here in my head. He's read your dossier, your sexual profile, your favorite colors; he knows your childhood fears, first lover, name of a teacher you liked. And I've got just the right pheromones and I'm a walking arsenal of drugs, something here you're bound to like. And we can lie, Hiro and I; we're ace liars. Please. You've got to see. Perfect strangers, but Hiro and I, for you, we make up the perfect stranger, Leni."

She was a small woman, blond, her smooth, straight hair streaked with premature gray. I touched her hair, once, and went out into the clearing. As I stood there, the long grass shuddered, the wildflowers began to shake, and we began our descent, the boat centered on its landscaped round of elevator. The clearing slid down out of Heaven, and the sunlight was lost in the glare of huge vapor arcs that threw hard shadows across the broad deck of the air lock. Figures in red suits, running. A red Dinky Toy did a U-turn on fat rubber wheels, getting out of our way. Nevsky, the KGB surfer, was waiting at the foot of the gangway that they wheeled to the edge of the clearing. I didn't see him until I reached the bottom.

"I must take the drugs now, Mr. Halpert." I stood there, swaying, blinking tears from my eyes. He reached out to steady me. I wondered whether he even knew why he was down here in the lock deck, a yellow suit in red territory. But he probably didn't mind; he didn't seem to mind anything very much; he had his clipboard ready.



“I must take them, Mr. Halpert.” I stripped out of the suit, bundled it, and handed it to him. He stuffed it into a plastic Ziploc, put the Ziploc in a case manacled to his left wrist, and spun the combination.

“Don’t take them all at once, kid,” I said. Then I fainted.

Late that night Charmian brought a special kind of darkness down to my cubicle, individual doses sealed in heavy foil. It was nothing like the darkness of Big Night, that sentient, hunting dark that waits to drag the hitchhikers down to Wards, that dark that incubates the Fear. It was a darkness like the shadows moving in the back seat of your parents’ car, on a rainy night when you’re five years old, warm and secure. Charmian’s a lot slicker than I am when it comes to getting past the clipboard tickers, the ones like Nevsky. I didn’t ask her why she was back from Heaven, or what had happened to Jorge. She didn’t ask me anything about Leni.

Hiro was gone, off the air entirely. I’d seen him at the debriefing that afternoon; as usual, our eyes didn’t meet. It didn’t matter. I knew he’d be back. It had been business as usual, really. A bad day in Heaven, but it’s never easy. It’s hard when you feel the Fear for the first time, but I’ve always known it was there, waiting. They talked about Leni’s diagrams and about her ballpoint sketches of molecular chains that shift on command. Molecules that can function as switches, logic elements, even a kind of wiring, built up in layers into a single very large molecule, a very small computer. We’ll probably never know what she met out there; we’ll probably never know the details of the transaction. We might be sorry if we ever found out. We aren’t the only hinterland tribe, the only ones looking for scraps.

Damn Leni, damn that Frenchman, damn all the ones who bring things home, who bring cancer cures, seashells, things without names who keep us here waiting, who fill Wards, who bring us the Fear. But cling to this dark, warm and close, to Charmian’s slow breathing, to the rhythm of the sea. You get high enough out here; you’ll hear the sea, deep down behind the constant conch-shell static of the bonephone. It’s something we carry with us, no matter how far from home.

Charmian stirred beside me, muttered a stranger’s name, the name of some broken traveler long gone down to Wards. She holds the current record; she kept a man alive for two weeks, until he put his eyes out with his thumbs. She screamed all the way down, broke her nails on the elevator’s

plastic lid. Then they sedated her.

We both have the drive, though, that special need, that freak dynamic that lets us keep going back to Heaven. We both got it the same way, lay out there in our little boats for weeks, waiting for the Highway to take us. And when our last flare was gone, we were hauled back here by tugs. Some people just aren't taken, and nobody knows why. And you'll never get a second chance. They say it's too expensive, but what they really mean, as they eye the bandages on your wrists, is that now you're too valuable, too much use to them as a potential surrogate. Don't worry about the suicide attempt, they'll tell you; happens all the time. Perfectly understandable: feeling of profound rejection. But I'd wanted to go, wanted it so bad. Charmian, too. She tried with pills. But they worked on us, twisted us a little, aligned our drives, planted the bonephones, paired us with handlers.

Olga must have known, must have seen it all, somehow she was trying to keep us from finding our way out there, where she'd been. She knew that if we found her, we'd have to go. Even now, knowing what I know, I still want to go. I never will. But we can swing here in this dark that towers way above us, Charmian's hand in mind. Between our palms the drug's torn foil wrapper. And Saint Olga smiles out at us from the walls; you can feel her, all those prints from the same publicity shot, torn and taped across the walls of night, her white smile, forever.

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\* \* \* \*

# SISTER ANGEL

by *Kate Wilhelm*

Dinner had been extraordinarily good, Charlie thought with contentment. From the kitchen there now came the soft chugging of the dishwasher; closer, the clink of cup on saucer, a pop from the fireplace, or a hiss; even closer, the nearly inaudible purr of Ashcan on his lap.

The orange cat, Candy, was stalking the cream on the coffee table. Her forequarters were low, her rear up high, and the white tip of her tail twitched.

"Candy! "Constance said, not raising her voice. The cat discovered that her right hind leg was filthy and started to wash it.

Gretchen laughed. "Heavens, country life could be addictive."

"We're only two hours away from New York," Constance pointed out. "Now we've wined you and dined you, and it's your turn. You said there was an urgent problem you had to discuss. Give."

"Do you believe in ghosts?" Dutch asked suddenly. He was a tall, heavy man with little patience and no evident sense of humor. An engineering consultant, he was leaving for Europe the following day and had asked for, demanded, this visit tonight. "It started last summer," he said. "At her cousin Wanda's house, in Connecticut. Vernon and Wanda Garrity. But Vernon's dead now, and Wanda insists that he's haunting her."

"Wasn't he the inventor?" Charlie asked.

"That's the one. He showed us some cats he was working on last summer." He shook his head. "Here's a guy who invents million-dollar gadgets, and in his spare time he plays with toy cats."

"What happened last summer?"

"That night at dinner he says, 'Do you believe in ghosts,' and I said something that squelched the topic. The next day Wanda went home with us, and that evening he was killed. Now, six months later, she says she's getting messages from him."

“How was he killed?” Charlie asked.

“Hit on the head on the beach at their place, robbed. No one was arrested.”

“Didn’t I meet Wanda years ago?” Constance asked.

Gretchen nodded. “Probably at a slumber party at my house when we were in school. She was there a lot.”

Gretchen and Constance had been in college together, had been friends, had parted and lost track of each other until Gretchen’s call that morning.

“Don’t forget Brother Amos,” Gretchen said, “and Sister Angel.”

“Fat chance. Brother Amos calls himself an evangelist. He claims that Vernon is in touch with him, and he tells Wanda what Vernon says. Angel is his daughter. He calls her Sister Angel.”

“Nasty can of worms,” Charlie said, shaking his head.

“I say she should see a shrink.”

“Well, she won’t,” Gretchen snapped.

“So you want Constance to go talk to her.” Charlie glanced at Constance with what was almost an evil grin. She understood the message: It was her turn to explain that she was retired, not taking private cases, busy writing a book and being a country housewife.

“Aunt Louise,” Gretchen said, “asked me to get in touch with you both. She wants someone—a detective—to investigate Amos. And she wants a psychologist—Constance—to talk sense into Wanda.”

“Aunt Louise,” Dutch added dryly, “is Wanda’s mother. She lives in Bridgeport. For the first time in her life, there’s money in the family, and she wants to keep it there.”

\* \* \* \*

The Garrity house was immense. There was a wide, covered portico outside a spacious foyer two stories high. A balcony bathed in light from windows on the north and south, overlooked the foyer. The living room was

down several steps; its southern exposure was glass, opening to a red-tiled terrace, lawn, and beyond it all, a lake. The rooms were large, brightly lighted with wide, tall windows, furnished in warm colors, and accented with American Indian' artwork, wall hangings, rugs.

Wanda was an interior decorator; her own house was proof that she was a very good one.

Slender, dark haired, she looked as if she had been ill. She was chain-smoking.

"Please call me Wanda," she had said almost instantly. "I'm sorry Gretchen is out. She's told me so much about you and Charlie, I feel as if I almost remember you. And it will make it that much easier to explain to Brother Amos."

"You have to explain us to him?"

"Not really, but... one does, you know." A flush colored her cheeks and left again. With a swift motion she stubbed out the cigarette and took a deep breath.

"I don't know what to say. Do you want to ask questions?"

"Not yet," Constance said. "Let's get acquainted. How does anyone manage to gather all these artifacts?"

Wanda stood up. "It took me nearly a year to gather the stuff. Come, I'll show you the rest of the house." She looked inquiringly at Charlie; he shook his head.

When they were out of sight, he opened the sliding glass door and walked outside, down to the narrow strip of beach. The lake was about three miles long and two miles wide. Straight across it there was a bluff, and on that, a trailer court where Brother Amos and his daughter lived. He turned to look back at the house, even more imposing here than from the front, because from here he could see the mammoth living room, the terrace, and sun glinting off the upper-floor windows, turning them all gold. From across the lake it must look like a gold mine, he thought.

Inside the house Wanda pointed to him on the beach. She and Constance were on the upper balcony.

"You're day and night," Wanda said. "He's so dark and mysterious,

and you're like a Nordic queen-tall, fair, splendid."

Constance smiled. Day and night was how she had always thought of herself and Charlie. "Tell me a little something about Vernon."

"Charlie reminds me of him," Wanda said slowly. "Not the way he looks, but the way he listens, the way he accepts what he hears, maybe. Vernon was like that. Quiet, steady, so loyal that when his first wife left him, he waited for more than a year, really believing she'd come back. We were married five years. We were happy together."

They started down the wide stairs that led to the foyer. Indian masks lined the wall here. "This is for the peyote ceremony," she said, pointing to a grotesquely contorted, brilliantly painted ceramic mask. "And that one was used for the buffalo hunt. He was going to leave me. He had fallen in love with someone else. I just had to get away by myself to think for a while. That's why I left with Gretchen."

Constance could feel the presence of staring eyes from the empty holes of the masks, could feel the presence of the ancient shamans. "Did he tell you that?"

"He said he was haunted by her, obsessed by her; he couldn't stop thinking of her." Wanda's face was so white that it could have been one of the masks.

"You hadn't suspected?"

She shook her head. "I knew there was something preying on him, but not that. I don't know when it could have happened. We were never apart. I don't even know who she is." Her voice was faint, unbelieving. "I never told anyone, not Gretchen, not my mother, no one! And that's one of the things Brother Amos told me. There's no way he could have found out, no way. No one suspected." She started to walk again, this time holding the balustrade tightly.

"Wanda, why did you agree to have Charlie and me come? What do you want?"

"I read your book. You have an open mind, don't automatically reject things. I agreed more than a week ago. Since then, every day there's been something new, something that only Vernon could be saying to me. I just don't know what to think any longer, what to do. Every time I see him I find out more."

“You mean from Amos?”

She shook her head. “From Vernon. Through Brother Amos.”

\* \* \* \*

Brother Amos was tall and blond, broad shouldered, trim. He could have been a car salesman, an insurance agent, a government undersecretary. He shook hands heartily. When he took Wanda’s hand, he used both of his and pressed hers between them as he gazed into her eyes and murmured something inaudible.

His daughter Angel was very thin, still gangly, with long pale hair that was baby fine, and beautiful eyes a deep-violet color.

“It was good of you, Gretchen, to bring company to help enliven the atmosphere in this house. Wanda needs companions, conversation. Too much grieving is bad for anyone. Life is to be lived fully if we are to rob death of its fears.”

“I’m acting bartender,” Charlie said father briskly. “Martini mixings, scotch, let’s see-” He found the shaker and started to mix martinis. “And for the young lady, we have Coke, Pepsi, juice-”

He glanced at her as he continued to shake the gin and ice, and he was struck by the loveliness of her eyes.

“Coke,” she said in a low voice.

“And juice for me,” Amos said. “I don’t condemn moderate alcohol, you understand, but I prefer to be abstemious. The training of a lifetime is hard to put aside.”

“Where do you preach?” Constance asked.

“Nowhere at the moment. My calling came late, too late for divinity school. My church is the world, wherever there are human souls yearning for the Word, the Truth, for Guidance.”

Constance knew he capitalized the words in his head. Mildly she said, “A tent revivalist? Really?”

“My dear lady, the Word of God is valid wherever it is uttered, be it in

an alleyway, or a tent, or the finest cathedral.”

“Here you go,” Charlie said cheerfully as he handed out the drinks. “Do you heal at your meetings, Brother Amos? The laying on of hands, all that?”

“Enough about me,” Amos protested. “What is your trade, Mr. Meiklejohn?”

“Retired. Out to pasture. Used to be a building inspector of sorts.”

Constance looked at him admiringly, wondering if he had rehearsed that answer. In the arson squad for years, he had indeed inspected many buildings for the New York City police department. Amos turned to her.

“And Mrs. Meiklejohn? Do you have a profession?”

“I’m thinking of writing a book as soon as I have enough time.”

“A writer! How exciting.” He dismissed them both and turned his attention to Wanda. “And you, my dear, are you feeling better today?”

“I’m fine,” she said quickly. She looked at her martini, tasted it, put it down, and picked up her cigarette instead.

Charlie poured more martinis, refilled Angel’s glass with Coke, and then knocked Amos’s glass off the table when he started to refill it. He put it aside, brought out a fresh glass, and filled that one. When he looked up, he found Angel’s gaze fixed on him, her violet eyes unblinking, an unfathomable expression on her face. The kind of look children sometimes assume. “Do you go to school here?”

She shook her head.

“I tutor her at home,” Amos said. “I don’t approve of the moral values the school systems teach.”

Dinner was interminable. Everyone waited for Brother Amos to lead the conversation, and this he did willingly at first, then with more and more reluctance. His store of small talk was poverty-stricken.

When he began to discuss the weather, even Wanda looked desperate. He tried baseball. With dessert he moved on to television, and he was still carrying it alone.



Charlie could see a glaze forming over Constance's eyes, and he suppressed a grin. As soon as there was a pause in the monologue, he asked, "Wanda, any chance of seeing those mechanical cats Gretchen told us about?"

She nearly jumped up in relief. Without even making certain all of them were through with the mousse, she went to the door. "Why don't you go into the living room for coffee. I'll bring one of them in."

The others left at a more leisurely pace and had not yet seated themselves when she reappeared, holding a furry white cat.

At first glance it appeared to be a live cat, its tail full and limp, swinging; its forepaws dangling. Wanda put it down in the center of the room, and they formed a circle around it.

"This one's set to respond to my voice. They're all voice-activated. They're covered with mink, or vicuna, or even silk. They're heat-seeking, but they're so dumb that they can't distinguish one heat source from another. They'll approach the fireplace, stop at a certain temperature, and curl up and purr. Or maybe go over to a light bulb or a toaster, anything that's the right temperature."

Angel moved in front of the toy, bending slightly to peer at its face.

"Kitty, kitty," Wanda said.

The cat moved, slowly rose from the sleeping position to stand on four feet. Its tail went straight up in a realistic way, and it turned its head from side to side and started to walk, a bit stiffly but catlike.

Constance was watching the cat with amusement when she felt a wave of revulsion and fear, then another even stronger, and then something else. Angel screamed.

The next several seconds were confused. Angel was screaming, backing away from the cat. Wanda had thrown her hands over her face and was swaying, moaning. Charlie caught Angel and half-carried her out of the path of the advancing cat. He held her against his chest as she screamed again and again and finally started to sob. Amos grabbed the cat and held it at arm's length. Constance backed Wanda into a chair and forced her down. The revulsion, the horror, the terror had faded, leaving her spent and weak.

She saw that Gretchen had gone white also, and she left Wanda, took Gretchen by the arm, and sat her down, too.

“For heaven’s sake!” she exclaimed, and took the cat from Amos, who was staring at it as if entranced. She started toward the workroom with it.

The spell was broken. Amos shook himself and ran over to Angel. “Baby, baby, it’s just a toy! It’s all right, sweetheart.”

Angel clung to Charlie, burying her face against him, no longer crying. Amos tried to loosen her grasp, but she shook her head and held on.

“Come on, honey. I’ll take you home. It’s all right now.” Amos pried her loose and held her, stroked her fine hair, all the while making soothing noises.

“I need a drink,” Constance said, rejoining them.

“Amen,” Charlie said, already at the long table where the bottles were lined up. He filled a glass with brandy and downed it.

Wanda stared fixedly at Brother Amos. “He was here, wasn’t he? What did he want?”

He nodded. “Yes. Tomorrow we’ll talk. I have to take my girl home now. She’s had a shock. She’s very sensitive to this kind of thing, very sensitive.”

“In the morning? At ten?”

“After lunch. I’ll come at two.”

Charlie handed Angel a glass of water. Her face was swollen, flushed. He patted her lightly on the shoulder, then took brandy to Wanda.

Amos took the glass from his daughter, put it down, and left with her, his arm around her shoulders.

Wanda stood up shakily. “If you’ll excuse me,” she said in a low voice.

Gretchen went with her.

Constance drank her brandy almost as fast as Charlie had done earlier. "Another."

They both had another. They sat in facing chairs, not talking yet. Finally he said, "You were swell."

"And you had your hands full. What happened, Charlie?"

"Damned if I know. Did you feel-?"

She nodded. "Like I was at one of those awful horror movies, and I was the victim."

"Yeah. Maybe another brandy. And I've got to retrieve that glass." He went behind the table, then cursed briefly. It was gone.

Constance pointed to the water glass. "He handled that."

He picked up the glass carefully, holding it at the bottom, and dumped the remaining water back into the pitcher. He started to leave with the glass, then hesitated, a curious look on his face.

"Will you be all right alone for a couple of minutes?"

"Fine," she said, glad that he had asked, startled that he had asked.

Gretchen joined them while they were having coffee. Wanda had taken a sleeping pill and was sleeping already, lucky Wanda.

"I don't dare close my eyes," Gretchen said. Then darkly she added. "I sure wish Dutch had been here, the ape, laughing at ghosts."

"That's the last kind of thing you should say now," Constance said severely. "All Wanda needs is any sort of confirmation and she'll be over the edge so deep we may not be able to pull her out again."

"What else do you think it could have been? It was Vernon, mad as hell at us for playing with his toys! She knows that!"

\* \* \* \*

That night Charlie dreamed: He was dancing with a woman. His eyes were closed, his cheek against her hair, his hands moving down her soft, silky

body, warm and yielding to his touch, so responsive that her body and his were not really separate but moved together as if joined at a common nerve center. Her hands were like warm kisses on his skin; where they touched he came alive. Now, he whispered into her hair. *Now!* They sank into cloudlike softness.

He came wide awake and sat upright, wet with sweat, shivering. He got out of bed, pulled on his robe, and stumbled from the bedroom. Behind him Constance made a slight noise, and he turned and saw her, an old woman with graying hair, lines at her eyes, old, old.

Moments later she sat up, certain he had said something. She reached out to touch him and found his bed empty.

Slowly she got up and put on her robe and slippers, troubled, wanting to find him. Going down the stairs she felt again the presence of the masks, the staring eye holes, and she drew her robe tighter about her. He was standing at the broad expanse of glass in the living room, outlined against the pale dawn light.

“Charlie! What’s wrong?”

He stiffened. When he turned to her, he again saw an aging woman with tousled hair, sleep-heavy features. The image faded, and he saw Constance.

“I thought I heard something.” Deliberately he faced the lake that was like a silver skin over an abyss.

She went to stand at his side but did not touch him. He seemed hard, unknowable. “Char-”

“Go back to bed. I have to think, and I have to be alone for a while.” His eyes were like obsidian discs.

Why didn’t it fade? he thought almost savagely after she left. Dreams always fade on awakening; the most frightening dream loses its power after you’re fully awake. The edges begin to crumble, and details sink back to the pit. He was still waiting for the dream reality to fade an hour later, when rain fractured the surface of the lake.

\* \* \* \*

Gretchen and Constance had breakfast in a pleasant room off the kitchen.

Charlie had gone into town, and Wanda was not feeling well. As soon as they were through eating, Gretchen left to do some errands.

Outside the rain was splashing on the red tiles, and the lake was churned by a brisk wind. And Charlie did not have a raincoat with him.

Constance knew exactly where it was, in their hall closet at home. Charlie would be soaked. She had not even seen him that morning. She had been in the shower, and when she got out he was gone. The rain began slanting in against the glass.

She prowled the silent house restlessly, finally settling down to look through some scrapbooks. Many of the pictures were of Vernon, a gray-haired, slender man with a straight carriage and squared shoulders. There were also many pictures of children, most of them in braces or in wheelchairs. There were several of Vernon holding one child or another up at a game of chance, a ball toss, or dart board; one of Wanda at a fund-raising booth, with a child eating cotton candy at a counter. There were no more pictures after that series.

Charlie called shortly before noon. "I won't be back for a couple more hours. Everything quiet?"

"You wouldn't believe how quiet. What are you doing?"

"Can't talk now. Okay? Guess who's chief of police in Bridgeport these days. Tony Francello! We're having lunch."

Constance stared at the phone for a long time after replacing it. She shivered with a sudden chill. What in God's name was wrong with Charlie? He had talked like a stranger. She rubbed her arms briskly, but the chill was deep within her.

Amos and Angel arrived shortly before two. "Hello," Constance said cheerfully, admitting them.

Amos nodded at her. "I told Sister Angel that she could watch television while I talk to Mrs. Garrity. I'll hang up your coat, honey." He hung both coats in the closet, and Angel went down the hallway toward the television room. Constance started to follow her.

"Mrs. Meiklejohn," Amos said urgently, "your husband is in danger. I see him surrounded by flames, and he is desperately afraid. Take him away from here!"

“What are you talking about? What do you mean?”

“He is in mortal danger! He fears the flames as he fears hellfire! If you want to save his sanity and his life, take him away from here!” Without waiting for a response, he turned and ran lightly up the stairs.

With great effort Constance released the railing she had grasped. Flames! She had known when Charlie began having nightmares about arson. She remembered too vividly the way he had muttered, thrashing about in his sleep. They had talked about it then but not since, never since. He had asked for a transfer, had changed his job, and gradually the nightmares had stopped. Her palms were wet. The masks stared down at her. They saw everything, knew everything. And Amos? How had he found that out?

\* \* \* \*

Half an hour later she joined Angel in the television room. “Mind if I watch with you?” she asked. “It sure is quiet in this house today.”

Angel shrugged. She was watching a game show.

“Our daughter is in college,” Constance said. “She wants to be a biologist. What will you major in?”

Angel continued to watch the show. “I don’t know.”

“That’s the best way to enter, I think. Leave it open until you’ve tried out various fields. Where will you go?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, I don’t think it hurts to wait until you’re older to decide. Have you always been afraid of cats?”

“I’m not afraid of cats.” -

“Mechanical ones, I meant.”

Angel pushed a button on the remote control.

“It really isn’t very different from the windup toys that kids play with when they’re young, you know.”

Angel pushed the button again, then again.

“Actually, what you’re doing now with that control is pretty much how the cat works, I think. You give a signal, and it does something that it’s been programmed to do.”

The television stations were flicking by faster and faster.

“It wasn’t aiming at you, you know. You just happened to be closest to it.”

Flick, flick. They were back to the original game show. She turned up the volume.

“Angel, there are people who can help you. These things don’t get better by themselves. You don’t have to be so afraid.”

Suddenly Angel jumped up and glared at Constance.

“Leave me alone! I’m not afraid of a stupid cat!”

She ran from the room.

Gloomily Constance turned off the television set and followed the girl. She reached the foyer just in time to see Charlie leading Angel back into the house, his arm about her protectively.

“Take it easy,” he was saying. “No one’s going to hurt you. Who was chasing you, anyway?”

“She wants to hurt me,” Angel said breathlessly, her face pressed against his side. “She won’t leave me alone.”

“Who. honey? Just tell me who.”

Angel pointed at Constance standing in the hallway entrance.

When Charlie looked at Constance, his face was set in hard lines. This is how *they* must have felt, she thought distantly. She meant, the ones he interrogated, the ones he suspected, the ones he intended to stop one way or another, the ones he hated.

Before either could say anything, Amos came running down the stairs.

“Time to go home, Sister Angel. Lessons to do. Sister Wanda is resting now. We’ll come back later.”

There was a glint in his eyes that suggested satisfaction or possibly contempt.

In their room a few minutes later, Charlie outlined what he had found out. “His name is Andrew Donovan, half a dozen pinches but never a conviction. Petty stuff. Con games, most of them. The chicken-drop switch, stuff like that. And for the last few years he’s been with a carnival, a magic act. Long, black hair, full black beard. Played in Bridgeport last summer, but no one would recognize him now.

She shook her head. What was happening here went beyond a con game.

“It all fits,” Charlie said brusquely. “He killed Vernon, split, and came back when things quieted down. Now he’s working his way into the house. What more could you ask for?”

She told him about the picture album. Vernon could have met him at the carnival. “But why did he kill Vernon? Petty con men don’t murder as a rule.”

“So Vernon found out something about him. What difference does it make? Even if he didn’t do it, he’s a con artist. And with the background of a magic show, mind reading and all, the rest of it’s easy. This is exactly what Wanda needs to know.”

“She won’t be convinced.”

“I’ve got what they wanted. We’re finished here. You take the car back home this afternoon. I’ll be along in a few days.”

He was at the window. The rain had stopped, and a feeble sun was lighting the clouds that lingered.

“Charlie, what’s wrong with you? What’s happened to you?”

His expression was so miserable that she wanted to go to him, hold him hard. “I don’t know. I have to be alone for a while. I have to think something through.”



“Vernon became obsessed with someone else all at once,” she said slowly. “I think that was the ghost he wanted to talk about that night. Who is it, Charlie?”

He had averted his face, did not answer.

Like Vernon, she thought. Just like Vernon. “You didn’t get any sleep last night,” she said. “Why don’t you take a short nap now before dinner?”

\* \* \* \*

Outside their room she looked up and down the hallway and said under her breath, “You can’t have him! Ghost, ghoul, whatever you are, you can’t have him!”

Gretchen met her in the foyer. “Telephone for Charlie. Is he in your room?”

“He’s sleeping. I’ll take it.” She took it in the living room.

“Constance? Hey, how’re you? It’s Tony.”

“Fine, Tony. What a nice surprise to have you here.” Tony chatted a moment or two before he came to the point.

“It’s about that other set of prints on the glass. She’s Angela Schnabel, a runaway from Philadelphia juvenile court. But hell, she’s going to be eighteen in a few months, and she’s clean. No one’s going to haul her back now.”

“Juvenile court? For what?” *Eighteen? It seemed impossible.*

“Nothing. Abandoned by her mother. She was a ward of the court in a disturbed children’s home and split.”

She paced the living room for several minutes, then sat down and called Philadelphia information and got two numbers, one of a colleague she had worked with and another of a child psychologist she knew by reputation.

Her friend protested that the information she wanted was not available. Constance hung up, called the child psychologist, and talked to her for a long time. Then she called back her friend.

“Dr. Walker will intercede for you,” she said forcefully. “She has influence at the detention center. Just get over there, Vanessa, will you, for crying out loud?”

Vanessa grumbled, but said she would do it and call back as soon as she had anything to tell.

Constance was still waiting when Gretchen and Charlie joined her; Charlie looked as if he had not slept.

Gretchen sprawled on the couch. “She’s giving us all the old heave-ho, I’m afraid. She’ll be down to tell us officially that we’re invited to leave. I guess last night was the last straw.”

“Amos called her Sister Wanda today. I was afraid he had won.” Constance remembered the glint in his eyes.

“Maybe what I have to tell her will change her mind,” Charlie said.

“I doubt it.” Wanda entered the room. “Brother Amos already told me about his past. He went through a conversion last fall as real as the one that changed the life of Saul of Tarsus.”

“You know about his little mind-reading act with the carnival.?”

She nodded. “Everything. And he really does communicate in ways not available to the rest of us. He said Constance knows that now.” She looked inquiringly at Constance who nodded.

“He knows things he shouldn’t.”

“See? I’ve invited him and Sister Angel to stay here but not until my other guests have departed,” she said without a trace of embarrassment. “They will join us tonight for a short while and move in to keep me company tomorrow. Will that be convenient?”

She sank into one of the overstuffed chairs, picked up her cigarettes, and lit one. “He also said that you, Charlie, should leave here tonight. Whatever it was that haunted Vernon has now transferred its attention to you. You’re in danger.”

“Vernon hasn’t told you anything about that ghost yet?” Charlie’s voice held a trace of mockery.

“Not yet,” Wanda admitted. “But he will eventually. Last night was the first time he has shown displeasure. That was because you’re under false pretenses. You’re the one who wanted to play with the cat, and you’re very threatening to Amos.”

Charlie laughed, “You told him about us?”

“No. I’ve told him nothing.” She stubbed out the cigarette and lit another. “There’s no need to tell him anything. He knows.”

*Why didn’t Vanessa call back ?* Constance looked again at her watch. “When do you expect Amos and Angel tonight?”

“Around nine-thirty.”

At dinner they all poked at their food without interest. The call for Constance came midway through the meal.

When she returned to the dining room Wanda was regarding Charlie. “That’s exactly how Vernon acted,” she said. “That same kind of absent look, pale, taut-”

Charlie stood up, stalked from the room, with Constance right behind him.

She nearly pushed him into the television room and closed the door. It was almost nine-thirty.

“I can’t leave,” Charlie said grimly. “Angel’s scared to death. She needs help.”

“I know she does. Charlie, go along with me for the next hour. Whatever you start to think, please trust me!”

“If you do anything to hurt her-”

“You know I won’t hurt her.”

He rubbed his eyes and took a deep breath. “What are you up to? Who called?”

“I can’t tell you. You’re too open to her.”

“We shouldn’t have come. We can leave now, forget all this. Maybe

that's what we should do-just get the hell out of here."

"We can't. You can't. It's too late for that." She looked at her watch. "It's time. He'll be upstairs with Wanda. Angel is going to have dessert with us. Let's go back now. And Charlie, don't interfere. Promise!"

He shook his head. "I can't promise that."

"All right. But you do trust me, you know. You can't stop trusting me now."

\* \* \* \*

Almost all day she had been with him, gone briefly now and again, but then back even stronger. Whispering in his ear, sitting on his lap, lying with him, moving with him, caressing him with her warm hands that were touches of electricity. When he paused at the dining-room door, she was seated at the table with cake before her. Her fork halted in midair. She looked directly at him. He saw her across the room and he felt her in his arms, her warm breath on his neck, her laughter in his ear. Her incredible violet eyes, he thought, unable to look away until she lowered her gaze. Then he moved, resumed his seat.

"Good evening, Angel," Constance said briskly. "It's time that we all began telling the truth around here, don't you think? First of all, Charlie is a detective. He used to work for the police in New York, now he's freelance."

He started to rise, relaxed again. *She* didn't care. In his mind he was holding her-the way he had held her when the-cat moved-hard, tight, with her face pressed against him.

"We were hired," Constance went on, very businesslike, almost brusque in her speech, "to investigate Amos."

Charlie closed his eyes, moving in a slow waltz with her. If he looked at Constance he would see an old, rather ugly woman. He kept his eyes closed and felt the lithe body against him.

"You know what I'm telling you is true," Constance said. "And this is true also. I'm a doctor, a psychologist-"

There was a wave of hatred, loathing, terror. Charlie snapped his eyes open. The emotional wave was gathering momentum, hitting him like surges of power. Gretchen screamed. Charlie tried to yell, tried to call out

Constance's name but could make no sound. *Stop it*, he tried to whisper  
*Stop it!*

Constance had been prepared for something but not this. She was the target; she knew that as she felt nausea and vertigo. She felt as if she were falling from a terrible height, falling faster and faster, and knew that when she hit she would die. She wanted to fling out her hands to catch herself, to stop the fall; if she did that she would be lost. There were words in her head, words she had to say now.

She tried to speak; her throat was paralyzed, her tongue paralyzed. Angel leaned forward, her eyes wide and staring, her face as pale as death. And in her mind Constance cried, *No!*

"Angela," she said in a hoarse whisper, "close your eyes. Go to sleep."

Angel blinked. For a moment Constance was afraid it was not going to work, but the childish face relaxed. Her eyes closed. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

It was over. Charlie's hand shook when he reached for his water and took a drink. It was *all* over, he thought. He looked at Constance, who was very pale.

"You were swell," he said huskily.

She nodded, grateful, but kept her attention on the girl across the table from her. Slowly, softly she said, "Angela, go into your deepest trace. Very relaxed, comfortable, down, down."

In a few minutes Constance asked, "Angela, does Amos hypnotize you?"

"Yes."

"You won't allow him to ever again, Angela. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"When he tries to hypnotize you again, you will remember what I'm telling you now and he won't be able to control you ever again." Constance repeated this several times before she was satisfied and then said, "I am

not your enemy, Angela. I won't send you back to the home. You don't have to hate me. You don't have to be afraid of me. Do you understand?"

Charlie watched in fascination, but time was running out. He caught Constance's eye and tapped his watch. She nodded.

"When you wake up, Angela, you will remember what we've talked about, all of it. You won't be afraid or nervous, but very relaxed and peaceful. You'll know that Charlie is not your father, Angela. You'll want to stay here with us tonight so we can take care of you. You don't have to go with Amos." As before, she repeated each part of her message several times.

At Constance's command Angel opened her eyes. She blinked rapidly a few times and started to eat her cake.

"Do you remember what happened?" Constance asked.

"Nothing happened."

Gretchen had not said a word throughout. Now she got up and started for the door. "I want coffee. Maybe I want a drink, too. Charlie? Constance?"

They both nodded and she left.

Charlie looked helplessly from Constance to Angel and back. Had it taken? He couldn't tell. Constance raised her eyebrow in a let's-wait-and-see manner, and he dug his fork into his cake.

Angel looked at him and said scornfully, "I knew you were a cop from the beginning. You look like a cop, walk like a cop, smell like a cop."

Charlie grinned at his cake and started to eat it. "That's more like it, kid," he said under his breath. Aloud he asked, "You had that much experience with cops?"

"Yeah." She looked past him. He turned to see Amos in the doorway.

"Come along, Sister Angel. Time to go study."

She started to rise from her seat and then sat down again. A puzzled look flickered across her face. She shook her head.

“Sister Angel, it’s late. Time to go home.”

Again she shook her head. “They said I can stay here.”

“We’ll come back tomorrow. You can wait one more day.”

She was pushing crumbs around her plate with her fork, not looking at him. She shook her head.

Now Amos walked around the table and put his hand on her shoulder lightly. “Be a good girl, Sister Angel. You hear me? Get up and come along home.”

Gretchen entered carrying the coffee tray, to which she had added brandy and glasses.

“Hi, Amos. Just in time. Join us?”

He was watching Angel closely, his hand tight on her shoulder now. “Be a good girl, Sister Angel,” he repeated clearly.

She stood up. “Is it okay if I go watch TV awhile?”

“Run along,” Constance said. “We’ll be in here if you want anything.”

Angel nearly ran from the room.

“You can’t keep her,” Amos said harshly.

Charlie shrugged. “She wants to stay.”

Amos looked at him, his eyes narrowed. His face was mean and rigid. “You’ll regret this,” he said. “You don’t know what you’re doing.” He marched out, and Charlie followed him through the hallway, watching until he left, the house.

He returned to the dining room, where Gretchen was drinking brandy as if it were going out of style. “What was that all about?” she demanded of Constance.

“I don’t want her to overhear,” Constance said, and Charlie took his glass and stood by the open door to keep watch.

“She’s a runaway,” Constance said then. “She was in a home for

disturbed youngsters in Philadelphia up until two and a half years ago. There was a scandal, the director apparently helped her, gave her money, then she vanished, and he resigned. She was classified schizophrenic. Her father abandoned her and her mother when she was three. When she was six, she landed in a hospital with multiple bruises, abrasions, a concussion, and she had been sexually molested. She had no memory of the incident. Mother said it was an attack by an unknown. Case closed. Two years later it was repeated, but this time Mother was implicated by a neighbor in the beating. Mother came under investigation. A series of live-in boyfriends, child abuse. Mother was ordered into therapy. When Angel was twelve her mother had her committed, called her sexually promiscuous and incorrigible. She authorized a series of shock treatments.”

Gretchen looked pale and sick. Charlie’s face was a mask.

“They started her on hypnoanalysis. And they got the story about her father, about her mother’s boyfriends, who she wished were her father, and about her mother’s reaction each time. And they got a dose of what we’ve had from her, the projections she’s capable of. Easier to call her schizophrenic than try to deal with that. Delusions of grandeur, retardation, nymphomania, schizo. She’s had it all pinned on her. Physically she’s like a thirteen-year-old, but God only knows what’s in her head.”

“They gave you the key words to induce trance?” Charlie asked after the silence had persisted many minutes.

“Yes. First she had to know that I was a doctor. That was the cue they left with her, that she would respond to a doctor using those words.” She glanced at Gretchen and added, “It’s a posthypnotic suggestion to return to trance instantly on cue. Obviously Amos planted one also, but he’s an amateur. He didn’t know enough to protect his power over her.”

“He isn’t even her father,” Gretchen said in disbelief.

And they were in the area last summer, Constance thought, when Vernon became obsessed with a mysterious woman and was killed. She looked at Charlie; he shook his head slightly.

“I’m going to keep her company,” Gretchen said then. “She may be lonesome tonight, and afraid. Poor little kid.”

Charlie nodded. “I wanted to check the security system.”

It wasn’t over, he thought. Not with Amos out there in a rage, not with



that strange girl in the house. Constance went upstairs to get her notebook. As she passed the masks on the stairway wall she scolded them. "You knew all the time," she muttered severely. "Damn enigmatic Indians."

When she returned to the living room Charlie was closing the drapes.

"You think he'll try to get in tonight?"

"Not if he's got half the brains he should have, but I'm spending the night right here on the couch."

And she would keep him company, she thought, eyeing the chairs, the other couch. The upstairs bedrooms were very far away.

"I saw a chess set earlier," she said. "Want a game?"

After Gretchen and Angel went upstairs, Charlie made another inspection of the house. From the dark television room he looked out at the yard. It was raining and the wind was blowing fitfully. It would be good to be home, he found himself thinking, and longed to be there in front of the fireplace, the silly cats trying to filch anything edible, Constance in her chair, reading or writing away.

Amos would not be able to give her up, Charlie thought later, studying the game where he was going to be mated in another move or two.

"Vernon must have seemed a real threat," Constance said, finishing his thought as she so often did.

"Yeah. But why does Angel keep on looking if she's found someone?"

"The three-year-old in her is still looking, remember? When the father becomes lover, the three-year-old knows something is wrong, and the search is on."

"And it'll never end for her."

"I don't know. I want her, Charlie. I want to work with her, find out what she's capable of, help her learn to control it."

Charlie thought of the images of Constance that Angel had put in his head-old, ugly, fearsome even. He doubted that Angel would let Constance near her. Yet, they couldn't just turn her loose. And they couldn't send her

back to the institution. She isn't our problem, he wanted to say, but obviously Constance thought she was.

"I resign," he said then. "Want to break the tie?"

"Sure." She started to set up the pieces again, then stopped, when Wanda appeared in the doorway.

"Why are both of you still up?"

"How did you get down here? I didn't hear you." Charlie asked.

"The back stairs. It's after two."

"Is anything wrong?" Constance asked sharply. Wanda had on a long robe that looked warm, but she was shivering and very pale.

"Please, both of you, please go on to bed. This is terrible. I have to be alone sometime! There's always someone-" She fled into the darkened hall.

Constance followed her to the kitchen. "What happened?"

Wanda put a tea kettle on the stove and turned on the burner. "I want a cup of tea."

Constance looked at her helplessly. "Were you dreaming? Is that it?"

"Just leave me alone."

"Listen to me, Wanda. Angel isn't his daughter, and she's the one with telepathic powers. He never knows anything until he gets it out of her. She's given him information, not Vernon. And it's information right out of your head, our heads, not from beyond the grave."

Wearily Wanda said, "I called Amos and turned off the security system so he can get in. There are things moving in the house, unquiet things. I have to see him alone. You and Charlie have to go upstairs. Mind your own business. If Vernon tries to tell me something, Charlie just gets in the way." She moved toward the hall.

In defeat Constance walked with her. They could not order her not to see Amos; They were nearing the end of the hall, the bright living room open before them, when she stopped abruptly. Her fingers dug into

Wanda's arm, pulling her back; her other hand covered Wanda's mouth. Amos, standing in the living room, was holding a small gun and looking at Charlie.

"Just don't forget it's here," Amos was saying, putting the gun in his raincoat pocket, keeping his hand on it. "When she comes out with her tea, then we'll talk."

Wanda pulled hard against Constance, and she tightened her grasp, forcing her back farther into the shadows.

"You don't think people might talk if you come in and shoot up the company?" Charlie asked pleasantly. His voice was so mild, so easy, he might have been asking about ball-game scores.

"You're a fire bug. Angel told me. Me and Wanda and Angel are leaving, and we're going to let you play with fire." He turned so that he could see the hallway to the kitchen.

"Just sit still until your wife joins us with her tea."

"Were you afraid Vernon was going to take her away from you?"

Amos moved out of range. Constance let go of Wanda and ran to the living room.

He was standing close to Charlie, speaking in a low, intense voice. "... her fault. She can't help it. He was going to investigate her, take her away."

"And you killed him. He just wanted to do something decent for the kid."

"Decent! You know what she does! She told me about you, how she wanted you. I know what that means."

"What does it mean?" Wanda asked, holding onto the door frame. "What exactly is it she does?"

For a moment Amos looked too stunned to speak. He recovered quickly. "She's sick. I've known it for a long time, but I thought I could cure her. I thought my love would be enough to make her well. She needs medical treatment, a hospital, help—"

Suddenly Constance felt as if she had been punched in the stomach. She doubled over in pain, unable to breathe, and at the same time a red hatred poured through her, wrenching her, numbing her. Things were flying through the air, the masks were flying. She tried to dodge, but something caught her on the side of the head, and she fell, dazed.

Charlie threw his arm up in front of his face to ward off the masks. One caught on his elbow, and he felt his entire arm go numb. Hatred and fury blinded him. He grunted and fell when something smashed into his midsection.

The chessboard flew from the table, scattering pieces, and hit Amos in the back. He was yelling hoarsely. "Angel! For God's sake, stop it! Sister Angel, be a good girl. Stop!" He was cut off by a scream; Charlie could not tell whose it was. Wanda crumbled to the floor.

Constance pulled herself to her knees. Angel was on the top step, barefooted, dressed in a man's pajama shirt that reached down to her mid-thighs. She was crying as a child cries: openmouthed, her eyes tightly closed, screaming.

She had to make the child hear her, had to say the right words to make her hear. Her words were drowned in screams. An end table flew across the room and hit Amos in the leg. She said the words again and could not even hear them. The entire room was alive, moving, crashing. *She'll kill us all*, Constance thought distantly.

"I'm coming!" Charlie whispered. "Hold on, baby, I'm coming!" He tried to move but tripped over the chess table. He felt it jerk out from under his body, saw it fly across the room and crash into the wall. He pulled himself on the carpet, clutching it, trying to drag himself to her. *I'm coming*, he whispered. *Honey, don't scream! Stop screaming! I won't let him send you back, Angel! I swear it!*

Amos was dragging one leg, holding on to the back of a chair, unable to stand upright, yelling to her, calling her name over and over. The chair tilted, and he crashed to the floor. The gun was shaken from his pocket. Angel kept screaming.

Amos flung up his hand to ward off something; he rolled and doubled up in pain, and his hand closed on the gun. He was moaning. "Stop it, Angel! My God, Angel-" He convulsed with pain again, and then he lifted the gun and fired.

“Angel!” he screamed. He dragged himself to the steps, and she fell down on top of him. Her eyes were opened, she stared unblinking at the ceiling, her long white hair swung when he lifted her. “Angel!” he cried out again and pressed her body to him, cradled her like an infant, rocking back and forth, crying out her name over and over.

Constance buried her face in her hands and shook with weeping.

She felt Charlie’s arms around her and leaned against him blindly.

His eyes were closed tight, his face pressed against her neck. He stirred first, and lifted his head.

“I’ll be damned! Constance, look!”

Nothing in the room was disturbed, nothing broken. Constance raised her head, reached up to feel her temple, expecting a lump, a cut, blood. There was nothing. Amos rocked back and forth sobbing, holding Angel in his arms.

\* \* \* \*

The police had come and gone, and now the sky was lightening.

Charlie and Constance stood before the wide expanse of glass and looked at the lake unbroken by a ripple; He told the police that Amos had come for his daughter and had shot her when she appeared on the top step. Constance and Wanda had repeated the story.

“That poor kid,” one of the policemen had said over and over. *Poor kid*, Constance echoed in her mind. *She never had a chance*. She remembered the toy cat, how it had thrown Angel into a panic, equating herself with it- soulless, will-less, an automaton, taking orders, never free. And with powers that never would be studied, never understood, never used for something other than deception and destruction. Powers that finally killed her after making her life hellish. “She never had a chance,” she whispered.

Charlie tightened his grip on her hand. *And Amos, he never had a chance either*, he thought. *He would have had to kill father figures for an awfully long time*.

“I wish we were home,” he murmured, yearning for their comfortable living room, the three raunchy cats, the quiet fire, the silent snow accumulating outside.

She leaned against him and sighed.

They went downstairs then, and when they got to their room they shared one of the twin beds, just to hold each other, just to be close.

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# PROCREATION

*by Gene Wolfe*

## *Creation*

*1 August, Monday.* Had a flash of insight today. Had been mulling over Gott's (Harvard) notion that the universe contains just one magnetic monopole-because that's its seed, the same way each raindrop holds just one dust particle. (Means the guys at Berkeley and U. of Houston are wrong about catching them in their balloon over Nebraska of course.) Why not make one in the accelerator? Because you can't move anything that heavy; mono-poles should be ten billion times (or so) the mass of a hydrogen atom. Flash of insight: to make industrial diamonds, you get the pressure with an explosion. Why not use an electrical discharge? Had some time on the accelerator, tried it. Nothing. Shot electrons at Nothing to see if they were attracted or repelled. Got electrons, a few positrons. Probably equipment glitch.

*2 August, Tuesday.* Anomaly in target. Took it out of accelerator, washed it, scrubbed with pumice, etc., still no good. Put it under scope. Dark spot of water and cleanser that won't wipe off. Heavy stuff seems to be settling out.

*3 August, Wednesday.* Told Sis, Martha, How'd you like to say, "My brother (husband) the Nobel Laureate?" Martha: "Gene, you're crazy, heard you talk before, etc." Sis interested. (What I expected from both, in other words.) Told her about it-found monopole, made microverse, Gott right. Drove to lab. The microverse seems pyramidal. Strange. Tilted it, water flowed as by gravity, leaving some solids dry. Gravity interuniversal. Wanted to phone John Cramer about it, but he's off Gastprofessoring in West Berlin. Had to lecture; didn't get much done.

*4 August, Thursday.* Rigged up light in lab so I can switch it on to study microverse. It's no longer pyramidal; cubical now and bigger. Which only means it's gone from four angles to eight. No doubt it'll continue until it approximates a sphere, if I let it. Funny to think how I've written about this odd particle or that (like the monopole) existing "in some strange corner of the universe," without guessing it might be true. (Special properties at corners?) Anyway, it seems no matter how big it gets, it takes up no "room," not being in our universe at all. When I measure the target with calipers, it's

the right size still. But ruler enters the microverse and loses a little length, making it appear the target has grown, (n.b. Remember to write on concept of "room" for *Physical Review C*.)

5 August, Friday. Introduced cellular material (scrapings) from the apple Sis put in my lunch. Astounding results. Green matter spread over all inorganic stuff above water. (That's been growing itself, I think; it seems to be expanding with the microverse, though not as fast.) Went over to Biology and bummed tissue samples from rabbits, mice, and so forth, and put them in. Nothing-they seem to have died.

6 August, Saturday. It seems I was wrong about the animal tissue. Today I saw a couple of little things darting around and one or two swimming. They seem large for microorganisms; wanted to catch some and bring them back, but they were too fast for me. What's more surprising, the vegetable matter has turned itself into club moss, or something of the kind. With my good glass, I can even see spore pods hanging from the branches. Fascinating! Wanted to do the animal tissue thing again, but had tossed out the cultures. Scraped my wrist and put the scrapings in. They grew too. Caught the little critter before he got too lively and scraped *him*. Put him back. Soon running around as good as ever, and the tissue I had taken from him became another, much the same.

7 August, Sunday. Decided not to go to the campus today, though I knew it would mean (as it did) Martha would nag me about church. Slept late, watched baseball on TV. Got to talking about the microverse with Sis, and she wanted to tell the "people" about us. Silly, but she was so fired up I couldn't refuse to help her. She made little drawings on a sheet of paper so it could be folded to make a booklet, beginning with the arc discharge and ending with me watching the Yankees drop one to the Angels. We went over to the campus and reduced it half a dozen times on the good copier, and she folded it up. Maybe I shouldn't say it here, but I don't think I've ever felt prouder in my life than when I showed her the microverse-she was that thrilled. (She's already talking about putting in a few cells of her own). But when I used the glass myself, why horrors! The critters were eating the spore pods or whatever they are. I wanted to have a better look at those, so I began casting about for a way of scaring them off. There was a fruit fly circling the apple core in my wastebasket, and I caught it and put it in. It worked like a charm, and off they scampered. Sis said we ought to title her book, but we couldn't think of anything appropriate. After a lot of talk, we just wrote our names, "Gene" and "Sis," on the cover and dropped it in.

\* \* \* \*



## Re-Creation

1 September, Thursday. Completed turnover of the new universe to the Astronomy Department today. As I told Dr. Ramakrishna, we will eventually have to draw some sort of line between their claims to new universes and ours. Anyway, it certainly appears that Gene-eration (as I've christened it) has moved into theirs. They say it's already outside the orbit of Pluto and headed in the direction of Vega; there's a red shift, too. (Dr. Ramakrishna suggested it be called "Ramajetta." I treated that as a joke, and intend to continue to do so.) Now back to work on my article for *Physical Review C*.

2 September, Friday. Received a most disturbing airmail letter from Dr. Cramer in West Germany. He points out that if my experiment created only a single monopole, then it created a net magnetic charge. (Which he calls a "no-no." He's always kidding. But about this?) To paraphrase Cramer: If Gene-eration was seeded by a *north* monopole, then there must also be a *south* monopole floating around somewhere. And that must have seeded *another* universe- call it "Sis-eration" after Sis, who was my sounding board for the first one. That's particularly apt because "sis" is a simple palindrome, read backwards the same as forwards, and Cramer actually goes so far as to suggest that time might run backward in Sis-eration. If Cramer's right, Sis-eration obviously doesn't grow as fast as Gene-eration. Which may make it even more valuable. I'll have a good look for it tomorrow.

3 September, Saturday. No classes today, so I was able to go over the lab with a fine-toothed comb looking for Sis-eration. Started with the accelerator target where I found Gene-eration and worked out from there-nothing. But see here: there's only one monopole in our universe. After all, I've *proved* that Gott (Harvard) was right about it being the seed of our universe. So it is a net magnetic charge-so far as our universe is concerned. Aha, Cramer, I've got you! Sis-eration is mythical, the Atlantis of physics.

4 September, Sunday. No reason to go to the campus today, so I didn't. Went to church with Martha and got to musing during the sermon. Don't know what to call it-a waking dream. Anyway, while I was sitting there studying the grain in the oak pew in front of me, I remembered that yesterday while I was shaving I had a vision. It started with one of those little vagrant spots that cross my eye sometimes. (I think the biologists call them "floaters" and say they're single body cells.) Anyway, the thing was

right in the middle of my eye when I was trying to scrape that tough bit under my nose. It interfered with my vision, and somehow, I suppose because I unconsciously linked not seeing with darkness, I wanted more light. Then it happened. I saw what Ramakrishna and his gang call the Big Bang. I saw that primordial supersun the old philosophers called the Ylem-saw it open like a milkweed pod and scatter the galaxies. And then it was gone. But here's the part that scares me: I swear I've never thought about that vision from yesterday morning until I was sitting in church today. My subconscious must have decided it was irrational and blocked it out completely. God, what a frightening thought! If I've got a censorship mechanism like that, what else have I lost because of it?

*5 September, Monday.* Spent most of my day musing at my desk, I'm afraid. Replaying the vision of Saturday morning in my memory. The way the Ylem acted and *why* it acted like that. It's always been assumed that matter and antimatter were created in equal amounts-parity seems to require it. And it's *also* been assumed that when an atom met an antiatom, they returned to energy again. *Therefore* there was some kind of segregation principle at work that put all the matter to the right (let's say) and all the antimatter to the left-because if they were mixed together, they'd eliminate each other perfectly. *But* that segregation principle is a violation of parity itself. It's God, or Maxwell's Demon, or some such, looking at each little atom and saying, "You sit in smoking, you in nonsmoking, you in smoking." And so on. But suppose it wasn't really like that at all? Suppose those atoms were much more stable than we think? Two atoms meet, and each had a dense, high-energy core of protons (or antiprotons) and neutrons. But far outside those cores each has the classical valence shells of electrons (or positrons), stuff that's much more diffuse and has much less mass and consequently much less energy. Now suppose that only those outer electron shells react- the atoms bounce violently apart, and deprived of their outer shells, decay to simpler elements. But of course when an atom meets another of the same matter, there's no bounce. Do the atoms tend to segregate *themselves*? You bet! What's more, here's an explanation for one of the oldest mysteries of astrophysics: Why is there so much hydrogen and so little of anything else?

*6 September, Tuesday.* Ramakrishna called to tell me that Gene-eration (that's what he called it) has shifted into the infra red. I thought, okay, if you're a nice guy, I'm a nice guy. So I said, "Dr. Ramakrishna, I want you to stop thinking about the Big Bang. Think about the Big Blossom instead. Think of that primeval fireball unfolding and scattering out stuff that slowly picks up speed." He wanted to call me a damn fool politely, but his English isn't good enough. I told him, "Trust me,"

and hung up. Wonder if anybody's gotten the Nobel for Physics twice. N.B., look it up.

*7 September, Wednesday.* It's only 6:00 a.m., and I don't usually write this journal so early, but I can't sleep, last evening, as I was getting ready to go to bed, I remembered-no, I can't write it. Suppose somebody (Martha) finds this? I'd be locked away. Remembered something, a visit to Sis-eration, I couldn't possibly have forgotten, *but that I've never remembered before.* My God, the continents rising from the water like whales. Cramer's right-I just didn't understand him. It was created when I performed my experiment, and it's propagating through our past. What will it do to us? Got to talk this over with Sis. But I can't-what if I'm really crazy?

\* \* \* \*

### *The Sister's Account*

My brother and I were never ordinary children. We shared a secret, though it was not until we both nearly grown that we understood just how extraordinary a secret it was. TV assured us that other children were transported to strange places-Dorothy to Oz, Wendy and her brothers to Never-Never Land. Why then shouldn't Gene and I find ourselves in a place equally strange, though somewhat less interesting?

The first time, we were on a camping trip; and because we were a few hundred miles from home, we believed for a long time afterward that unless we left home it wouldn't happen at all.

And yet that first time was not terribly interesting, and only a little frightening. We were camping in the Sierras. Mom and Dad were setting up the tent and Barque was superintending the job from the vantage of a fallen log. We were given a water can and told where the spring was.

It wasn't. We stood shivering in country of brown sand and tan and red stones. The towering Sierras were gone, but pinnacles of stone that seemed very high to us (as high, that is to say, as large trees) cast shadows that stretched for miles across the sand. Dark though the sky was, it was not dark with cloud, and no bird flew there.

It seemed to us that we walked forever; no doubt it was really three miles or so. Then there was a beach where glassy waves raised by the cold, thin wind crashed on the sand, sweeping it forward and back as I had swept the floor the year before in kindergarten, when I was too young to

know that the broom had to be lifted after each stroke.

“Look!” I called to Gene. “There they are!” And I could see the tent quite clearly in the lifted surface of every wave, with Dad coming out of it and Barque yapping under his feet, just as if I were seeing the same picture again and again in the TVs in a department store. I ran forward, Dad picked me up, and a minute later Gene was there too.

We told Mom and Dad all about it, of course. Mom decided there was a little patch of desert nearby. Dad said that was completely impossible, as of course it was. He took us to the spring, and we found our footprints in the soft soil near the water. But all the footprints pointed away from the tent, as though we had walked into the spring and swum into the earth. Dad was something of a woodsman, and he was frightened by that. He frightened us too by making us promise not to tell Mom. After that we never told anyone.

The second time, we were at the beach raiding the tide pools for our high school biology class. The waves reminded me of that first experience, but there had been a storm far out in the Pacific, and they were dark and opaquely green. We had not talked about the desert for a long time, but I called Gene over and asked if he couldn't see something-trees, it seemed to me-beyond the bottom of the pool I'd found.

It was just such a forest as you see in the pictures in old books: the trees ten feet across, wrapped in moss, each sleeping in its own wisp of night. A door opened in the tenth we passed, and a dark man led us down into his underground home, where his shy and lovely wife nursed their child.

The man and woman fed us nuts and mushrooms, the boiled fiddleheads of ferns, and bread made without wheat; they talked to us with many gestures and drew pictures of trees and deer on paper that was white again each time the dark man turned it over. We understood very little of what they said, but now I think they were trying to explain that they lived beneath the ground so that the trees and the deer, who could not, might live above it; and that there were many, many such families..

At last the child fell asleep, and the dark woman opened a crumpled little mirror for us so it was as large and smooth as a pier glass. In it we saw ourselves, and beyond ourselves the ocean; and in a moment its spray was in our faces.

Gene and I talked about it for a long time that night, and we decided (or rather, he decided) that there was too much danger. We had been lucky thus far; but we could not hope to be lucky always. We thought we had

seen two different worlds. Perhaps we had.

After that he tried to forget, and I believe he succeeded. I went only once more, when Gene had married and it was clear I, never would. I stood before the vanity in my bedroom and looked beyond my reflected face and saw the sea.

At first I thought it the same world we had visited when we were children, because it was a landscape of stones and dust, but now the sun was hot, and there was kelp on the beach and a thousand tiny crabs. I sat on a boulder for a while, thinking and looking out at the water, never seeing a sail or a gull. And I understood as I sat there that all three had been one world, and that in my own short life I had seen its senility and its flower, and now I saw its beginning.

I had carried a mirror with me, having learned something at least from the beautiful, dark woman who had been so much younger than I now was; but there was no need of it. The shore held many pools, and each showed me my bed, the coverlet neatly spread for the repose of my rag doll.

Beyond it, my closet door stood open, with tiny silver fish swimming among my coats and dresses. I reached for one, but in my hand it became a wisp of embroidered scarf.

This afternoon, I found a letter on Gene's desk from his friend Dr. Cramer, who is teaching for a year in West Germany. It said:  
"Congratulations on your creation of the monopole! But I have a slight quibble. You didn't mention it, but you must surely have made a pair, a 'north' monopole and a 'south' monopole. Otherwise you would have created a net magnetic charge, which is a no-no. So you must have *two* universes (for the price of one). The one. you describe must be like ours, but the other should contain antimatter and have time running in reverse."

I believe that Dr. Cramer is correct; and since you had Gene's account of the first, you should have mine of the second. It is gone now, so that when I stand before my mirror, I see only my own face.

Or perhaps that second universe was ours, and it is we who are gone, leaving as our only trace these words upon a printed page.

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\* \* \* \*

# EASY POINTS

*by Kathleen V Westfall*

The bet had been to see whether Henry Cutter could get a pool ball in his mouth. Twenty years ago the boys at Iota Kappa surrounding him had said that if he *could* get a pool ball in his mouth, he'd be in. Simple as that. He'd be one of the surrounders next time instead of the one surrounded.

Henry, who at eighteen was shy and eager and anxious about everything-including pool balls-agreed.

So they gave him the eight ball and, just before he tried, a paddling for loyalty.

Henry wiped the yellow chalk dust on his pants. Holding the ball to the light he measured the black orb with his eyes and fingers. He took everything about the bet into account except the curvature of his teeth.

When he was ready, Henry opened wide and, with one sweeping, overly dramatic gesture, popped the pool ball in. He looked around the group of boys-who by this time were laughing, hooting, half-rolling on the floor-and grinned as best he could. He made happy, satiated noises. The crowd of Iotas mimicked him. They slapped him on the back, and everything was going just fine until Henry tried to pop it out.

Then he remembered the curvature of his teeth.

The Iotas called a cab, which took Henry-minus four dollars and twenty-three cents and most of the Iotas-to the hospital. In fairness, though, Brian MacAfee, the pledge master, did go along for the ride.

The nurse at the emergency room cussed them both out.

She gave Henry a shot in the jaw and was not at all delicate about the insertion of the needle. Within minutes the muscles of Henry's face began to relax. Sag. Droop grotesquely like clocks in a Dali painting.

The young intern who extracted the ball told Henry, in no uncertain terms, he looked retarded.

“At least,” Henry mumbled when Brian and he-minus the hospital costs-left, “I got it in. When will I get my pledge card?”

Brian laughed. “Henry,” he said, “we lotas are... how shall I say it? Henry, we are the intellectuals on campus. And you know? What that doctor said just now was right. That shot had made you look retarded. I’m afraid you won’t get getting your pledge card, Henry. You just aren’t lota material. Sorry.”

“What?” A thin line of saliva dripped down Henry’s chin.

“Henry, you flunked! Look, everyone knows you can get a pool ball *in* your mouth. That’s no big deal. It’s just that once you get it in, you can’t ever get it *out*. Not by yourself, anyway. And that’s why you won’t be getting your pledge card.”

“You see,” Brian continued, obviously relishing every word, “we lotas feel that knowing in advance the results of one’s actions tends to determine one’s intellectual capacity. All you had to do to pass the test was to say no. And, Henry, you didn’t do that.”

\* \* \* \*

Henry thought about what Brian MacAfee had said twenty years ago. He looked across the desk and watched as the man, paunchy and nervous in the hard wooden chair, squirmed. Henry smiled and said, “No.”

“What?”

Henry chuckled. “Oh, nothing. I was just thinking about that night twenty years ago. You remember. The night of the pool ball.”

“Oh, yeah,” Brian MacAfee said. He tried to laugh but .did not succeed.

Henry rubbed the bald spot on his head. He smiled.

“That really, was something that night, Mr. Cutter. It certainly is good to see you again.”

“I’m sure,” Henry said. “Now to the business at hand.” Henry looked at the form Brian had just deposited on his desk.’ He pulled his pen from its black-onyx holder. The holder was shaped something like an egg or, Henry thought now with a certain malicious humor, possibly like a pool ball. He

tapped his pen several times across Brian's neat application. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched as Brian squirmed. Finally, he said, "Well, everything seems to be in order here." At this, Henry turned his head ever so slightly toward the picture of the President on the wall and winked.

"Mr. MacAffee," Henry said, "if you will take this form over to Building G. That's in the third quadrangle. What you do, you just go out this building the same way you entered, turn to the left, and keep going for five or so blocks. G is on your right. There's a fountain in front of it-are you getting all this down?-there's a fountain in front; so you really can't get lost. Now, when you get there-Building G-go up to room 807 and ask for Mr. Acue. Get another form from him entitled B, as in Barbara, dash eight three two dash A, as in Annie-in triplicate-and bring it back to me. When you've done all that, we'll take it from there, okay?"

"Fine, Mr. Cutter. And I want you to know, I really appreciate this."

Henry *tsked*, shaking his head. "Nothing to it. Really. I'm happy to be of help."

"That's Building G, right? The one with the fountain?"

"Yes," Henry told him. "It's a very big fountain. It has blue tiled sides and three jets. Oh, you can't possibly miss it."

\* \* \* \*

Eleanor Dano stormed into Henry's office right after Brian left. "I hope you don't think that's going to count, Cutter."

"Well," Henry speculated, "I don't see why not. He isn't a friend, *per se*. I haven't seen that bastard for twenty years."

Dano held a gray notebook to her small and, Henry thought, efficient breasts. Sparse, hard little knockers.

Dano appraised him carefully. "There's a grudge factor, Henry. I was watching in Control, and, believe me, I detected a distinct hostility. Technically, I should dock you.

"Yeah. Maybe. I guess I should have sent him over to John or Albert. Let them try for points. But, Dano," he said, tossing his arms up, "it was just too damn much fun!"



Dano, the dry and ordinarily humorless woman, smiled at this. "I must admit that touch about the fountain was brilliant. But you should have saved it for points. Albert was there, too," she said, jerking her thumb toward the President, toward the picture with the camera lens in the lens of his right eye. "And with Albert in Control, I tell you... by this afternoon, half the players in the building will be inventing fountains for the public."

"I wonder how high the Irritation Factor will go."

"Five. Maybe a sixer. Possibly a ten for the psychos. It's hard to tell so early." Dano made a notation in her book. "As yet, no points for you today." She studied the notebook, then glanced at Henry. She looked puzzled and a little concerned. "You're *really* behind this week. Are you feeling all right?"

Henry shrugged.

"Well, you look pale to me. And, Henry, you're getting awfully thin. Perhaps you should see a doctor."

Henry shuddered. "No, no, I'm fine."

Dano said, "Okay." She moved toward the door and, just before she left, turned and said, "You really should have saved the fountain. But good luck to you anyway."

The phone on Henry's desk rang.

A woman named Ramona Kitchens wanted a V, as in Valerie, oh dash three sixer seven form sent to her house. Henry listened to her with great patience. He drew a small elephant on his blotter. He put little blue ballpoint flowers on its head. Finally he had to cut in. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Kitchens. I have an incoming call. Can I put you on hold?"

The response was, as Henry expected, affirmative. So he pushed the button that put her on hold, got up, got his hat, and left for lunch.

\* \* \* \*

As was often the custom, Henry ate a tuna surprise alone in the lunchroom. He sat at a table near a huge plate window and read the paper. Once a woman-whom Henry did not recognize, but suspected to be one of the public- came up and asked whether the seat next to him was taken. Indignantly he barked her back.

He finished his tuna slowly and, when he got to the classifieds, folded the paper and sighed. It was time for the afternoon heat, and he knew he was far, far behind. He got up and left for his office.

On the way there, he passed Waiting Section P, on the third floor. The large, windowless room had temporarily been roped off. Henry peeked past the sign that said, CAUTION. FRESH WAX. Inside, on the benches that lined the room, Henry counted over forty of the public: seated, their legs up on the benches or bent uncomfortably under themselves. The floor mirrored these legless scores in its fresh waxy sheen.

“Not dry yet?” Henry called to one of them, an old man perched near the fire exit.

The man looked terribly confused. Slowly he shook his head and blinked. “They told us not to move until it was.”

“Yes. That’s right. Stay there till it’s dry.”

Several of the public shot Henry brief, almost grateful glances as he scurried off for the elevator.

Back in his office, he asked Margo-his blonde and full-breasted secretary-for the name of the head maintenance man on Section P.

“Emilio Marquez. Is something wrong?”

“No, no. Just try to get him for me sometime today, Margo. Oh, before I forget-how long was Ramona Kitchens on the phone?”

“The one who wanted V, as in Valerie, oh dash three sixer seven?”

“Yes, that’s the one.” .

Margo checked her log. “Twenty-two minutes and thirty-eight seconds. That is, of course, before we cut her off completely.”

Henry Cutter smiled. “Inform Mrs. Dano,” he said. “And I want full credit, too. No more of that point-and-a-half deduction just because it wasn’t face to face. That’s really not fair, you know, dear. Tell Dano I’ve decided to change the rules.”

“Very good, Mr. Cutter. I’m sure morale will soar! And, if I may say so,

sir, I think you're one of the most creative middle managers we've ever had."

Henry Cutter smiled.

At two, Brian MacAffee telephoned. "Mr. Cutter, I think I must have confused what you told me. I think I'm lost."

"Oh?"

"I'm over in the third quadrangle now. As a matter of fact," he said with an obviously strained laugh, "I've been here for almost two hours. I can't find a fountain anywhere."

"Oh?"

"And I've really looked, too. All around, Mr. Cutter. I just can't find that fountain."

"Mr. MacAffee," Henry said, now himself sounding a little confused. "Why are you looking for a fountain?"

"Well... to find Building G, of course. You told me there was a fountain in front of Building G."

Henry Cutter smiled. "No, no, Mr. MacAffee. You *have* confused what I told you. I told you there was a fountain *in* Building G. There is an *oak tree* in front of it."

"An oak tree?"

"An oak tree. It's in a planter," Henry said. "A rectangular planter. It's cement. And it's red. Bright cherry-red."

\* \* \* \*

Later Henry watched as the tall, angular man paced in irritation around his office. He watched the man's jerky, disjointed movements, then said, "Albert, why?"

"Why? Why do I want a meeting of the Game Board, Henry? I'll tell you why. I heard you changed the rules. Again."

"Yes, Albert. That's right. I did."

“Well, you can’t do that! You can’t just arbitrarily change the rules. And right before final scoring, too! It’s unheard of.”

Henry felt cold suddenly. “And why can’t I change the rules? After all, I *invented* the Game.”

Albert Mathews sat down beside Henry’s desk in the hard wooden chair. Because one of its legs had been sawed half an inch shorter than the others, the chair rocked back and forth as Albert talked. “Henry, you’re not playing solitaire. There are over a hundred players in this building alone. Ten times that number in the entire complex. And every new round it grows!”

“Henry,” Albert said, “it’s spreading, too. They’re playing it in El Paso. Savannah’s interested. The guys in Newark are saying they’ve had it all along. In fact, they’re pissed because they think you stole it from them.”

Henry frowned.

“Look, Henry, I don’t mean to be critical. God knows, before the Game, there was nothing! Efficiency was poor. There was no morale. It was terribly depressing. Now, of course, because of the Game, all that’s changed. Henry, you’ve transformed us into a team! We finally have *something* in common.

“But you can’t just change the rules on a whim! And I’ll tell you something else, too.” At this, Albert looked around conspiratorially. “Henry, this is on the Q.T. Aw, maybe I shouldn’t tell you this.” Albert pulled the disabled chair close to Henry. “About the Game,” he whispered. “I’ve heard it’s being considered by the President himself!”

“What can I say?” Henry said, feeling an intense pleasure. “The guy’s dumb. But he’s not that dumb.”

“That’s right, Henry. And that makes it all the more imperative that we convene the board.”

“You think so?”

“Absolutely. Look, we need to check over all the rules anyway. Add, delete, make changes *where* necessary. But I’m afraid you can’t decide it all on your own anymore.”

Henry sighed. Albert had a point.

“Face it, Henry,” Albert said. “The Game has just grown too big.”

\* \* \* \*

At three, Margo popped her head in the door, “I’ll try Emilio Marquez again. He’s *got* to get off his coffee break sometime.”

“Yes. Try it again.” Henry waited through the inevitable clicks and buzzes and two mistransfers. “Emilio? Hey, boy! This is Henry Cutter. How are you doing?”

“Fine, sir.”

“I looked in on Section P today. Stroke of genius. What was that you put on the floor?”

Emilio laughed. “A new wax, sir. W, as in Wait-forever, dash eight niner zero. I invented it myself. Takes twelve hours to dry. Oh, you ought to go down there now, sir. One of the public got off the bench. I told her not to. But she was a real snotty bitch. She said, ‘Shut up, spic’ So I let her.”

“You let her what?”

“I let her get off the bench.”

Henry rubbed his forehead. He had discovered that talking to Maintenance could sometimes be very difficult. “So?”

“Sir! She’s stuck to the floor! Hasn’t been able to move for over an hour.”

Henry smiled. “Emilio, I want you to go over to Personnel. Fill out a B, as in Barbara, dash eight three two dash A, as in Annie. Mr. Acue has them.”

“Yes, sir!”

“You know where he is?”

“Yes, sir!”

“Emilio,” Henry said, “I’m kicking you upstairs.”

\* \* \* \*

Before he left for the night, Henry had Margo set up a meeting of the Game Board for nine in the morning. He also trimmed his nails. In mid-clip, the phone rang.

“Mr. Cutter, I can’t find that oak tree.”

“Oh?” Henry dropped the paring into his ashtray. “What oak tree? And who is this?”

“Brian! Brian MacAffee! You said to look for an oak tree. In the planter? In front of Building G?”

“Building G? Mr. MacAffee, there is no oak tree in front of Building G. It’s a pine.” Henry tapped his nail clipper lightly on the mouthpiece. “I’m sorry, Mr. MacAffee, I have an incoming call. Can I put you on hold?”

\* \* \* \*

There was a ringing in Henry’s ears when he finally made it home. A constant nagging noise. He tried to ignore it. He felt his heart race arrhythmically. Painfully. He went to the bathroom. He put the teakettle on. He started fixing dinner and, when he could no longer stand it, went to answer the phone. “Hello, Mamma.”

“Henry, I want to talk to you!”

“Absolutely not. Mamma, I know that tone of yours.” Henry’s hands began to sweat.

“I’m coming over, Henry.”

“Oh, no, you’re not. I’ll tell the doorman to keep you out.”

Mamma laughed. “I tip him better than you do. I can get in anytime I want. I was up there just today, Henry, and that’s what I want to talk to you about.”

The veins in Henry’s neck began to throb.

“Henry, I’m coming over.”

Henry hung up the phone. It rang again; so he unplugged it. He went over to the door and pressed the buzzer to the lobby. After what seemed an interminable wait the doorman finally answered.

“Oscar, was my mother up here today?”

“Maybe,” came the answer. “It depends. Who are you?”

“Henry Cutter! In 8-B! I gave you five dollars just last Christmas, remember?”

Oscar laughed. “Oh, yeah. Five bucks. I remember, huh!” ‘

“Well? Was my mother up here?”

“ “Little old lady? Dyes her hair red? Good tipper?”

“Yeah, Why’d you let her in?”

“She’s a good tipper. What did she do, Mr. Carter? Rip you off or something?”

Henry pinched the bridge of his nose. “Oscar, I don’t want you to let her up here again. Do you understand?”

“Well, Mr. Carter... uh... I can’t be too sure about that. Y’know, I’m not on duty all the time, and even when I am, she’s such a crafty devil, she could slip past and...”

“Maybe we can work something out, Oscar.” Oscar settled for twenty dollars on the nose and five extra a Week! Henry tried to condition himself to think of it as an insurance premium. Although he knew he would not pay gladly, Henry also knew he would pay.

\* \* \* \*

Henry ate his dinner and listened to the radio. Halfway through the twelfth chorus of “Amazing Grace,” he heard a terrible noise.

“Henry? Henry Cutter! This is your mother speaking!”

Henry dropped his spoon. Terrified, he searched the small apartment.

“Come to the window, Henry!”

Henry went. He parted the curtains timidly.

“Henry, I want to talk to you!”

“God, Mamma!” Henry said as he flung the window open and bent out. “What are you doing there? And put down that bullhorn!”

The small woman who dyed her hair red and was a good tipper said, “No! Not till I talk to you, Henry!” Her voice had a strange, mechanical tone. It wafted up and bounced off the walls of the U-shaped building. Dozens of windows overlooking the concrete courtyard opened. Heads popped out. Curious. Public. “I was up there today, Henry!”

“I know!” he yelled back. “Will you put down that damn bullhorn!”

“And do you know what I found up there, Henry Cutter?”

“Whadja find lady?” the man in 4-F yelled.

“Damnation,” Henry said. “Put down that bullhorn!”

Mrs. Cutter reached into her bag and retrieved a small, brown box. Henry could barely see it. “I found these, Henry Cutter! These!”

“What are they?” asked the woman in 5-A.

“Oh, it must be drugs!” said her neighbor, Mrs. Green. “That poor, poor woman.”

“Henry, I’ve told you a thousand times! I want grandchildren! Do you hear? Grandchildren! Grandchildren! Grandchildren! I go up there to clean, and what do I find? These!” She pointed the box at Henry.

“Hey, they’re rubbers!” cried the teen-aged boy in 1-C.

“Rubbers?” asked the woman in 2-B. “They’re rubbers!” she called to the man above her, who called to the man above him.

By the time the news reached Henry on eight, all the people in the complex knew. And were laughing. Hooting. Half-falling from their windows.

“I’m gonna kill you, Mamma!” Henry screamed, pulling away from the sill. “I’m really gonna kill you this time!”



“Don’t touch that poor woman’s head!” screeched Mrs. Green from five. “She’s your Mamma! She loves you, schmuck!” Mrs. Green looked down for a second. “And how long were you in labor, Mrs. Cutter?”

“Three days!” she cried up. “Three days I suffered for him, and look what he does! Henry Cutter! Grandchildren are the compensation for old age! I’ve told you a thousand times! You do this just to aggravate me!”

“Mamma, stay right where you are! I’m coming down!”

“Don’t walk away from your Mamma,” Mrs. Green yelled. “Children! They’ll cut your heart out!”

“Who cuts your heart out?” asked the lady in 11-F.

“Henry Cutter, that’s who! Look! He’s killing his poor mother!”

“Killing his mother! Where?”

At this, Henry-who was not married and had never been married-fell to his knees.

\* \* \* \*

“Mothers,” Henry said, “should be for points, too.”

The dozen or so men and women seated around the conference table laughed. Obviously they thought it was a joke. Finally, Albert-the ever sensible-said, “Henry, that’s! ridiculous. And, anyway, how often does your mother come to the office?”

Henry smiled. “I’m serious. Under the new rules, if close personal friends are eligible for scoring, then mothers should be, too.”

The members of the Game Board were silent.

“They’re not exempt from red tape, you know. I bet everyone here handles business for his or her mother. On occasion.”

Albert looked disgusted. “But, Henry-your *own* mother?”

“Albert, make no mistake. No one *has* to play them. But, ladies, gentlemen, fellow bureaucrats, let’s not forget the meaning of the Game,

the purpose, the primary motive... the Game *is* for money. Everyone automatically tithes ten percent of his or her salary towards it. And if they don't show or place at the end of a round, well... that money's gone,

"Look, the rules wouldn't change. No one has to play anyone they don't want to. And I'm not saying mothers would be an everyday score. That is ridiculous. But think! Just think of the possibilities!"

The Game Board was silent. They considered the possibilities. Finally, Eleanor Dano, the head referee, said, "Out of curiosity, Henry, how much would you say they'd be worth?"

Henry shrugged. "They'd rank like everybody else. With a bonus, of course, considering the emotional bond. Personally, I'd go for a multiplication of the Irritation Factor. The same thing for the Percentage Point of Frustration."

"Plus a bonus?" Albert asked.

"No. That would be the bonus," Henry said. "Look, it's not complicated, Albert. Say, for instance, I wanted to use my mother for points. She comes over on business and I say, 'Mom. You want to go to the bathroom?' Naturally, my mother-anyone's mother for that matter-is going to answer, 'No.'

"That is, of course, until I start talking about something important. Or, say I invite her to lunch. She'll wait until we're in the car and then say, 'Henry, I've got to go to the bathroom now.' "

The Game Board laughed.

"So, anyway, I'd then say, 'Sure, Mom.' I direct her to one of the Johns, but I make sure it's the farthest one away from wherever we happen to be. Immediately, I score one point, Irritation Factor, right?"

Dano concurred.

"Now, the bathroom I take her to is a *public* one, right? That means that out of fourteen or sixteen toilets, only one of them is working. I score another point. It's simple, really. So now she has to wait in line, right? But maybe that line is rowdy! My mother's fairly old, and rowdy lines intimidate her. So that's another point at least. Number three already! So she waits. And when she finally gets to the head of the line, what happens?"

"She gets in," Albert said. "Goes. Reduces her I-factor to zero, and you're out of the ball park, Henry."

"Not so," Henry corrected. "Oh, she gets in all right. But when she's through, she reaches for the paper and... guess what?"

"There isn't any!" someone said.

"Or maybe there's only one sheet!'"

"Or maybe," someone else said, "there's a whole roll, but none of it will come out!"

"Exactly," Henry said. "And by now the Irritation Factor has crossed to the Point of Frustration, percentage level one, of course. But even so, that's an automatic ten! Then tack on the bonus factor-say, a multiplier of three-and *voila!* Thirty points. And, ladies, gentlemen, that's just the Johns!"

"It's brilliant!"

"Magnificent!"

"Justifiable," Henry said, "it's justifiable."

The board voted to include a new category: mothers.

Before they broke up for the morning, Albert said that Grounds Maintenance had contacted him saying they wanted into the Game. Albert said you had to give them their due: They were creative. "As a gesture of good faith," he said, "they redesigned the parking lots. Just the ones for Visitors, but still... you ought to see it. In Lot C, they've placed all these little signs saying, TO VISITORS PARKING. I bet they have a hundred of those. All saying, TO VISITORS PARKING. So the public follows the signs, right? They drive and drive and drive. And before they know it, they're completely out of the lot."

"And back on the street?"

"Yes! Third Street," Albert said. "You know, the one that leads directly and without any cutoffs to the through-way.

"That's beautiful," Henry said.

"Wait! Listen to what else they've done. In Lot Q-you can see it from

your office, Henry-in Lot Q, they've painted RESERVED on almost all the spaces. In fact, out of two hundred slots, they left only one that says VISITOR. There was a hell of a fight down there this morning. Had to be fifteen or twenty of the public slugging it out for that spot."

"Who won?" Dano asked.

"Oh," Albert said, "I don't know. Some guy. Anyway, I think we should let Grounds Maintenance in."

The Game Board agreed.

\* \* \* \*

Henry went back to his office happy and relaxed.

Game Board or no Game Board, he realized, the Game was still his. He had slaved over the birth of the Game. Whatever he wanted, as in the past, was simply voted in. Rules changes. Accounting systems. Mothers.

When he got back to his desk, Margo buzzed him and said he had a call.

"Mr. Cutter," the voice said, "I'm in Building G. Yes, I finally found it. I'm in room 807, but... now this is very strange. No one up here has ever heard of Mr. Acue."

"That's puzzling," Henry said. "Very puzzling indeed. By the way, who are you? And why are you looking for Mr. Acue?"

Brian MacAffee screamed his name at Henry. He screamed something else, too-something unintelligible. Then, quickly, he apologized. "Look," he said, "I realize you're a busy man, and I hate to take your time. You'll never *know* how much I hate to take your time. But when I saw you yesterday, you said I needed to get a B, as in Barbara, dash eight three two dash A, as in Annie. You said a Mr. Acue in Building G had them and..."

"Building G?" Henry interrupted. "Mr. MacAffee, I'm afraid you've gotten things a little confused. Again. Mr. Acue isn't in Building G. He's in Building B-as in Barbara." Henry let this information sink in for a second; then he added, "Do you know where that is?"

Henry heard the sound of muffled sobbing on the line. He told Brian how to get to Building B, hung up, and dialed Dano. "Play, back the tape of

my last conversation,” he said. “I just got to the Point of Frustration, dear. Score... automatic ten.”

\* \* \* \*

The rest of Henry’s morning was fairly typical.

Ramona Kitchens called back. Henry apologized profusely. He blamed the entire misunderstanding yesterday on Margo. And this time he took down half her address before he put her on hold and left for lunch.

He ate with Emilio Marquez. Emilio explained a plan he’d devised, during the night. “Mr. Cutter,” he said, “it’s the elevators.”

“Call me Henry, son.”

“You see, Henry, what we do is this. We fix the public ones so they never go up.”

“What?”

“Well, they do go up. Eventually. But never directly from the lobby. That’s the beauty of it, Henry. No matter how many times the public punches *up*, the elevators always go down.”

Henry smiled. “And then they go to the lobby, right?”

Emilio shrugged. “Well, maybe. Maybe not.”

“Emilio,” Henry said, “I predict that you will go far in this world.”

\* \* \* \*

When he got back to his office, Henry learned that Ramona Kitchens had stayed on the line this time for just a little over forty minutes.

“Before we cut her off again,” Margo said.

“Good girl. Now call Dano.”

“Sir, we’re cooking now. You’ve made twenty points just this morning.”

Henry smiled. “When you get the chance, Margo, get my mother on the line.”

That afternoon Henry did his paperwork.

He spilled coffee on a laboriously typed S, as in Sharon, dash two niner zero subscript four. He dropped an ash and accidentally burned off the name of the file on a P, as in Patty, slash one. Through no fault of his own, he misplaced the last sheet of an Oh comma Annie. "Margo," he said, "send these back. But first stamp then INCOMPLETE."

After the paperwork, Henry did yoga. He pushed and pulled and bent and strained, then lay down for a nap.

Margo interrupted him. "Sir, you have a visitor." As she said this, she made an odd series of eyebrow gestures as if she were trying to communicate something to Henry.

"Margo," he said, concerned, "why don't you take next month off? I think you're catching a tic."

Margo winked at the President, then escorted the visitor in.

"Mr. Cutter," the visitor said, "I've *got* the B, as in Barbara, dash eight three two dash A, as in Annie."

Henry looked at the disheveled and slightly bloodied man and said, "Brian, you're kidding."

"No. Here it is."

Henry asked Brian to sit down. "That's a bad cut over your eye," he said, then took the form and conscientiously pored over it. He took his pen from the black-onxy holder and tapped it several times. Finally, he said, "Well, this all looks just fine, Brian."

Brian smiled. He lightly touched the cut over his eye.

"Yes," Henry said. "This all looks just fine-except for one little, tiny thing."

Brian visibly tensed in the chair. It began to rock back and forth.

"Mr MacAffee," Henry said, "I'm afraid this isn't the form I asked you to get."

“What! What do you mean? You told me to get a B, as in Barbara, dash eight three two dash A, as in Annie, and *there* it is!”

“No, Mr. MacAffee,” Henry said slowly, deliberately. “I told you to get a B, as in Barbara, dash eight three two dash A, as in Annie... subscript one.”

Brian exploded from the chair, “Damn it,” he said, “I’ve already been in one fight today, and I don’t mind another! “ He grabbed the nearest thing to him-the black-onyx pen holder-and waved it at Henry. “Why are you doing this to me? What is it? That damn twenty-year-old pool ball?”

Henry smiled.

“Damn it, Henry! I want an answer!”

“No, Brian. It isn’t because of the pool ball. Not at all. At least, not really. Hell, Brian. It isn’t even *you*, per se.”

“Then what is it?”

Henry leaned back in his chair and carefully appraised the situation. The anger, righteous outrage, and frustrated confusion in the paunchy man’s face seemed to point to an imminent breakdown. And Henry knew he was behind this week. This thought, along with the realization that he and Brian were alone in the office, began to worry itself up and down Henry’s spine. He felt suddenly cold. Chilled. His chest ached. Suddenly he thought about the pool ball twenty years ago. He thought about the fact that there were no witnesses now, and then suddenly he said it. “The public. It’s just the public, Brian. That’s really all there is to it.”

“Just what the hell does that mean? ‘The public’ “

“Calm down, Brian.” Henry relaxed in his chair. “It means exactly what I said-the public. I probably shouldn’t tell you this,” he said, carefully observing a twitch in Brian’s cheek, “you being one of them and all. But, too, I have the feeling that may change. I mean, anyone who can *drown* in red tape the way you do belongs in the government. You could yet be hired.”

Brian did not seem appeased. “Are you telling me you treat *everyone* like this?”

Henry made a gesture as if to say maybe. “Maybe more in your case,

Brian. After all, I haven't forgotten that pool ball."

"By God, I'm calling for an investigation, Henry! I'm going to write the Congress. I'm going to write the President."

Henry smiled. "That would be stupid, Brian. You should be grateful to us, not-as you are now-snotty. After all, we're only doing this for your own good."

Brian's jaw dropped. His twitch worsened.

"You see, Brian. It's simple. It's something we've discovered. Basically, this is just a system to increase internal efficiency and-at the same time-save the taxpayer money: You don't understand, do you? It's so easy! Simple even. We've just accepted the fact that things go so much more smoothly and cost less when we don't have to deal with the public. In fact, I think it would be better for everyone if we never had to deal with the public at all. What you ran up against, Brian, was just a little system for... what shall I say?... public discouragement. That's all."

"Public discouragement! That's insane, Henry. You're the government! You have to deal with the public!"

"No," Henry said, "not really. At least not here. You see, we're not a very important agency. The only public we deal with here are the ones who *want* to deal with us. Of course, it's not like that with all other agencies. Agencies like the IRS, the FBI, those guys. You see, the only public they deal with are the ones who *don't* want to deal with them. And they have their own little games to handle that.

"But I may be confusing the issue. That happens a lot around \_ here, Brian. No, what I said was true. The government, at least most of it, doesn't have to deal with the public. Not to survive, anyway."

"You're mad," Brian screamed. "I don't care what kind of crap you spout about money and efficiency. You can't treat the public like this!"

"The public! The public!" Henry mimicked in righteous indignation. "Who do you think the public is, Brian?" Henry's voice assumed a forceful, serious tone. "The public! Hell, Brian, we *are* the public. You. Me. Everybody. Where do you think we bureaucrats came from?" Henry pointed to the window. "From out there, that's where. Look, you come in here prancing around for a job, and if you get it, you'll have come from the public, too. So just where the hell do you get off?"



At that moment Margo came in. She walked over to Henry and whispered in his ear. "Sir, I've just heard from Grounds Maintenance. You know that slot in Visitors Parking, Lot Q? The only one there was? They just told me they painted it RESERVED." She whispered something else, and Henry smiled.

He walked over to the window. "Brian," he said, looking down on Q, "will you come here for a minute?"

Brian came and Henry said, "That isn't *your* car they're towing away, is it?"

Brian, who in fact was the owner of the car they were towing away, jumped on Henry. He pushed him to the floor and began to strangle the life out of him.

Henry's mouth gaped open. He felt his chest constrict painfully, as he gasped for air. He flailed his arms against Brian. He made tiny gurgling sounds. Suddenly he saw the shadow of something black flash across his face. Realizing what it was, he tried to squeak, "No."

Brian, his forearm pressing Henry's throat, took the black-onyx pen holder, shaped something like a pool ball, and shoved it into Henry's mouth.

Henry's heart failed.

\* \* \* \*

There was a very quiet knock on the door.

A nurse-pretty, brunette, and very young-went to answer it. Albert Mathews entered, looking nervously around the room. He squeezed a white envelope between his fingers.

"Only for a minute now," the nurse said, "and please try not to excite him."

Albert walked over to the bed. He looked at the small man with tubes up his nose and said, "Henry, you won!"

"What?" Henry croaked, barely awake.

"The Game this week, Henry. You came in first!" Albert opened the

envelope. "Look. There's almost ten thousand dollars in here."

Henry was stunned."

"Henry, no one's ever been attacked before. I mean, not to the point of dying! I'm proud of you, man."

Henry smiled. He touched the envelope Albert placed upon his chest.

"Remember," the nurse said, "no excitement now. Mr. Cutter is a heart patient."

For a while Albert chatted with Henry about the office. He told Henry that everything and everyone was just fine. He told Henry not to worry about anything but getting well. "We've got a temporary replacement for you. So don't worry about anything, Henry."

"Oh?" Henry asked, weak but curious. "Who is it?"

"Well..." Albert said somewhat evasively. "What does it matter?"

"C'mon, Albert. I want to know. Who'd you get to replace me?"

Albert looked over at the nurse. He bent down then toward Henry and whispered, "Brian. It's Brian MacAfee."

"Brian?"

Albert shrugged. "What could we do? He's *almost* qualified. And you know, you said you weren't going to press charges, Henry."

"But what about the investigation? Albert, he said he was going to call for one!"

"Oh, don't be ridiculous, Henry. Why do you think we offered him the job? Brian MacAfee's not going to call for any investigation. Not now, anyway."

After Albert left, the nurse said, very sweetly, "My, what was that all about?"

Henry made something up.

The nurse smiled and asked Henry what he did for a living.

“Oh,” Henry said, “I used to be a bureaucrat. But I’m thinking of changing careers.”

“That’s nice.” The nurse checked the equipment board over Henry’s head. She looked at Henry. “To what?”

“A consultant maybe. My hobby... my avocation, really, is inventing games.”

The nurse seemed very impressed. She smiled and said, “Well, we should be feeling better pretty soon.”

Another nurse, this one older and not nearly so attractive, came in just then and stood in the far corner of the room. The pretty nurse walked over, and together they discussed something.

Henry lay in the bed especially designed for coronary patients and began to consider the possibilities. It wasn’t such a wild idea, he thought: game consultant. After all, just look at what he’d accomplished. He’d boosted morale. Efficiency. Esprit de corps. *Sure*, he thought, *there must be plenty of employers-other than just the federal government-who could benefit from my expertise. Plenty that would, in addition, pay me plenty. Make the risks worthwhile. .*

Henry began to consider these potential employers. The first thing he thought of was, of course, the electric company. Then he thought of the rest of the utilities: the phone company, water, and gas. All he needed, he realized, were the ones that had a monopoly. The ones that offered a service no one else had. Vital service companies. The ones with the only game in town. Suddenly he called to the nurse. “Can you bring me a pan, please?”

The pretty nurse said, “Certainly.” She skittered out the door.

The other nurse came over and monitored Henry’s vital signs.

Soon the pretty nurse returned. She held the gleaming chrome bowl in her hand and quickly slipped it under him.

Henry screamed. His body arched a foot off the bed. “Damnation!” he yelled, a horrified expression spreading across his face.

“Mr. Cutter,” the nurse said sweetly, “my, but we *are* touchy today, aren’t we?”

As Henry relieved himself, he watched the two nurses. They went back over to the corner, where he could just barely eavesdrop.

“What’s the matter with that one?” the plain one asked.

“Oh,” answered the pretty nurse, “patients are just lousy sports.” -

“What?”

“Crybabies, too.”

“Look,” said the plain one, “I’ve worked in a lot of hospitals before, but I’ve *never* seen a heart patient jump off the bed! What’s going on here?”

“Are you new here?”

The plain one nodded her head in assent.

“Well, that explains it. You see,” she said slowly, almost conspiratorially, “here at St. Mark’s we have something of a contest. It’s based on points. Hard points. Easy points. Things like that.” At this, the pretty nurse smiled. “And freezing the bedpans always makes for very easy points.”

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\* \* \* \*

# WHEN AULD'S ACQUAINTANCE IS FORGOT

by *Harlan Ellison*

That's a federal offense you're suggesting, Mr. Auld. It's not just my job, it's the whole franchise. The auditors come in, they fall over it-because *I* don't know how to cover it- and the people who own this Bank lose everything they sank into it." The young woman stared at Jerry Auld till he looked away. She wasn't trying to be kind, despite the look of desperation on his face. She was telling him in as flat and forthright a manner as she could summon-just in case he was a field investigator for the regulatory agency looking for bootleg Banks-possibly wired for gathering evidence- so he would understand that *this* Memory Bank was run strictly along the lines of the federal directives.

"Is that what you want, Mr. Auld? To get us in the most serious kind of trouble?"

He was pale and thin, holding his clasped hands in his lap, rubbing one thumb over the other till the skin was raw. His eyes had desperation brimming in them. "No... no, of course not. I just thought..."

She waited.

"I just thought there might be *some* way you could make an exception in this case. I really... have to get rid of this one last, pretty *awful* memory. I know you've gone as far as you can by the usual standards; but I felt if you just looked in the regulations, maybe you'd find some legitimate way to..."

"Let me stop you," she said. "I've monitored your myelin sheathing, and the depletion level is absolutely at maximum. There is no way on earth, short of a federal guideline being relaxed, that we can leach one more memory out of your brain." She let a mildly officious-some might say nasty-smile cross her lips. "Simply put, Mr. Auld, you are overdrawn at the Memory Bank."

He straightened in the formfit and his voice went cold. "Lady, I'm about as miserable as a human being can be. I've got a head full of stuff that makes sex with spiders and other small, furry things seem like a happy

alternative, and I don't need you to make me feel like a fool."

He stood up. "I'm sorry I asked you to do something you can't do. I just hope you don't come to where I am some day and need someone to help."

She started to reply, but he was already walking toward the iris. As it dilated, he turned to look at her once more. "You don't look anything like her. I was wrong."

Then he was gone.

It took her some time to unravel the meaning of his last words, but she decided she had not time to feel sorry for him. She wondered who "her" was; then she forgot it.

The little man with the long nose and the cerise caftan spotted Auld as he left the Memory Bank. He had been sitting on a bench in the mall, sipping at a bulb of Flashpoint Soda, watching the Bank. He recognized Auld's distressed look at once, and he punctiliously deposited the bulb in a nearby incinerator box and followed him.

When Jerry Auld wandered into a showroom displaying this year's models of the Ford hoverpak, the little man sauntered around the block once, strolled into the showroom, and sidled up to him. They stood side by side, looking at the pak.

"They say it's the same design the aircops use, just less juice." the little man said, not looking at Auld.

Jerry looked down at him, aware of him for the first time. "That so? Interesting."

"You look to me," the little man said, in the same tone of voice he had used to comment on the Ford pak, casual, light, "like a man with some bad memories."

Jerry's eyes narrowed. "Something I can do for you, chum?"

The little man shrugged and acted nonchalant. "For me? Hell, no. I'm fuzz-free and frilly, friend. What I thought, I might be able to do something upright for you."

"Like what?"

“Like get you to a clean, precise Bank that could leach off some bad stains.”

Jerry looked around. The showroom grifters were busy with live customers. He turned to face the little man.

“Why me?”

The little man smiled. “Saw you hobble out of the Franchise Bank in the mall. You looked rocky, friend. Mighty rocky. Carrying a freightload of old movies in your skull. Figured they turned you down for one reason or another. Figured you could use a friendly steer.”

Jerry had been expecting something like this. The Bank in the mall had not been his first stop. There had been the Memory Bank in the Corporate Tower and the Bank in the Longacre Shopping Center and the Bank at Mount Sinai. They had all turned him down, and from recent articles he’d read on bootleg memory operations, he’d suspected that maintaining a visible image would put the steerers on to him.

“You got a name, chum?”

“Do I gotta have a name?”

“Just in case I go around a dark corner with you and get a sap upside my head. I want to be able to remember a tag to go with the face.”

The little man grinned nastily. “Remember the nose. My friends call me Pinocchio.”

“Let’s go see the man,” Jerry Auld said.

“Woman,” Pinocchio said.

“Woman,” Jerry Auld said. “Let’s go see the woman.”

The bootleg Bank was on an air-cushion yacht anchored beyond the twelve-mile limit. They reached it, using hoverpaks, and by the time the strung lights of the vessel materialized out of the mist, it was night. They put down on the forecastle pad and racked their units. Pinocchio kept up a line of useless chatter, intended to allay Auld’s fears. It served to draw him up tighter than he’d been before the little man had braced him.

Jerry saw guards with weapons on the flying bridge.

Pinocchio caught his glance and said, "Precautions."

"Sure."

Pinocchio didn't move. Jerry said, "Are we doing something here or just taking the night air?" He didn't like being under the guns.

Pinocchio kept his eyes on the flying bridge as he said, "They're making us, reporting. It'll only be a minute."

"What kind of trouble do these people get?" Jerry asked.

"Hijackers sometimes. You know: pirates. The market's lively right now. A lot of jockeying for territory, getting good product to push..." One of the armed guards motioned with his weapon, and Pinocchio said, "Come on."

They went belowdecks. The yacht was handsomely appointed. Flocked-velvet wallpaper in the companionways, burnished metal banisters, thick carpets. Pinocchio knocked at an inlaid teak door. The door was opened by an unexceptional-looking woman. She smiled, *pro forma*, and walked back into the cabin, permitting Auld and the little man to enter.

The room was a spacious saloon, fitted to the walls with the memory-leaching devices Auld recognized from his many trips to legitimate Banks in the city.

"Ms. Keogh, I'd like to introduce Mr. Jerry Auld. Met him in the city, thought we could do a little business..."

She waved him to silence. "Do you have your own transportation, Mr. Auld? Or did you come with Mr. Timiachi?"

Auld said, "I have my own pak."

"Then you can go, Mr. Timiachi," she said to the little man. "Stop by the office and get a check."

Obsequious, Pinocchio bobbed his head and smiled a goodbye at Jerry. Then, sans forelock-tugging, he bowed himself out of the saloon. Ms. Keogh waved at a formfit. Jerry sat down.



“How close are you to maximum depletion?” she said.

He decided not to fence. He was in too much pain. They were both here for the same thing. “I’m at the limit.”

She walked around the saloon, thinking. Then she came and sat down beside him in the other formfit. Through the open porthole Auld heard the mournful sound of something calling to its mate across the night water. “Let me tell you several things,” she said.

“I want, to get rid of some bad stains,” Auld said. “I know what I need to know.”

She raised a hand to silence him. “Probably. Nonetheless, this is not a bucket shop. Bootleg, yes; but not a crash-and-burn operation.”

He indicated he’d listen.

“The ‘holographic’ memory model postulates that a memory is stored in a manner analogous to a hologram- not sited in any specific area, but stored all over the brain. To remove one certain memory, it is always necessary to break molecules of myelin all over the brain... from the densely packed myelin of the corpus callosum-”

“The white matter,” Auld said. She nodded. “I’ve heard all this before.”

“-from the white matter right down the spinal cord, perhaps even down into the peripheral nerves.” She finished on a tone of dogged determination.

“Now tell me about the weak point in the long-chain myelin molecule. The A-I link. Tell me how easily the molecule breaks there. The point at which muscular dystrophy and other neurodegenerative diseases attack the molecule. Tell me how I might become a head of lettuce if I go past the max. I’ve heard it all before. I’m surprised you’re trying to discourage me. I’m also annoyed, lady.”

She looked at him with resignation. “We don’t push anyone, and we don’t lie. It’s bad enough we’re outside the law. I don’t want anyone’s life on my hands. Your choice, fully informed.”

He stood up. “Put me in the drain and let’s get this over with.”

“It must be nasty.”

“I pity the poor sonofabitch you sell these stains to.”

“Would you like to meet the head that will be receiving what you’ll be losing?”

“Not much.”

“He’s a wry old man whose life has been bland beyond the telling. He wants action, danger, adventure, romance. He wants to settle into his twilight years, with a head filled with wonder and experience.”

“I’m touched.” He made his fists. “Godammit, lady, *get this shit out of my head!*”

She waved him to the leaching unit on the wall. He followed her as she opened out the wings. She folded down the formfit with its probe helmet, and he sat without waiting for instructions. He had been in that seat before. Perhaps too many times.

“This won’t hurt,” Ms. Keogh said.

“That’s not true,” he replied.

“You’re right. It’s not true,” she said, and the helmet dropped and the probes fastened to his skull and she turned on the power. The universe became a whirlpool.

\* \* \* \*

Lucy spat blood and he touched her chin with the moist cloth. “Jerry, please.”

”No. Forget it.”

“I’m in terrible pain, Jerry.”

“I’ll call the medic.”

“You know it won’t do any good. You know what you have to do.”

He turned away. “I can’t, kid. I just can’t.”

“I trust you, Jerry. If *you* do it, I won’t be afraid. I know, it’ll be okay.”

It wasn’t going to be okay, no matter how it happened. For a moment he hated her for wanting to share it with him, for needing that last terrible measure of love no one should be asked to give.

“Don’t let them put me in the ground, Jerry. Nobody can talk to worms. Send me to the fire. I wouldn’t mind that, not if you were with me...”

She was rambling. He understood about her fear of the dark; down there forever in the cold; with things moving toward her. Yes, he could guarantee the clean fire would have what remained... after. But she was rambling, talking about things she was seeing on the other side-

“I know they’re over there, past the crossover, Jerry. They were there before, when I thought I was going. Don’t let me die alone. Be there to keep them at bay till I can run, honey. Please.”

She coughed blood again, and her eyes closed. He held the moist cloth and reached down and lifted her head from the pillow and placed it over her face. “I love you, kiddo.”

After a very long time he took the pillow away. It was heavily stained.

Ms. Keogh called two deckhands to help him onto the forecastle. They strapped his pak on him. The mist was heavier now, had slipped into fog. If there were stars somewhere beyond the yacht, they could not be seen.

“Can you travel?” she said. He was looking off to starboard. She took his head in her hands. “Can you travel?”

“Yes. Of course. I’m fine.” He looked away again.

“Set the auto for the city,” she said to one of the deckhands. She spoke softly. “Do you remember Lucy?”

“Yes.”

“Do you remember the fire?”

“What fire?”

“Lucy.”

“Yes. She smiled at me.”

They sent him aloft and he hovered for a moment. Then the autopilot cut in and he moved slowly off into the fog.

She watched for a time, but there were no stars visible.

Then she went belowdecks to purify the stain that had been stored in the unit.

Later that night an old man sat in the unit’s formfit, and the balance of pain in the universe was restored.

\* \* \* \*

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\* \* \* \*

# THE ANCIENT MIND AT WORK

by *Suzy McKee Charnas*

On a Tuesday morning Katje discovered that Dr. Weyland was a vampire, like the one in the movie she'd seen last week.

Jackson's friend on the night cleaning crew had left his umbrella hooked over the bike rack outside the lab building. Since Katje liked to take a stroll in the dawn quiet before starting work, she went over to see if the umbrella was still there. As she started back empty-handed through the heavy mist, she heard the door of the lab building boom behind her, and she looked back.

Two men had come out. One of them, clearly hurt or ill, sank down on his knees and reached out a hand to steady himself on the damp and glistening surface of the parking lot. The other, a tall man with gray hair, turned his head to look full at the kneeling figure-and continued walking without hesitation. He didn't even take his hands out of his raincoat pockets until he stooped to unlock his shimmering, dark Mercedes. He got inside and drove off.

Katje started back toward the lot. But the young man pushed himself upright, looked around in a bewildered manner, and making his way unsteadily to his own car also drove away.

So, there was the vampire, sated and cruel, and there was his victim, wilted, pale, and confused-although the movie vampire had swirled about in a black cloak, not a trench coat, and had gone after bosomy young females. Walking over the lawn to the club, Katje smiled at her own fancy.

What she had really seen, she knew, was the star of the Cayslin Center for the Study of Man, Dr. Weyland, leaving the lab with one of his sleep-subjects after a debilitating all-night session. Dr. Weyland must have thought the young man was stooping to retrieve dropped car keys.

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The Cayslin Club was an old mansion donated years before to the college. It served now as the faculty club. Its grandeur had been severely challenged by the lab building and attendant parking lot constructed on half

of the once spacious lawn, but the club was still imposing within.

This morning when she stepped inside, Katje found a woman in a T-shirt, shorts, and red shoes running from the dining area through the hall and down the length of the living room, making a turn of quick little steps at the fireplace, and running back again. It was Miss Donnelly's latest guest lecturer, who was surely old enough to have more dignity. Nothing could hurt the synthetic carpeting that had replaced the fine old rugs, but really, what a way for a grown woman to behave!

She glared. The runner waved cheerfully.

Jackson was in the green room, plugging leaks; it had begun to rain now. The green room was a glassed-in terrace, tile-floored and furnished with chairs of lacy wrought iron.

"Did you find it, Mrs. de Groot?" Jackson asked.

"No, I'm sorry." Kate never called him by his name because she didn't know whether he was Jackson Somebody or Somebody Jackson, and she had learned to be careful about everything to do with blacks in this country-

"Thanks for looking, anyway," Jackson said.

In the kitchen she stood by the sinks, staring out at the dreary day. She had never grown used to these chill, watery winters, though after so many years she couldn't quite recall the exact quality of the African sunlight in which she had grown up. It was no great wonder that Henrik had died here. The gray climate had finally quenched even his ardent nature six years ago.

Her savings from her own salary as housekeeper at the Cayslin Club would eventually finance her return home. She needed enough to buy not a farm but a house with a garden patch somewhere high and cool. She frowned, trying to picture the ideal site, but nothing clear came into her mind. She had been away so long.

While Katje was scrubbing out the sinks, Miss Donnelly burst in, shrugging off her dripping coat: "Of all the high-handed, Goddamn-oh, hello, Mrs. de Groot; sorry for the language. Look, we won't be having the women's faculty lunch here tomorrow after all. Dr. Weyland is giving a special money pitch to a couple of fat-cat alumni, and he wants a nice, quiet setting-our lunch corner here at the club, as it turns out. Dean Wacker's already said yes, so that's that." She cocked her head to one side. "What in

the world is that thumping noise?”

“Someone running,” Katje said, thinking abstractedly of the alumni lurching with the vampire. Would he eat? The one in the movie hadn’t.

Miss Donnelly’s face got red patches over the sharp cheekbones. “My God, is that my lecturer doing her jogging in here because of the weather? I’m so sorry, Mrs. de Groot-I did mean to find her someplace to run, but even in free periods the gyms are full of great hulking boys playing basketball.”

She smiled. “You know, Mrs. de Groot, I’ve been meaning to ask you to be my next guest lecturer. Would you come talk to my students?”

“Me? What about?”

“Oh, about colonial Africa, what it was like growing up there. These kids’ experience is so narrow and protected, I look for every chance to expand their thinking.”

Katje wrung out the rag. “My grandfather and Uncle Jan whipped the native boys to work like cattle and kicked them hard enough to break bones for not showing respect. Otherwise we would have been overrun and driven out. I used to go hunting. I shot rhino, elephant, leopard, and I was proud of doing it and doing it well. Your students don’t want to know about such things. They have nothing to fear but tax collectors and nothing to do with nature except giving money for whales and seals.”

“But that’s what I mean,” Miss Donnelly said. “Different viewpoints.”

“There are plenty of books about Africa.”

“Okay, forget I asked.” Miss Donnelly gnawed at her thumbnail, frowning, “I guess I could get the women together over at Corrigan tomorrow instead of here if I spend an hour on the phone. We’ll miss your cooking, Mrs. de Groot.”

Katje said, “Will Dr. Weyland expect me to cook for his guests?”

“Not Weyland,” Miss Donnelly said drily. “It’s nothing but the best for him, which means the most expensive. They’ll probably have a banquet brought in from Borchard’s.”

She went to collect her guest.

Katje put on coffee and phoned Buildings and Grounds- Yes, Dr. Weyland and two companions were on at the club for tomorrow; no, Mrs. de Groot wouldn't have to do anything but tidy up afterward; yes, it was short notice, and please write it in on the club calendar; and yes, Jackson had been told to check the eaves over the east bedrooms before he left.

"Wandering raincoat," Miss Donnelly said, darting in to snatch it up from the chair where, she'd left it. "Just watch out for Weyland, Mrs. de Groot."

"What, an old woman of fifty, more gray than blond, with lines and bones in the face? I am not some slinky graduate student trying not only for an A but for the professor also."

"I don't mean romance," Miss Donnelly grinned, "though God knows half the faculty-of both sexes-are in love with the man." Honestly, Katje thought, the things people talked about these days! "To no avail, alas, since he's a real loner. But he will try to get you into his expensive sleep lab and make your dreams part of the world-shaking, history-changing research that he stole off poor old Joel Milnes."

Milnes, Katje thought when she was alone again: Professor Milnes, who had gone away to some sunny place to die of cancer. Then Dr. Weyland had come from a small southern school and taken over Milnes's dream project, saving it from being junked-or stealing it, in Miss Donnelly's version. A person who looked at a thing in too many ways was bound to get confused.

Jackson came in and poured coffee for himself. He leaned back in his chair and flipped the schedules where they hung on the wall by the phone. He was as slender as a Kikuyu youth-she could see his ribs arch under his shirt. He ate a lot of starch and junk food, but he was too nervous to fatten on it. By rights he belonged in a red blanket, skin gleaming with oil, hair plaited. This life pulled him out of his nature.

"Try and don't put nobody in that number-six bedroom till I get to it the end of the week," he said. "The rain drips in behind the casement. I laid out towels to soak up the water. I see you got Weyland in here tomorrow. My buddy Maurice on the cleaning crew says that guy got the best lab in the place."

"What is Dr. Weyland's research?" Katje asked.



“ ‘Dream mapping,’ they call it. Maurice says there’s nothing interesting in his lab—just equipment, you know, recording machines and computers and like that. I’d like to see all that hardware sometime. Only you won’t catch me laying out my dreams on tape!

“Well, I got to push along. There’s some dripping faucets, over at Joffrey I got to look at. Hans Brinker, that’s me. Thanks for the coffee.”

Katje began pulling out the fridge racks for cleaning, listening to him whistle as he gathered up his tools in the green room.

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The people from Borchard’s left her very little to do. She was stacking the rinsed dishes in the washer when a man said from the doorway, “I am very obliged to you, Mrs. de Groot.”

Dr. Weyland stood poised there, slightly stoop-shouldered, head thrust inquisitively forward as he examined the kitchen. She was surprised that he knew her name, for he did not frequent the club. She had seen his tall figure only once or twice in the dining room.

“There was just a bit remaining to do. Dr. Weyland,” she said.

“Still, this is your territory,” he said, advancing. “I’m sure you were helpful to the Borchard’s people. I’ve never been back here. Are those freezers or refrigerators?”

She showed him around the kitchen and the pantries. He seemed impressed. He was, she realized, unexpectedly personable: lean and grizzled, but with the hint of vulnerability common among rangy men. You couldn’t look at him without imagining the gawky scarecrow he must have been as a boy. His striking features—craggy nose and brow, strong mouth, lank jaw—no doubt outsize and homely then, were now impressively united by the long creases of experience on his cheeks and forehead.

“No more scullions cranking the spit,” he remarked over; the rotisserie. “You come originally from East Africa, Mrs. de Groot? Things must have been very different there.”

“Yes. I left a long time ago.”

“Surely not so very long,” he said, and his eyes flicked over her from head to foot.

Relaxing in the warmth of his interest she said, "Are you from elsewhere also?"

A mistake; he frosted up at once. "Why do you ask?"

"Excuse me. I thought I heard just the trace of an accent."

"My family were Europeans. We spoke German at home. May I sit down?" His big hands, capable- and strong-looking, graced the back of a chair. He smiled briefly. "Would you mind sharing your coffee with an institutional fortune hunter? That is my job-persuading rich men and the guardians of foundations to spend a little of their money in support of work that offers no immediate result. I don't enjoy dealing with these shortsighted men."

"Everyone, says you do it well," Katje filled a cup for him.

"It takes up my time," he said. "It wearies me." His large and brilliant eyes, in sockets darkened with fatigue, had a withdrawn, somber aspect. How old was he? Katje wondered.

Suddenly he gazed at her and said, "Didn't I see you over by the lab the other morning?. There was mist on my windshield; I couldn't be sure."

She told him about Jackson's friend's umbrella, thinking now he'll explain, this is what he came to say. But he added nothing, and she found herself hesitant to ask about the student in the parking lot. "Is there anything else I can do for you, Dr. Weyland?"

"I don't mean to keep you from your work. One thing. Would you come over and do a session for me in the sleep lab?"

She shook her head.

"All the information goes on tapes under coded I.D. numbers, Mrs. de Groot. Your privacy would be strictly guarded."

"I would prefer not to."

"Excuse me then. It was a pleasure to talk with you," he said, rising. "If you find a reason to change your mind, my extension is one sixty-three."

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She was close to tears, but Uncle Jan made her strip down the gun again-her first gun, her own gun-and then the lion coughed, and she saw with the wide gaze of fear his golden form crouched, tail lashing, in the thornbush. As her pony shied she threw up her gun and fired, and the dust boiled up from the thrashings of the wounded cat.

Then Scotty's patient voice said, "Do it again," and she was tearing down the rifle once more by lamplight at the worn wooden table while her mother sewed with angry stabs of the needle and spoke words Katje didn't bother hearing because she knew the gist by heart: "If only Jan had children of his own! Sons, preferably, to take out hunting with Scotty. Because he has no sons, he takes Katje out shooting instead so he can show how tough Boer youngsters are, even a girl. For whites to kill for sport, as Jan and Scotty do, is to go backward into the barbaric past of Africa. Now the farm is producing; there is no need to kill for hides to get cash for coffee, salt, and tobacco. And to train a *girl* to go stalking and killing animals like scarcely more than an animal herself!"

"Again," said Scotty, and the lion coughed, making the pony shiver under her; Katje woke.

She was sitting in front of the tv, blinking at the sharp, knowing face of the talk-show host. The sound had gone off again, and she had dozed. She didn't often dream, hardly ever of Africa. Why now? Because, she thought, Dr. Weyland had roused her memory. She thought he looked a bit like Scotty, the neighboring farmer whom Uncle Jan had begun by calling a damned *rooinek* and ended treating like a brother.

She got up and hit the tv to make it speak again and sat down to watch with an apple in her hand. Lately she ate too much, out of boredom. Would she grow stout like her mother? It was Dr. Weyland who had brought this worry to the surface of her mind, no proper concern of a middle-aged widow. It was Dr. Weyland who had stirred up that long-ago girlhood spent prowling for game in the bright, dissolving landscape of tan grass.

"Under the bed; do you think?" Miss Donnelly dropped on her knees to look. The guest lecturer had left her hairbrush behind. Katje forbore to point out that this was the sort of thing to be expected of someone who put on track clothes and ran inside the house.

A student flung open the bedroom door and leaned in: "Is it too late to hand in my paper, Miss Donnelly?"

“For God’s sake, Mickey,” Miss Donnelly burst out, “where did you get that?”

Across the chest of the girl’s T-shirt where her coat gapped open were emblazoned the words SLEEP WITH WEYLAND. HE’S A DREAM. She grinned. “Some hustler is selling them right outside the co-op. Better hurry if you want one—Security’s already been sent for.” She giggled, put a sheaf of dog-eared pages down on the chair by the door, added “Thanks, Miss Donnelly,” and clattered away down the stairs.

Miss Donnelly sat back on her heels and laughed. “Well, I never, as my grandma used to say. That man is turning this school into a circus!”

“These young people have no respect for anything,” Katje said, “What will Dr. Weyland say, seeing his name used like that? He should have her expelled.”

“Him? He’ll barely notice. But Wacker will throw fits.” Miss Donnelly got up, dusting her hands. She ran a finger over the blistered paint on the windowsill. “Pity they can’t use some of the loot Weyland brings in to really fix this old place up. But I guess we can’t complain. Without Weyland this would be just another expensive little backwater school for the not so bright children of the upper middle class. And it isn’t all rose’s even for him; this T-shirt thing will bring on a fresh bout of backbiting among his colleagues, you watch. This kind of incident brings out the jungle beast in even the mildest academics.”

Katje snorted. She didn’t think much of academic infighting.

“I know we must seem pretty tame to you,” Miss Donnelly said wryly, “but there are some real ambushes and even killings here, in terms of careers. It’s not the cushy life it sometimes seems, and not so secure either.

“Even you may be in a little trouble, Mrs. de Groot, though I hope not. Only a few weeks ago there was a complaint from a faculty member that you upset his guests by something you said-”

“I said they couldn’t set up a dart board in here,” Katje responded crisply.

“There are others who don’t like your politics-”

“I never speak about politics,” Katje said, offended. That was the first

thing Henrik had demanded of her here. She had acquiesced like a good wife; not that she was ashamed of her political beliefs. She had loved and married Henrik not because but in spite of his radical politics.

“From your silence they assume you’re some kind of reactionary racist,” Miss Donnelly said. “And because you’re a Boer and don’t carry on your husband’s crusade. Then there are the ones who say you’re just too old and stuffy for the job, meaning you scare them a little, and they’d rather have a giggly cocktail waitress or a downtrodden mouse of a working student. But you’ve got plenty of partisans too, and even Wacker knows you give this place tone and dignity. They ought to double your salary. You’re solid and dependable, even if you are a little, well, old-fashioned. And you lived a real life in the world, whatever your values, which is more than most of our faculty has ever done.” She stopped, blushing, and moved toward the door. “Well, when that hairbrush turns up just put it aside for me, will you? Thank you, Mrs. de Groot.”

Katje said, “Thank you, too.” That girl was as softheaded as everyone around here, but she had a good heart.

Many of the staff had already left for vacation during intercession, now that new scheduling had freed everyone from doing special intensive courses between semesters. The last cocktail hour at the club was thinly attended. Katie moved among the drinkers, gathering loaded ashtrays, used glasses, rumpled napkins. A few people greeted her as she passed.

There were two major topics of conversation: the bio student who had been raped last night as she left the library, and the Weyland T-shirt or, rather, Weyland himself.

They said he was a disgrace, encouraging commercial exploitation of his name. He was probably getting a cut of the profits; no he wasn’t, didn’t need to, he was a superstar with plenty of income, no dependents, and no tastes except for study and work. And that beautiful Mercedes-Benz of his, don’t forget. No doubt that was where he was this evening-not off on a holiday or drinking cheap club booze but tearing around the countryside in his beloved car.

Better a ride in the country than burying himself in the library and feeding his insatiable appetite for books. But what can a workaholic do if he’s also an insomniac? The two conditions reinforce each other. It was unhealthy for him to push so hard. Just look at him, so haggard and preoccupied, so lean and lonely-looking. The man deserved a prize for his shy-bachelor-hopelessly-hooked-on-the-pursuit-of-knowledge act.

How many students were in the sleep project now? More than were in his classes. They called his course in ethnography “The Ancient Mind at Work,” but the girls found his formality charming, and his absent-mindedness, too-did you hear how he wore two vests one on top of the other to class and never knew it? He wasn’t formal; he was rigid and too old-fashioned in his thinking to make a first-rate contribution to anthropology. So he’d simply appropriated poor Milnes’s beautiful adaptation of the Richman-Steinmoller recording system to the documentation of dreams, throwing in some “cross-cultural” terminology to bring the project into his own field. And there was doubt that Weyland fully understood the computer end of the process. No wonder he couldn’t keep an assistant for long.

Here was Petersen leaving him because of some brouhaha over a computer run. Charming, yes, but Weyland could also be a sarcastic bastard. He was apt to be testy, yes; the great are often quarrelsome, nothing new in that. Remember how he almost came to blows with young Denton over that scratch Denton put on the Mercedes’ fender? When Denton lost his temper and threw a punch, Weyland jumped into the car and tried to run him down. Well, that’s how Denton told it, but was it likely, considering that Weyland was big enough to flatten Denton with a slap? Denton should have been given a medal for trying to get Weyland off the street. Have you seen him drive? Roars along just barely in control of that great big machine-

Weyland himself wasn’t there. Of course not. Weyland was a disdainful, snobbish son-of-a-bitch; Weyland was a shy, socially-maladroit scholar absorbed in his great work; Weyland had a secret sorrow too painful to share; Weyland was a charlatan; Weyland was a genius working himself to death to keep alive the Cayslin Center for the Study of Man.

Dean Wacker brooded by the huge, empty fireplace and said several times in a carrying voice that he had talked with Weyland and that the students involved in the T-shirt scandal would face firm disciplinary action.

Miss Donnelly came in late with a woman from Economics. They talked heatedly in the window bay, and the two other women in the room drifted over to join them. Katje followed.

“...from off-campus, but that’s what they always say,” one of them snapped. Miss Donnelly caught Katje’s eye, smiled a strained smile, and plunged back into the discussion. They were talking about the rape. Katje wasn’t interested. A woman who used her sense and carried herself with

self-respect didn't get raped, but saying so to these intellectual women wasted breath. They didn't understand real life. Katje headed back toward the kitchen.

Buildings and Grounds had sent Nettie Ledyard over from the student cafeteria to help out. She was rinsing glasses and squinting at them through the smoke of her cigarette. She wore a T-shirt bearing a bulbous fish shape across the front and the words SAVE OUR WHALES. These "environmental" messages vexed Katje; only naive, citified people could think of wild animals as pets. The shirt undoubtedly belonged to one of Nettie's long-haired, bleeding-heart boyfriends. Nettie herself smoked too much to pretend to an environmental conscience. She was no hypocrite, at least. But she should come properly dressed to do a job at the club, just in case a professor came wandering back here for more ice or whatever.

"I'll be helping you with the club inventory again during intersession," Nettie said. "Good thing too. You'll be spending a lot of time over here until school starts again, and the campus is really emptying out. Now there's this sex maniac cruising around-though what I could do but run like hell and scream my head off I can't tell you.

"Listen, what's this about Jackson sending you on errands for him?" she added irritably. She flicked ash off her bosom, which was high like a shelf, pushed up by her too tight brassiere. "His pal Maurice can pick up his own umbrella; he's no cripple. Having you wandering around out there alone at some godforsaken hour-"

"Neither of us knew about the rapist," Katie said, wiping out the last of the ashtrays.

"Just don't let Jackson take advantage of you, that's all."

Katje grunted. She had been raised not to let herself be taken advantage of by blacks. At home they had all practiced that art.

Later, helping to dig out a fur hat from under the pile of coats in the foyer, Katje heard someone saying, "... other people's work, glomming on and taking all the credit; a real bloodsucker."

Into her mind came the image of Dr. Weyland's tall figure moving without a break in stride past the stricken student.

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Jackson came down from the roof with watering eyes. A damp wind was rising.

“That leak is fixed for a while,” he said, hunching to blow on his chapped hands. “But the big shots at Buildings and Grounds got to do something better before the next snow piles up and soaks through again.”

Katje polished the silver plate with a gray flannel. “What do you know about vampires?” she said.

“How bad you want to know?”

He had no right to joke with her like that, he whose ancestors, had been heathen savages. “What do you know about vampires?” she repeated firmly.

“Not a thing.” He grinned. “But you just keep on going to the movies with Nettie, and you’ll find out all about that kind of stuff. She got to have the dumbest taste in movies there ever was. Horrible stuff!”

Katje looked down from the landing at Nettie, who had just let herself in to the club. Nettie’s hair was all in tight little rings like pigs’ tails. She called, “Guess what I went and did?”

“Your hair,” Katje said. “You got it done curly.”

Nettie hung her coat crookedly on the rack and peered into the foyer mirror. “I’ve been wanting to try a permanent for months, but I couldn’t find the money. So the other night I went over to the sleep lab.” She came upstairs.

“What was it like?” Katje said, looking more closely at Nettie’s face: Was she paler than usual? Yes, Katje thought with sudden apprehension.

“It’s nothing much. You just lie down on this couch, and they plug you in to their machines, and you sleep. Next morning you unplug and go collect your pay. That’s all there is to it.”

“You slept well?”

“I felt pretty dragged out yesterday. Dr. Weyland gave me a list of stuff I’m supposed to eat to fix that, and he got me the day off too. Wait a minute, I need a smoke before we go into the linens.”



They stood together on the upper landing. From down in the living room rose the murmur of quiet conversation.

Nettie said, "I'd go back for another sleep session in a minute if they'd have me. Good money for no work; not like this." She blew a stream of smoke contemptuously toward the closet door.

Katje said, "Someone has to do what we do."

"Yeah, but why us?" Nettie lowered her voice. "We ought to get old Grauer and Rhine in there with the beading and the inventory lists, and us two go sit in their big leather chairs and drink coffee like ladies."

Katje had already done that as Henrik's wife. What she wanted now was to sit on the *stoep* after a day's hunting, sipping drinks and trading stories of the kill in the pungent dusk, away from the smoky, noisy hole of a kitchen: a life that Henrik had rebelled against as parasitical, narrow, and dull. His grandfather, like Katje's, had trekked right out of the Transvaal when it became too staid for him and had started over, and what was wrong with that kind of courage and strength? Henrik had carried on the tradition. He had the guts to fight Uncle Jan and everybody else over the future of the land. the government, the natives-that courage had drawn her to him, and had lost her that fine old life and landed her here, now.

Nettie, still hanging back from the linen closet, grudgingly ground out her cigarette on the sole of her shoe. "Coming to the meeting Friday?"

"No. I told you, they're all Reds in those unions. I do all right for myself." Besides, Dr. Weyland was giving a lecture that same Friday night. Katje opened the closet.

"Okay, if you think it's fine to make what we make doing this stuff. Me, I'm glad there's something like a gig in the sleep lab now and then so I can make a little extra and live like a person once in a while. You ought to go over there, you know? There's hardly anything doing during intersession with almost everybody gone. They could take you right away. You get extra pay and time-off, and besides, Dr. Weyland's kind of cute, in a gloomy, old sort of a way. He leaned over me to plug something into the wall, and I said, 'Go ahead, you can bite my neck any time.'

Katje gave her a startled glance, but Nettie, not noticing, moved past her into the closet and pulled out the step stool. Katje said in a neutral voice, "What did he say to-that?"

“Nothing, but he smiled.” Nettie climbed onto the step stool. “We’ll start up top, all right? I bet all the guys who work nights at the labs get those kind of jokes all the time. Later he said he was hoping you’d come by, and I said he just likes his blood in different flavors.”

Taking a deep breath of the sweet sunshine smell of the clean, linens, Katje said, “He asked you to ask me to come?”

“He said to remind you.”

The first pile of blankets was handed down from the top shelf. Katje said, “He really accepts anyone into this project?”

“Unless you’re sick, or if you’ve got a funny metabolism or whatever. They do a blood test on you, like at the doctor’s.”

That was when Katje noticed the little round Band-Aid on the inside of Nettie’s elbow, right over the vein.

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Miss Donnelly was sharing a jug of cheap wine with three other faculty women in the front lounge. Katje made sure the coffee machine was filled for them and then slipped outside.

She still walked alone on campus when she chose. She wasn’t afraid of the rapist, who hadn’t been heard from in several days. A pleasurable tension drove her toward the lighted windows of the labs. This was like moving through the sharp air of the bushveldt at dusk.

The lab blinds, tilted down, let out only threads of light. She could see nothing. She hovered a moment, then turned back, hurrying now. The mood was broken, and she felt silly; Daniel from Security would be furious to find her alone out here, and what could she tell him? That she felt herself to be on the track of something wild and it made her feel young?

Miss Donnelly and the others were still talking. Katje was glad to hear their wry voices and gusts of laughter, equally glad not to have to sit with them. At first she had been hurt by the social exclusions that had followed her hiring on at the club; now she was grateful.

She had more on her mind than school gossip, and she needed to think. Her own impulsive act excited and appalled her; sallying forth at dusk at some risk (her mind swerved neatly around the other, the imaginary

danger), and for what? To sniff the breeze and search the ground for tracks?

The thought of Dr. Weyland haunted her: Dr. Weyland as the restless visitor to the club kitchen; Dr. Weyland as the enigma of faculty gossip; Dr. Weyland as she had first thought of him the other morning in the lab-building parking lot.

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She was walking to the bus stop when Jackson drove up and offered her a lift. She was glad to accept. The lonesomeness of the campus was accentuated by darkness and the empty circles of light around the lamp posts.

Jackson pulled aside a jumble of equipment on the front seat—radio parts, speakers, and wires—to make room for her. Two books were on the floor by her feet. He said, “The voodoo book is left over from my brother Paul. He went through a thing, you know, trying to trace back our family down in Louisiana. The other one was just lying around.”

The other one was *Dracula*. Katje felt the gummy spot where the price sticker had been peeled off. Jackson must have bought it for her at the discount bookstore downtown. She didn’t know how to thank him easily, so she said nothing.

“It’s a long walk out to the bus stop,” Jackson said, scowling as he drove out of the stone gates of the college drive. “They should’ve let you stay on in faculty housing after your husband died.”

“They needed the space for another teacher,” Katje said. She missed the cottage on the east side of campus, but her present rooming-house lodgings away from school offered more privacy.

He shook his head. “Well, I think it’s a shame, you being a foreign visitor and all.”

Katje laughed. “After twenty-five years in this country, a visitor?”

He laughed too. “Yeah. Well, you sure have moved around in our society more than most while you been here? from lady of leisure to, well, maid work.” She saw the flash of his grin. “Just like my old auntie that used to do for white women up the hill. Don’t you mind?”

She minded when she thought working at the club would never end. Sometimes the Africa she remembered , seemed too vague a place to go back to now, and the only future she could see was keeling over at the end while vacuuming the club, like a farmer worn to death at his plow...

None of this was Jackson's business. "Did your auntie mind her work?" she snapped.

Jackson pulled up opposite the bus stop. "She said you just do what comes to you to do and thank God for it."

"I say the same."

He sighed. "You're a lot like her, you know? Someday I got a bunch of questions to ask you about how it was when you lived in Africa. I mean, was it like they show in the movies, you know, *King Solomon's Mines* and - like that?"

Katje had never seen that movie, but she knew that nothing on film could be like her Africa. "No," she said. "You should go to Africa sometime and see for yourself."

"I'm working on it. There's your bus coming. Wait a minute, listen-no more walking alone out here after dark. There's not enough people around now. You got to arrange to be picked up. Didn't you hear? That guy jumped another girl last night. She got away, but still. Daniel says he found one of the back doors to the club unlocked. You be careful, will you? I don't want to have to come busting in there to save you from some deranged, six-foot pre-med on the rampage, know what I mean? Skinny dude like me could get real ruined that way."

"Oh, I will take care of myself," Katje said, touched and annoyed and amused all at once by his solicitude.

"Sure. Only I wish you were about fifteen years younger and studying karate, you know?"

As she climbed out of the car with the books on her arm he added. "You do any shooting in Africa? Hunting and stuff?"

"Yes, quite a lot."

"Okay; take this." He pulled metal out of his pocket and put it in her hand. It was a gun. "Just in case. You know how to use it, right?"

She closed her fingers on the compact weight of it. "But where did you get this? Do you have papers for it? The laws here are very strict."

He tugged the door shut and said through the open window, "I live in a rough neighborhood, and I got friends. Hurry up, you'll miss your bus."

\* \* \* \*

*Dracula* was a silly book. She had to force herself to read on in spite of the phony Dutchman Van Helsing, an insult to anyone of Dutch descent. The voodoo book was impenetrable, and she soon gave it up in disgust.

The handgun was another matter. She sat at the formica-topped table in her kitchenette and turned the shiny little automatic in the light, thinking. How had Jackson come by such a thing, or for that matter, how did he afford his fancy sports car and all that equipment he carried in it from time to time-where did it all come from and; where did it go? He was up to something, probably lots of things-what they called "hustling" nowadays. A good thing he had given her the gun. It could only get him into trouble to carry it around with him. She knew how to handle weapons, and surely with a rapist at large the authorities would be understanding about her lack of a license for it.

The gun needed cleaning. She worked on it as best she could without the right tools. It was a cheap .25-caliber gun. Back home your gun was a fine rifle, made to drop a charging rhino in his tracks, not a stubby little nickel toy like this for scaring off muggers and rapists.

Yet she wasn't sorry to have it. Her own hunting gun that she had brought from Africa years ago was in storage with the extra things from the cottage. She realized now that she had missed its presence lately, since the beginning of the secret stalking of Dr. Weyland.

She went to sleep with the gun on the night table next to her bed.

\* \* \* \*

She woke listening for the roar so she would know in what direction to look tomorrow for the lion's spoor. There was a hot, rank odor of African dust in the air, and she sat up in bed thinking, he's been here.

It was a dream. But it had been so clear! She went to look out the front window without turning on the light, and it was the ordinary street below

that seemed unreal. Her heart drummed in her chest. Not that he would come after her here on Dewer Street, but he had sent Nettie to the club, and now he had sent this dream into her sleep. Creatures stalking one another over time grew a bond from mind to mind. But that was in another life. Was she losing her sanity? She read for a little in the Afrikaans Bible she had brought with her from home but so seldom opened in recent years. What gave comfort in the end was to put Jackson's automatic into her purse to carry with her. A gun was supposedly of no use against a vampire-you needed a wooden stake, she remembered reading, or you had to cut off his head to kill him-but the weight of the weapon in her handbag reassured her.

\* \* \* \*

The lecture hall was full in spite of the scarcity of students on campus this time of year. These special talks were open to the town as well.

Dr. Weyland read his lecture in a stiff, abrupt manner. He stood cramped slightly over the lectern, which was low for his height, and rapped out his sentences, rarely raising his eyes from his notes. In his tweeds and heavy-rimmed glasses he was the picture of the scholarly recluse drawn out of the study into the limelight. His lecture was brief; he fulfilled with unmistakable impatience the duty set every member of the faculty to give one public address per year on an aspect of his work.

The audience didn't mind. They had come prepared to be spellbound by the great Dr. Weyland speaking on the demonology of dreams. At the end there were questions, most of them obviously designed to show the questioner's cleverness rather than to elicit information. The discussions after these lectures were usually the real show. Katje, lulled by the abstract talk, came fully to attention when a young woman asked, "Professor, have you considered whether the legends of such supernatural creatures as werewolves, vampires, and dragons are not distortions out of nightmares, as many think; that maybe the legends reflect the existence of real, though rare, prodigies of evolution?"

Dr. Weyland hesitated, coughed, sipped water. "The forces of evolution are capable of prodigies, certainly," he said. "You have chosen an excellent word. But we must understand that we are not speaking-in the case of the vampire, for example-of a blood-sipping phantom who cringes from a clove of garlic. How could nature design such a being?"

"The corporeal vampire, if it existed, would be by definition the greatest of all predators, living as he would off the top of the food chain.

Man is the most dangerous animal, the devourer or destroyer of all others, and the vampire preys on man. Now, any sensible vampire would choose to avoid the risks of attacking humans by taking the blood of lower animals if he could; so we must assume that our vampire cannot. Perhaps animal blood can tide him over a lean patch, as seawater can sustain a castaway for a few miserable days but can't permanently replace fresh water to drink. Humanity would remain the vampire's livestock, albeit fractious and dangerous to deal with, and where they live, so must he.

"In the sparsely settled early world he would be bound to a town or village to assure his food supply. He would learn to live on little-perhaps a half-liter of blood per day-since he could hardly leave a trail of drained corpses and hope to go unnoticed. Periodically, he would withdraw for his own safety and to give the villagers time to recover from his depredations. A sleep several generations long would provide him with an untouched, ignorant population in the same location. He would have to be able to slow his metabolism, to induce in himself naturally a state of suspended animation; mobility in time would become his alternative to mobility in space."

Katje listened intently, thinking yes, he is the sort of animal that lies in wait for the prey to come his way. His daring in speaking this way stirred her; she could see he was beginning to enjoy the game, growing more at ease at the podium as he warmed to his subject.

"The vampire's slowed body functions during these long rest periods might help extend his lifetime; so might living for long periods, waking or sleeping, on the edge of starvation. We know that minimal feeding produces striking longevity in some other species. Long life would be a highly desirable alternative to reproduction, since a vampire would flourish best with the least competition. The great predator would not wish to sire his own rivals. It could not be true that his bite would turn his victims into vampires like himself-"

"Or we'd be up to our necks in fangs," whispered someone in the audience rather loudly.

"Fangs are too noticeable and not efficient for blood sucking," observed Dr. Weyland. "Large, sharp canine teeth are designed to tear meat. Polish versions of the vampire legend would be closer to the mark: They tell of some sort of puncturing device, perhaps a needle in the tongue like a sting that would secrete an anticlotting substance. That way the vampire could seal his lips around the wound and draw the blood freely without having to rip great, spouting, wasteful holes in his unfortunate prey."

Dr. Weyland smiled.

The younger members of the audience produced appropriate retching noises.

Would a vampire sleep in a coffin? Someone asked.

“Certainly not,” Dr. Weyland retorted. “Would you, given a choice? The corporeal vampire would require physical access to the world, which is something that burial customs generally prevent. He might retire to a cave or take his rest in a tree like Merlin, or Ariel in the cloven pine, provided he could find either tree or cave safe from wilderness freaks and developers’ bulldozers.

“Finding a secure resting place is one obvious problem for our vampire in modern times,” he continued. “There are others. Upon each waking he must quickly adapt to his new surroundings, a task that, we may imagine, has grown progressively more difficult with the rapid acceleration of cultural change since the Industrial Revolution. In the past century and a half he has no doubt had to limit his sleeps to shorter and shorter periods for fear of completely losing touch. This curtailment of his rest might be expected to wear him down and render him increasingly irritable.”

He paused to adjust his glasses, now as visibly relaxed as Katje had seen him in her kitchen at the club. Someone called out, “Could a corporeal vampire get a toothache?”

“Assuredly,” replied Dr. Weyland. “He is, after all, a stage of humanity, real though hard to come by. He would no doubt also need a haircut now and then and could only put his pants on, as humorists have said since the widespread adoption of trousers, one leg at a time.

“Since we posit a natural rather than a supernatural being, he grows older, but slowly. Meanwhile, each updating of himself is more challenging and demands more from him—more imagination, more energy, more cunning. While he must adapt sufficiently to disguise his anomalous existence, he must not succumb to current ideologies of Right or Left—that is, to the cant of individual license or to the cant of the infallibility of the masses—lest either allegiance interfere with the exercise of his predatory survival skill.”

Meaning, Katje thought grimly, he can’t afford scruples about drinking our blood.



Emrys Williams raised a giggle by commenting that a lazy vampire could always take home a pretty young instructor to show him the new developments in inter-personal relations.

Dr. Weyland fixed him with a cold glance. "You are mixing up dinner with sex," he remarked, "and not, I gather, for the first time."

They roared. Williams-the "tame Wild Welshman of the Lit. Department" to his less admiring colleagues- turned a gratified pink.

One of Dr. Weyland's associates in Anthropology pointed out at boring length that the vampire, born in an earlier age, would become dangerously conspicuous for his diminutive height as the human race grew taller.

"Not necessarily," commented Dr. Weyland. "Remember that we speak of a highly specialized physical form. It may be that during his waking periods-his metabolism is so sensitive that he responds to the stimuli in the environment by growing in his body as well as in his mind. Perhaps while he's awake his entire being exists at an intense inner level of activity and change. The stress of these great rushes to catch up all at once with physical, mental, and cultural evolution must be enormous. No wonder he needs his long sleeps."

He glanced at the clock on the wall. "As you can see, by the application of a little logic and imagination we come up with a creature bearing superficial resemblances to the vampire of legend, but at base one quite different from your standard strolling corpse with an aversion to crosses. Next question?"

They weren't willing to end this flight of fancy. Someone asked how he accounted for the superstitions about crosses and garlic and so on.

Dr. Weyland sipped water from the glass at hand while contemplating the audience. He said finally, "Primitive men first encountering the vampire would be unaware that they themselves were products of evolution. They would have no way of knowing that he was a still higher product of the same process. They would make up stories to account for him and to try to control him. In early times the vampire himself might even believe in some of these legends-the silver bullet, the oaken stake.

"But waking at length in a more rational age, he would abandon these notions just as everyone else did. A clever vampire might even make use of the folklore. For instance, it is generally supposed that Bram Stoker was

inspired to write *Dracula* by his meeting with a Rumanian professor of Oriental languages from Pest University; I refer you to a recent biography of Stoker by Daniel Farson. Why was this Professor Arminius Vambery in London at just the right time, a guest at a certain eating club along with Stoker on a certain night? How did Vambery come to have a wealth of tantalizing detail about the vampire superstition at his fingertips? Ladies and gentlemen, take note: There is a research paper in it somewhere.”

He didn't wait for their laughter to die away but continued, “Any intelligent vampire sensitive to the questing spirit of those times would have developed a passionate interest in his own origin and evolution. Now, who was Arminius Vambery, and why his ceaseless exploration of that same subject?

“Eventually our vampire prudently retires. Imagine his delight, upon waking half a century later to find vampire legends a common currency of the popular culture and *Dracula* a classic.”

“Wouldn't he be lonely?” sighed a girl standing in the side aisle, her posture eloquent of the desire to comfort that loneliness.

“The young lady will forgive me,” Dr. Weyland responded, “if I observe that this is a question born of a sheltered life. Predators in nature do not indulge in the sort of romantic moonings that humans impute to them. As for our vampire, even if he had the inclination he wouldn't have the time. On each waking he has more to learn. Perhaps someday the world will return to a reasonable rate of change, permitting him some leisure in which to feel lonely or whatever suits him.”

A nervous girl ventured the opinion that a perpetually self-educating vampire would always have to find himself a place in a center of learning in order to have access to the information he would need.

“Naturally,” agreed Dr. Weyland drily. “Perhaps a university, where strenuous study and other eccentricities of the living intellect would be accepted behavior in a grown man. Possibly even a modest institution like Cayslin College would serve.”

Under the chuckling following this came a question too faint for Katje to hear. Dr. Weyland, having bent to listen, straightened up and announced sardonically, “The lady desires me to comment upon the vampire's ‘Satanic pride.’ Madam, here you enter the area of the literary imagination and its devices, where I dare not tread under the eyes of my colleagues from the English Department. Perhaps they will pardon me if I merely point out that a

tiger who falls asleep in a jungle and on waking finds a thriving city overgrowing his lair has no energy to spare for displays of Satanic pride.”

That nerve, Katje thought; Dr. Weyland expounding on a vampire’s pride-what an exercise in arrogance!

Williams, intent on having the last word as always, spoke up once more: “The vampire as time traveler- you ought to be writing science fiction, Weyland,” which provoked a growing patter of applause. It was evident that the evening was ending.

Katje went out with the crowd, but withdrew to stand outside under the portico of the Union Building. She saw Dr. Weyland’s car across the street, gleaming in the lamplight: his access to physical mobility and a modern mechanical necessity that he had mastered. No wonder he loved it.

With the outwash of departing audience came Miss Donnelly. She asked if Katje needed a lift: “There’s my car,” the rusty, trusty Volks.” Katje explained that a group of women from the staff cafeteria went bowling together each Friday night and had promised to come by and pick her up.

“I’ll wait with you just in case,” Miss Donnelly said. “You know, Wild Man Williams is a twerp, but he was right: Weyland’s vampire would be a time traveler. He could only go forward, of course, never backhand only by long, unpredictable leaps-this time, say, into our age of what we like to think of as technological marvels; maybe next time into an age of interstellar travel. Who knows, he might get to taste Martian blood, if there are Martians, and if they have blood.

“Frankly, I wouldn’t have thought Weyland could come up with anything so imaginative as that-the vampire as a sort of flying saber-toothed tiger prowling the pavements, a truly endangered species. That’s next term’s T-shirt: SAVE THE VAMPIRE.”

Miss Donnelly might banter, but she would never believe. It was all a joke to her, a clever mental game invented by Dr. Weyland for his audience. No point consulting her.

Miss Donnelly added ruefully, “You’ve got to hand it to the man. He’s got a tremendous stage presence, and he sure knows how to turn on the charm when he feels like it. Nothing too smooth, mind you, just enough unbending, enough slightly caustic graciousness, to set susceptible hearts a-beating. You could almost forget what a ruthless, self-centered bastard he can be. Did you notice that most of the comments came from women?”

Is that your lift?"

It was. While the women in the station wagon shuffled themselves around to make room, Katje stood with her hand on the door and watched Dr. Weyland emerge from the building with admiring students at either hand. He loomed above them, his hair silver under the lamp-light. For over civilized people to experience the approach of such a predator as sexually attractive was not strange. She remembered Scotty saying once that the great cats were all beautiful, and maybe beauty helped them to capture their prey.

He turned his head, and she thought for a moment that he was looking at her as she got into the station wagon.

What could she do that wouldn't arouse total disbelief and a suspicion that she herself was crazy? She couldn't think amid the tired, satisfied ramblings of her bowling friends, and she declined to stay up socializing with them. They didn't press her. She was not one of their regular group.

Sitting alone at home, Katje had a cup of hot milk to calm herself for sleep. To her perplexity, her mind kept wandering from thoughts of Dr. Weyland to memories of drinking cocoa at night with Henrik and the African students he used to bring to dinner. They had been native boys to her, dressed up in suits and talking politics like white men, flashing photographs of black babies playing with toy trucks and walkie-talkie sets. Sometimes they had gone to see documentary films of an Africa full of cities and traffic and black professionals exhorting, explaining, running things, as these students expected to do in their turn when they went home.

She thought about home now. She recalled clearly all those indicators of irrevocable change in Africa, and she saw suddenly that the old life there had gone. She would return to an Africa largely as foreign to her as America had been at first. Reluctantly, she admitted one of her feelings when listening to Dr. Weyland talk had been an unwilling empathy with him: if he was a one-way time traveler, so was she.

As the vampire could not return to simpler times, so Katje saw herself cut off from the life of raw vigor, the rivers of game, the smoky village air, all viewed from the lofty heights of white privilege. One did not have to sleep half a century to lose one's world these days; one had only to grow older.

Next morning she found Dr. Weyland leaning, hands in pockets, against one of the columns flanking the entrance to the club. She stopped some yards from him, her purse hanging heavily on her arm. The hour was

early, the campus deserted-looking. Stand still, she thought; show no fear.

He looked at her. "I saw you after the lecture last night, and earlier in the week, outside the lab one evening. You must know better than to wander alone at night; the campus empty, no one around-anything might happen. If you are curious, Mrs. de Groot, come do a session for me. All your questions will be answered. Come over tonight. I could stop by here for you in my car on the way back to the lab after dinner. There is no problem with scheduling, and I would welcome your company. I sit alone over there these nights hoping some impoverished youngster, unable to afford a trip home at intersession, will be moved by an uncontrollable itch for travel to come to my lab and earn his fare."

She felt fear knocking heavily in her body. She shook her head, no.

"My work would interest you, I think," he went on, watching her. "You are an alert, fine-looking woman; they waste your qualities here. Couldn't the college find you something better than to be a housekeeper for them after your husband died? You might consider coming over regularly to help me with some clerical chores until I get a new assistant. I pay well."

Astonished out of her fear at the offer of work in the vampire's lair, she found her voice: "I am a country woman, Dr. Weyland, a daughter of farmers. I have no proper education. We never read books at home, except the Bible. My husband didn't want me to work. I have spent my time in this country learning English and cooking and how to shop for the right things. I have no skills, no knowledge but the little that I remember of the crops and weather and customs of another country- and even that is probably out of date. I would be no use in work like yours."

Hunched in his coat with the collar upturned, looking at her slightly askance, his tousled hair gleaming with the damp, he had the aspect of an old hawk, intent but aloof. He broke the pose, yawned behind his large-knuckled hand, and straightened up.

"As you like. Here comes your friend Nellie."

"Nettie," Katje corrected, suddenly outraged: he'd drunk Nettie's blood; the least he could do was remember her name properly. But he was vanishing over the lawn toward the lab.

Nettie came panting up. "Who was that? Did he try to attack you?"

"It was Dr. Weyland," Katje said. She hoped Nettie didn't notice her

trembling, which Katje tried to conceal.

Nettie laughed. "What is this, a secret romance?"

Miss Donnelly came into the kitchen toward the end of the luncheon for the departing Emeritus. She plumped herself down between Nettie and Katje, who were taking a break and preparing dessert, respectively. Katje spooned whipped cream carefully into each glass dish of fruit.

Miss Donnelly said, "In case I get too smashed to say this later, thanks. On the budget I gave you, you did just great. The Department will put on something official with Beef Wellington and trimmings, over at Borchard's, but it was really important for some of us lowly types to give Sylvia our own alcoholic farewell feast, which we couldn't have done without your help."

Nettie nodded and stubbed out her cigarette.

"Our pleasure," Katje said, preoccupied. Dr. Weyland had come for her, would come back again; he was hers to deal with, but how? She no longer thought of sharing her fear, not with Nettie with her money worries or with Miss Donnelly, whose eyes were just now faintly swimmy-looking with drink. Weyland the vampire was not for a committee to deal with. Only fools left it to committees to handle life and death.

"The latest word," Miss Donnelly added bitterly, "is that the Department plans to fill Sylvia's place with some guy from Oregon, which means the salary goes up half as much again or more inside of six months."

"Them's the breaks," Nettie said, not very pleasantly. She caught Katje's eye with a look that said, Look who makes all the money and look who does all the complaining.

"Them is," Miss Donnelly agreed glumly. "As for me, the word is no tenure, so I'll be moving on in the fall. Me and my big mouth. Wacker nearly fainted at my prescription for stopping the rapes: You trap the guy, disembowel him, and hang his balls over the front gate. Our good dean doesn't know me well enough to realize it's all front. On my own I'd be too petrified to try anything but talking the bastard out of it: You know, 'Now you just let me get my dress back on, and I'll make us each a cup of coffee, and you tell me all about why you hate, women.' " She stood up, groaning.

"Did you hear what happened to that girl last night, the latest victim? He cut her throat. Ripped her pants off but didn't even bother raping her; that's how desperate for sex he is."

Katje said, "Jackson told us about the killing this morning."

"Jackson? Oh, the maintenance man. Look out, it could even be him. Any of them, damn them," she muttered savagely as she turned away, "living off us, kicking our bodies out of the way when they're through-"

She stumbled out of the kitchen.

Nettie snorted. "She always been one of those libbers. No wonder Wacker's getting rid of her. Some men act like hogs, but you can't let yourself be turned into a manhater. A man's the only chance a girl has of getting up in the world, you know?" She pulled on a pair of acid-yellow gloves and headed for the sink. "If I want out of these rubber gloves I have to marry a guy who can afford to pay a maid."

Katje sat looking at the fruit dishes with their plump cream caps. It was just as the Bible said. She felt it happen: The scales fell from her eyes. She saw clearly and thought, I am a fool.

Bad pay is real, rape is real, killing is real. The real world worries about real dangers, not childish fancies of a night prowler who drinks blood. Dr. Weyland took the trouble to be concerned, to offer extra work, while I was thinking idiot things about him. Where does it come from, this nonsense of mine? My life is dull since Henrik died; so I make up drama in my head, and that way I get to think about Dr. Weyland, a distinguished and learned gentleman, being interested in me.

She resolved to go to the lab building later and leave a note for Dr. Weyland, an apology for her reluctance, an offer to stop by soon and make an appointment at the sleep lab.

Nettie looked at the clock and said over her shoulder, "Time to take the ladies their dessert."

\* \* \* \*

At last the women had dispersed, leaving the usual fog of smoke behind. Katje and Nettie had finished the cleaning up. Katje said, "I'm going for some air."

Nettie, wreathed by smoke of her own making, drowsed in one of the big living-room chairs. She shook her head. "Not me. I'm pooped." She sat up. "Unless you want me along. It's still light out, so you're safe from the

Cayslin Ripper.”

“Don’t disturb yourself,” Katje said.

Away on the far edge of the lawn three students danced under the sailing shape of a Frisbee. Katje looked up at the sun, a silver disc behind a thin place in the clouds; more rain coming, probably. The campus still wore a deserted look. Katje wasn’t worried; there was no vampire, and the gun in her purse would suffice for anything else.

The sleep lab was locked. She tucked her note of apology between the lab door and the jamb and left.

As she started back across the lawn someone stepped behind her, and long fingers closed on her arm: It was Dr. Weyland. Firmly and without a word he bent her course back toward the lab.

“What are you doing?” she said, astonished.

“I almost drove off without seeing you. Come sit in my car, I want to talk to you.” She held back, alarmed, and he gave her a sharp little shake. “Making a fuss is pointless. No one is here to notice. No one would believe.”

There was only his car in the parking lot; even the Frisbee players had gone. Dr. Weyland opened the door of his Mercedes and pushed Katje into the front passenger seat with a deft, powerful thrust of his arm. He got in on the driver’s side, snapped down the automatic door locks, and sat back. He looked up at the gray sky, then at his watch.

Katje said, “You wanted to say something to me?”

He didn’t answer.

She said, “What are we waiting for?”

“For the day man to leave and lock up the lab. I don’t like to be interrupted.”

This is what it’s like, Katje thought, feeling lethargic detachment stealing through her, paralyzing her. No hypnotic power out of a novelist’s imagination held her, but the spell cast on the prey of the hunting cat, the shock of being seized in the deadly jaws, though not a drop of blood was yet spilled. “Interrupted,” she whispered.



“Yes,” he said, turning toward her. She saw the naked craving in his gaze. “Interrupted at whatever it pleases me to do with you. You are on my turf now, Mrs. de Groot, where you have persisted in coming time after time. I can’t wait any longer for you to make up your mind. You are healthy-I looked up your records-and I am hungry. You may live to walk away after, I don’t know yet-who would listen to a mad old woman? I can tell you this much: Your chances are better if you don’t speak.”

The car smelled of cold metal, leather, and tweed. At length a man came out of the lab building and bent to unlock the chain from the only bicycle in the bike rack. By the way Dr. Weyland shifted in his seat, Katje saw that this was the departure he had been awaiting.

“Look at that idiot,” he muttered. “Is he going to take all night?” She saw him turn restlessly toward the lab windows. That would be the place, after a bloodless blow to stun her-he wouldn’t want any mess in his Mercedes.

In her lassitude she was sure that he had attacked that girl, drunk her blood, and then killed her. He was using the rapist’s activities as cover. When subjects did not come to him at the sleep lab, hunger drove him out to hunt. Perhaps he was glad then to put aside his civilized disguise.

She thought, *But I am myself a hunter!*

Cold anger coursed through her. Her thoughts flew: She needed time, a moment out of his reach to plan her survival. She had to get out of the car-any subterfuge would do.

She gulped and turned toward him, croaking, “I’m going to be sick.”

He swore furiously. The locks clicked; he reached roughly past her and shoved open the door on her side: “Out!”

She stumbled out into the drizzling, chilly air and backed several hasty paces, hugging her purse to her body like a shield, looking quickly around. The man on the bike had gone. The upper story of the Cayslin Club across the lawn showed a light-Nettie would be missing her now. Maybe Jackson would be just arriving to pick them up. But no help could come in time.

Dr. Weyland had gotten out of the car. He stood with his arms folded on the roof of the Mercedes, looking across at her with a mixture of annoyance and contempt. “Mrs. de Groot, do you think you can outrun me?”

He started around the front of his car toward her.

Scotty's voice sounded quietly in her ear: "Yours," he said, as the leopard tensed to charge. Weyland too was an animal, not an immortal monster out of legend-just a wild beast, however smart and strong and hungry. He had said so himself.

She jerked out the automatic, readying it to fire as she brought it swiftly up to eye level in both hands while her mind told her calmly that a head shot would be best but that a hit was surer if she aimed for the torso. "

She shot him twice, two slugs in quick succession, one in the chest and one in the abdomen. He did not fall but bent to clutch at his torn body, and he screamed and screamed so that she was too shaken to steady her hands for the head shot afterward. She cried out also, involuntarily: His screams were dreadful. It was long since She had killed anything.

Footsteps rushed behind her, arms flung round her, pinning her hands to her sides so that the gun pointed at the ground and she couldn't fire at Weyland again. Jackson's voice gasped in her ear, "Jesus Creeping Christ!"

His car stood where he had braked it, unheard by Katje. Nettie jumped out and rushed toward Katje, crying, "My God, he's shot, she shot him!"

Breaking off his screaming, Weyland tottered away from them around his car and fetched up, leaning on the front. His face, a hollow-cheeked, starving mask, gaped at them.

"It's him?" Jackson said incredulously. "He tried to rape you?"

Katje shook her head. "He's a vampire."

"Vampire, hell!" Jackson exploded in a breathless laugh. "He's a Goddamn dead rapist, that's what he is! Jesus!"

Weyland panted, "Stop staring, cattle!"

He wedged himself heavily into the driver's seat of his car. They could see him slumped there, his forehead against the curve of the steering wheel. Blood spotted the Mercedes where he had leaned.

"Mrs. de Groot, give me the gun," Jackson said. Katje clenched her fingers around the grip. "No." She could tell by the way Jackson's arms tightened that he was afraid to let go of her and grab for the gun.

He said, "Nettie, take my car and go get Daniel!" Nettie moaned, "My God, look! What's he doing?" Weyland had lifted his red-smearred hands to his face, and he was licking the blood from his fingers. Katje could see his throat working as he strained to swallow his food, his life.

A siren sounded. Nettie cried in wild relief, "That's Daniel's car coming!"

Weyland raised his head. His gray face was rigid with determination. He snarled, "I won't be put on show!"

The door-one of you shut the door!" He started the engine.

His glaring face commanded them. Nettie darted forward, slammed the door, and recoiled, wiping her hand on her sweater.

Eyes blind to them now, Weyland drove the Mercedes waveringly past them, out of the parking lot toward the gateway road. Rain swept down in heavy gusts. Katje heard the siren again and woke to her failure: She had not made a clean kill. The vampire was getting away.

She lunged toward Jackson's car. He held her back, shouting, "Nothing doing, come on, you done *enough!*"

The Mercedes crawled haltingly down the middle of the road, turned at the stone gates, and was gone.

Jackson said, "*Now will you give me that gun?*"

Katje snapped on the safety and dropped the automatic on the wet paving at their feet.

Nettie was pointing toward the club. "There's people coming. They must have heard the shooting and called Daniel. Listen, Jackson, we're in trouble. Nobody's going to believe that Dr. Weyland is the rapist-or the other thing either." Her glance flickered nervously over Katje. "Whatever we say, they'll think we're crazy."

"Oh, shit," said Jackson tiredly, letting Katje go at last. He stooped to retrieve the gun. Katje saw the apprehension in his face as he weighed

Nettie's assessment of their situation: a wild story from some cleaning people about the eminent professor-

"We've got to say something," Nettie went on desperately. "All that blood." She fell silent, staring.

There was no blood. The rain had washed the tarmac clean.

Jackson faced Katje and said urgently, "Listen, Mrs. de Groot, we don't know a thing about any shooting, you hear?" He slipped the gun into an inside pocket of his jacket. "You came over to make an appointment at the sleep lab, only Dr. Weyland wasn't around. You waited for him, and Nettie got worried when you didn't come back, so she called me, and we drove over here looking for you. We all heard shooting, but nobody saw anything. There was nothing to see. Like now."

Katje was furious with him and herself. She should have chanced the head shot; she shouldn't have let Jackson hold her back.

She could see Daniel's car now, wheeling into the parking lot.

Jackson said quietly, "I got accepted to computer school in Rochester for next semester. You can bet they don't do vampires down there, Mrs. de Groot; and they don't do black guys who can get hold of guns, either. Me and Nettie got to live here; we don't get to go away to Africa."

She grew calmer; he was right. The connection had been between herself and the vampire all along, and what had happened here was her own affair. It had nothing to do with these young people,

"All right, Jackson," she said. "There was nothing to see."

"Not a thing," he said in his old, easy manner, and he turned toward Daniel's car.

He would do all right; maybe someday he would come visit her in Africa, in a smart suit and carrying an attaché case, on business. Surely they had computers there now too.

Daniel stepped out of his car into the rain, one hand on the butt of his pistol. Katje saw the disappointment sour his florid face as Nettie put a hand on his arm and began to talk quietly.

Katje picked up her purse from where she had dropped it-how light it felt now, without the gun in it. She fished out her plastic rain hood, though her hair was already wet. Tying the hood on, she thought about her old Winchester 270, her lion gun. About taking it from storage, putting it in working order, tucking it well back into the broom closet at the club. In case Weyland didn't die, in case he couldn't sleep with two bullets in him and came limping back to hunt on familiar ground, to look for her. He would come next week, when the students returned, or never. She didn't think he would come, but she would be ready just in case.

And then, as she had planned, she would go home to Africa. Her mind flashed: a new life, whatever life she could make for herself there these days. If Weyland could fit himself to new futures, so could she.

But if he did sleep, and woke again 50 years from now? Each generation must look out for itself. She had done her part, although perhaps not well enough to boast about. Still, what a tale it would make some evening over the smoke of a campfire on the veldt, beginning with the tall form of Dr. Weyland seen striding across the parking lot past a kneeling student in the heavy mist of morning...

Katje walked toward Daniel's car to tell the story that Buildings and Grounds would understand.

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