

# THE PRONOUNCED EFFECT

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Never in all her nineteen years had Lies Andrassy wished so devoutly her father could be with her. She had been tense and edgy throughout the 200-mile bus ride which had brought her here; now, in the huge hall of the hotel where banners welcomed the annual convention of the Linguistics Society, she was positively trembling. She had only seldom been among such a large group of people before—there must have been at least a thousand, milling around or waiting patiently in line—and the sheer pressure of their presence was upsetting.

Worst of all was the fact that she didn't know a single soul, and nobody knew her.

However, she was determined to put a bold face on it. She had checked into her room easily enough, and then come down to collect her conference documents. Tables had been set up with signs above them: PRE-REGISTERED A – K; PRE-REGISTERED L – Z; OFFICIALS AND PARTICIPANTS; NON-REGISTERED... She had duly joined the line at the first table, but it was moving dreadfully slowly, and she had far more time than she wanted to look about her and envy those who had friends to talk to.

One man in particular, of early middle age, with a big red beard and a booming laugh, was holding forth to half a dozen seeming admirers just far enough away for her not to catch what was being said, but everybody in the group was obviously vastly entertained by his witty conversation. Well, maybe by the time the weekend was over she too might be chatting happily with new acquaintances. But Monday seemed like an awfully long way away from Friday, and in her heart of hearts she could not be optimistic. She was acutely aware how confident, how poised, most of the women were who strode briskly across the hallway, and how out of keeping her own "safe" tailored suit was compared with the up-to-the-minute styles most of them wore. People who wanted to be polite to her called her "cuddly," or at worst "plump," but in fact she was fat; and, worse yet, she had had to wear glasses since she was six. It looked, in short, as though nature had marked her out for the same kind of dull academic career her father had endured.

Not, of course, that he had ever admitted to finding it dull; indeed, he more often talked of it as though it were some kind of grand contest, in which there were skirmishes and duels and outright battles.

But how on earth could anyone get excited about whether or not a certain word in a dead language was pronounced *this* way rather than *that* way?

On the bus she had read and re-read the paper of her father's which she was scheduled to present tomorrow in his place, until she had practically memorised it.

She muttered a phrase from it which was supposed to be some kind of grand curse, calling up a veritable devil, as she went on staring at the man with the red beard.

“Oh, excuse me!” a light voice said at her side. “Did I bump into you?”

She returned to the here and now with a start, and realised that the line she was in had moved without her noticing, so there was now six feet between her and the person ahead. Hastily she closed the gap, at the same time glancing—glancing *up*—at the man who had addressed her. He was very tall and quite indecently handsome: a shock of fair hair, neatly brushed, incongruously dark eyes above well-modelled cheekbones, a light summer jacket, open shirt, silk choker...

He had been among the early arrivals; he already carried his file of conference documents, and pinned to his lapel was a badge identifying him as J.R. DeVILLE, Ph.D., MISKATONIC U.

Not a college Lies had ever heard of—but then, she hadn't heard of half the places represented this weekend. There would be almost two thousand teachers and students of linguistics and etymology assembled by tonight. And how bare her own name-badge would seem among all these doctors and professors, without a single qualification!

But that was irrelevant. What mattered was that he still thought her under-the-breath exclamation had been due to his bumping into her, and he had apologised needlessly. She summoned a smile.

“That's all right, Doctor! You didn't do anything.”

“I'm glad,” he said, and flashed sparkling white teeth as he made to turn away.

Before she could stop herself, she had caught his sleeve.

“Excuse me!” she heard herself saying. “But do you know who that man is over there, with the red beard?”

“Hmm?” Dr. DeVille checked and looked around. “Oh, that's Professor Simon Tadcaster. One of the—ah—more conspicuous delegates, as you might say... Is something wrong?”

For on hearing the name Lies had turned pale and started to sway, furious because she could not control the impulse.

“I'm—I'm all right,” she forced out.

“You don't look all right,” he contradicted, taking her arm. “Let me help you to a chair.”

“No, no—really!” She straightened and released herself from his grip. “I don't want to lose my place in line, do I? And I really am all right, I promise. It's just...”

She felt obliged to explain. “I simply didn't realise that was Professor Tadcaster. He's—he's my father's greatest enemy.”

It sounded ridiculous, put like that. But what else could one call a person who set out systematically to mock and ridicule the life's work of a professional colleague?

Dr. DeVille raised his eyebrows. "Really? Your father being—?"

"Well... Well, Professor Julius Andrassy. I don't suppose you ever heard of him."

"Heard of Andrassy?" DeVille countered with a trace of sarcasm. "Of course I have! He's giving a paper tomorrow on the way the pronunciation of Latin and Hebrew was affected by local dialects in Central Europe, and I certainly don't intend to miss it! It sounds fascinating!"

"Oh, you *do* know about him! I thought..." Lies licked her lips. "But he's not giving the paper. He's too ill to come, so I've got to do it instead, and I don't more than half-understand it... And it's all that Professor Tadcaster's fault, I'm sure!"

"Well, I must admit," DeVille said after a slight hesitation, "he has been a bit scathing in the professional journals about your father's theories, and I suppose most of the people who turn up will be there in the hope of watching a grand set-to between them... But never mind that for the moment. You said you're actually going to present the paper?"

"Yes, I promised I would."

"Then you're in the wrong line," DeVille said briskly, and taking her arm urged her over to the table for officials and participants, where there was for the moment no line at all; the girl on duty was leaning back in her chair and covering a yawn.

"But—!" Lies began.

He ignored her. "Do you have Professor Andrassy's documents there?" he was saying. "He can't come but Miss Andrassy here is his daughter and will be making the presentation in his place. You'd better let her have the professor's file, and make out a participant's badge for—ah...?"

"Lies Andrassy, *L-I-E-S*."

The girl smiled and scribbled a note on a scrap of paper which she passed to a young man behind her seated at a large electric typewriter with an Orator all-capitals face. In a moment the badge, red-bordered to indicate her status as an official participant, was slipped into its transparent cover, and DeVille pinned it to the front of her jacket with quick, deft fingers.

"Thank you!" he said to the girl as she handed over the file of documents, and continued, taking Lies's arm, "I really am most interested to meet you! If you're not doing anything, come and have a drink."

"I—uh—I don't drink, I'm afraid," Lies said selfconsciously.

"Nonsense. My doctorate may not be in medicine, but I know enough to assure you that a glass of sweet wine would be medicinal to someone in your condition. This way!"

Such was his self-assurance, Lies felt herself helplessly swept along.

Moments later they were seated at a secluded table in a dimly-lit bar. With a snap of his fingers DeVille summoned a waiter and ordered sherry, one sweet, one very dry.

Offering a cigar, which she refused—a little surprised that he should offer such a thing to a girl—and receiving her permission to light one for himself, he went on, “Now explain what you meant when you said your father’s illness is due to Tadcaster!”

“It’s true!” Under the table, Lies clenched her hands on the file of conference documents, into which she had slipped her copy of the paper she must deliver tomorrow. She was afraid to let it out of her sight, even in a locked hotel room. “He’s being hounded! Absolutely *hounded!* And he hasn’t done anything to deserve it... Have you ever met my father, Dr. DeVille?”

“No, I never had the privilege. And, by the way, nobody ever calls me Doctor except people I don’t like. My name is Jacques.”

“Are you—are you French?”

“Not by birth, if that’s what you mean. Go on. You were telling me about your father.”

“Well, he’s a marvellous person, and lots of people think he’s brilliant, including me, but he’s—I don’t know how to put it!”

“Unworldly?” Jacques suggested.

She seized on the word gratefully. “Yes, there’s a lot of that in it, but something else, too. You might say single-minded. You might even say *obsessive*.”

There: it was out. And to a perfect stranger. Something which before she had scarcely dared admit to herself.

The waiter delivered their drinks; to cover her moment of alarm, she sipped the wine Jacques had chosen for her, and found it not only delicious, but warming. What a stroke of luck it had been to meet somebody like this, who simply by talking to her was bringing back a little of the confidence she had feigned to her father but never really felt.

“I think I see what you mean,” Jacques was saying as he raised his own glass. “Cheers, by the way, and lots of luck tomorrow morning... Yes, I’ve had something of that impression from the papers of his that I’ve read, especially the one on anomalous vowel-shifts among initiates of the alchemical tradition in Prague and Ratisbon.”

Lies stared at him in genuine amazement. “You’ve read as much of my father’s work as I have myself?” she exclaimed. “That was—oh—about the second paper he published after he learned English, wasn’t it?”

“And very well he learned it, too. Amazingly well. Or do you help with the final text?”

She felt herself blushing. “Well, of course after Mother died *someone* had to... So for the last five years, yes, it’s been me.”

“Congratulations on your editing job, then. But fill me in a little more on his background. I know he was born in Hungary, and left in 1956, and then he came to the States and found this post at Foulwater, a place which practically nobody wants to work at because of its name, only the trust under which the college was endowed prevents it being changed—isn’t that right?”

“Yes,” Lies confirmed. “Apparently our founder had a macabre sense of humour, which is why ninety per cent of the faculty are of foreign origin; the name doesn’t bother them. The students, on the other hand... But we’ve always had enough, and sometimes after what they thought of as a bad start they’ve gone on to great things, because some of the teaching is superb. At least, so I’ve always understood.”

“Your father has been happy at Foulwater?”

“Oh, yes! Most of the time, I mean he met and married Mother there, and except for a year or so after her death, he’s always been content to carry on with his work. He’s one of the old school of European scholars, basically; he loves learning in the abstract, and I suppose that’s why people might call him—as I said—obsessive.” It was easier to utter the word the second time.

“And you think Tadcaster has been hounding him. How?”

“I don’t think, I know!” Lies flared, and took another sip of her wine. “It’s one thing to disagree with a colleague’s argument, or reasoning. It’s something else to mock his integrity, and—well—practically accuse him of forgery!”

“I take it,” Jacques said thoughtfully, “you’re referring to that unfortunate comment Tadcaster made during a discussion at last year’s convention, when he said something to the effect that until he himself was able to subject the Foulwater texts to scientific analysis he would continue to doubt their authenticity?”

“He was much ruder than that, wasn’t he?” Lies exclaimed. “When my father read the Proceedings, he was beside himself! He swore that even though he hates big gatherings like this he would attend this year’s convention for the first time and show up Tadcaster for a scoundrel and a mountebank! But he’s an ochlophobe, and the prospect of having actually to confront hundreds of people in a totally strange environment drove him into a decline. For months he’s been shaking and trembling, and finally the stress brought on an ulcer, and right now he’s in the hospital and hoping diet and tranquilizers will fix it without an operation. Which is why I’m here instead of him. Me, who don’t really understand a fraction of what he wants to prove!”

“I see now why you got so upset in the lobby,” Jacques said sympathetically. “And you have no real need to worry, you know. Many of the people who will attend the lecture tomorrow are definitely on your father’s side, because Tadcaster is a man who makes enemies easily, and what’s more he doesn’t really have friends, only hangers-on and toadies. But of course his academic reputation is very high, and he works at one of the most famous universities in the world, and there was some substance in the charge he made that your father had never submitted the texts he’s relying on to independent scrutiny.”

“But he can’t let them leave Foulwater!” Lies exclaimed heatedly. “The only thing he managed to bring with him when he left Hungary was this crate full of his prized collection of late-medieval and early-modern manuscripts and incunabula, and the only way he was able to secure a post at Foulwater before he spoke proper English was by donating them in perpetuity to the university library. That was more than a quarter of a century ago! Surely people who want to examine them for authenticity have had plenty of chances to go there and inspect them? Surely the people who inspected and valued them for insurance when he first arrived were satisfied about their genuineness?”

She looked beseechingly at Jacques for reassurance; there was a lurking terror in the far corners of her mind, to the effect that one day her beloved father’s collection might turn out after all to be spurious...

To her surprise and delight, he was nodding vigorously.

“Oh, yes! I can testify to that. The expert they called in was my old teacher at Miskatonic, Professor Brass, and he came back saying that we no longer had the finest collection of mystical and alchemical texts in the New World! He was made permanently jealous by what he saw! Not, of course, that some of the stuff wasn’t duplicated by our own holdings, and anyhow we’re more interested in the content of such texts than in their linguistic and etymological associations. So I don’t suppose anyone from my place has studied them since, let alone anybody from the other and stuffer foundations which look down on Foulwater as the back of beyond.”

Taking another sip of wine, Lies said, “I’ve always found that a very strange attitude. If it hadn’t been for his fear of strangers, I’m sure my father would have gone anywhere to confirm or disprove his conclusions. All my life, I remember him reading every single publication that he could lay hands on, studying them down to the tiniest detail, making piles of notes. . . Oh, he’s so *dedicated!*” She drained her glass and concluded, “And I have to stand in for him, and I’m terrified!”

“I don’t see why,” Jacques riposted, looking genuinely puzzled. “I mean, he’s made out an excellent case for his views.”

“But Professor Tadcaster—”

“I know, I know!” He signalled the waiter for another round of drinks; Lies made to decline, but thought better of it, for the sherry had definitely relaxed her.

“But,” Jacques went on, “the main thrust of his objection is not so much that he thinks your father’s texts are forged—excuse me, but you did use the term forgery, and I think that’s pitching it too high. It’s more that, if he’s right, we shall have to think again about how the learned words from Latin, Greek, and Hebrew were pronounced in the days when they were the common means of communication among the academics and specialists of all Europe. Right?”

“Y-yes!”

“And this means that those words which then entered the common tongue, the vernacular, must have been pronounced differently from what we’ve assumed for more than a century, and we may even have to re-write that fundamental dogma of language study, Grimm’s Law. We shall have to revise our view of the Great Vowel Shift, we shall have to reconsider everything we have been teaching for generations. In short, people like Professor Tadcaster will have to make an about-turn and start teaching that what they taught yesterday was wrong after all! Worse yet, they themselves will have to go back to studying instead of merely passing on what they learned in their youth as though it were Holy Writ! And *that* is why Tadcaster in particular is so fierce in claiming that we cannot base such a radical revision of our views on a bunch of mystical and alchemical books which at best may have affected a small in-group of initiates among whom it may well have been a mark of distinction to know how to *mispronounce* certain words. Unworthy or not, though, it is a rational objection.”

A fresh glass of wine appeared before her. Lies drank deeply to cover the fact that her eyes had filled with tears. She had dared to think that this wonderful stranger, so tall, so friendly, so handsome, so well-spoken, might be on her side. Instead, he had just presented Tadcaster’s case better than he might have done himself.

She muttered something and made to rise. Jacques caught her hand.

“Please! Don’t go away. I do appreciate how you feel—I felt just the same myself one time when old Brass told me he had screwed up his engagements and I’d have to deliver a paper he’d written because he couldn’t be in two places at once. Which quite destroyed my respect for him—I’d been firmly convinced for three years that he could!”

Against her will Lies found she was chuckling at the joke, and once again able to relax.

“Even so,” she said after a pause, “I don’t really know what I shall be talking about tomorrow. I mean, how can I possibly understand it in my bones the way my father does? I can’t make myself believe that it *matters* how some particular word was pronounced five hundred years ago! I can see how it can be *interesting* to some people, but *important*... ?”

“Maybe in a way,” Jacques said judiciously, “it’s a shame your father didn’t find his way to Miskatonic. I can assure you there are occasions when the correct pronunciation is very important indeed. Today, for instance.”

Lies blinked at him. She registered peripherally that the bar by now was crowded with convention delegates, exchanging shouted greetings or engaged in heated debate; all that, however, was washing past this charmed circle enclosing her and Jacques. They might as well have been on a private island.

“Do you mean,” she ventures, “that when one is talking about such a rarefied subject it’s essential to get across in speech the same as what you’d put over in IPA?”

“If, back in the Middle Ages, someone had had the wit to invent a perfectly phonetic script, things might have been very different.” Jacques gave a lazy smile, and sipped his very dry sherry before crushing out his cigar. A wisp of smoke rose from the ashtray.

“No,” he went on, “what I meant was something else. Ah... Well, perhaps I could make my point clearer if you told me what exactly it is about this speech that’s bothering you.”

“I’m not sure I could explain—”

“Oh, come on! Try, at least! After all, I seem to be the only person here from the only other university in North America where they have the same sort of respect as your father for the *recherche*? and the arcane. I promise you, I’m not one to dismiss a source merely because it relates to a subject like alchemy, or raising the devil, which has subsequently gone out of style. The important thing is that these people believed in what they were doing, and as the saying goes, faith can move mountains. It may take a long time—you may have to wait until that faith invents dynamite—but it does work. I have a suspicion that under Tadcaster’s bombardment your father is losing faith in his own convictions. Am I right?”

She gave a little sad nod.

The same had often occurred to her. Had he really believed in his assertions, he would not, surely, have abandoned her—ulcer or no ulcer!

She said at last, in a low and confidential tone, “There is one thing that I’m sure people are going to ask about, and I don’t think I can answer. It’s when he’s analysing some macaronic verses, a sort of incantation in mixed-up Latin, Greek, and Magyar, and—”

“Have you got a transcript?” Jacques interrupted, leaning across the table.

“Oh, yes! I have photocopies of all the pages he cited!” Hastily she opened the file at her side, fumbling for the sheet in question.

Jacques studied it gravely. He said at length, “This isn’t where you got what you were saying when I bumped into you.”

“But you didn’t actually—” Lies put her hand to her mouth. “I didn’t know anyone had heard me!”

“I heard. And what’s more I can testify that your pronunciation was impeccable, otherwise I wouldn’t be here talking to you. But this must have been one of the passages that afforded a clue, right?”

“You *heard* what I said?” Lies mourned. “Oh, how awful! I didn’t really mean to say it, I promise. I just felt so—”

He laid his hand soothingly on hers and pressed gently.

“Don’t worry. Please! There probably aren’t more than two people in this hotel—at this entire congress!—who’d know it for a diabolic invocation, and even if you were brought up to believe that swearing was a bad habit, like drinking, I can promise you that now and then there are exceptions. You’re enjoying this sherry? I thought you would. I can feel how much more relaxed you are now. Your pulse has steadied and you aren’t perspiring the way you were, and your attention is fully engaged in the important subject under discussion. One rescue operation underway.”

There was something infinitely reassuring about his cool, almost surgical dissection of her condition. Lies felt a smile creep unbidden across her mouth.

“I guess you missed your vocation. You’re one Hell of a therapist, aren’t you?”

“If you said that twice I wouldn’t accuse you of exaggerating. But let’s get back to the main line of the argument. I take it that this must be one of the passages in leontine verse which, because its rhymes are from the middle of the line to the end, strike your father as supporting his claim that the broad*a* sound had already started to approach the broad*e* long before...”

At some stage during the next hour, in order to get a clearer sight of the papers she was spreading on the table, Jacques left his chair facing her and came to sit beside her on the padded bench he had gentlemanly urged her to accept on their arrival; she hadn’t paid much attention at the time. The bar was now packed. There was a sort of humming in the air, an excited and exciting sound. It matched her mood. She was almost delirious. For here was this amazing stranger giving her the insight into what she must say tomorrow which even her beloved father had failed to communicate.

Well, of course, if the Romans themselves had pronounced such a word with a soft*w* sound, and yet in modern languages it had been replaced with a harsh*v*, and virtually no other word in any of the languages that survived exhibited a similar change, then somebody must have had a reason for meddling with it. And given that the scientific method was just being devised as a universal standard, it followed that—

And if this other word had an otherwise unaccountable broad*i*, and most similar words had a short one, and the surrounding consonants didn’t match the standard pattern—and—and...

“I’m getting hungry,” Jacques announced suddenly. “It’s after seven. Let’s go grab a table in the



restaurant.”

“Wait a moment!” Lies exclaimed. “I was just going to bring up another point here on page...”

And then the awful reality dawned on her. The budget allotted by Foulwater U. for this trip wouldn't stretch to eating in hotels or real restaurants; she was resigned to making do with MacDonald's or whatever the equivalent was in this strange city. She began to gather her papers.

“You've been very kind,” she said. “But really I can't—”

“Can't accept my invitation to dinner? Oh, my dear Lies! I came here expecting the usually dreary round of back-slapping and in-fighting and general bitchiness, and here I am with somebody who actually cares about what we're all supposed to get worked up about, and you're telling me I can't go on talking to you over a meal? Honestly, that's ridiculous! You just come with me and bring the whole pile of paper and we can eat and talk at the same time. I think,” he added meaningfully, “we can lay a little trap for Professor Tadcaster... don't you?”

An hour earlier she had been imagining disaster during tomorrow morning's inevitable interrogation—disguised in the convention programme as “discussion,” but nonetheless merciless if Professor Tadcaster were to be there. Now she was almost looking forward to it, for Jacques had shown her connections between one word and another, and cited other references from different sources—most of which she had never heard of—that did, taken together, tend to support her father's favourite theory...

She mastered herself. She reminded herself that merely accepting an invitation to dinner was a normal thing in the lives of most young women, even though at home in Foulwater there had been very few men who made the offer. She was in a big city, attending a major academic congress. She must pretend she was in Rome, and behave like the Romans...

Up to a point.

Smiling, she said, “Very well, Jacques.” It was the first time she had used his name. “If you *insist* ...”

And there was a delicious meal, with white wine—she once again pleaded that she didn't drink, and was persuaded to take a glass, that became two, but not three, because he was tactful enough not to press it on her. Two were fine; they made her loquacious and even vociferous, as she picked up the threads of her father's argument and improvised a defence for them which yesterday she could never have guessed at. Jacques sat—on her right this time, at a little square table whose far corner afforded a place to lay out the sheets of paper they were not currently consulting—smiling and nodding approval, and now and then offering a hint or clue that led her to yet further comprehension.

She was astonished at what was happening to her. She did now at last have some conception of what so fascinated her father, and all these other people assembled for the convention, about the words which were the basic tool of human communication. Jacques, whoever he was, must be a great teacher! If only he had turned up soon enough to be of help to her father!

Or would that rigid and now elderly man have taken advice from someone twenty, thirty years his junior... ?

She realised suddenly she had no idea how old her companion might be. Sometimes he gave a mischievous grin which made him seem like a teenager; sometimes he spoke with a gravity that made him seem infinitely old, infinitely wise... But did it matter? She was enjoying his company more than anybody else's she could recall, and occasionally he was making her laugh aloud, something she could not have believed when she got off the bus this afternoon, quailing at the prospect of her ordeal by Tadcaster.

She said as much, and Jacques cocked one eyebrow.

“Speak of the devil, as the saying goes... Here he comes now, with a bunch of his cronies, and I think he just caught sight of you.”

Fear clutched Lies's heart Jacques set his hand on hers, and warmth seemed to flow from it.

“Be polite,” her murmured. “Just make him understand that he can't walk all over you tomorrow. And he can't. It's been arranged.”

Nonetheless she was shaking inwardly as the red-bearded man advanced.

“Miss Andrassy?” he said in a voice as resonant as his big booming laugh. “I'm told your father is *unfortunately* indisposed, isn't that so? A shame! I had been looking forward to a debate with him in real time, instead of through the slow and fallible channels of the professional journals.”

Lies sat tongue-tied, an artificial smile on her face. She would rather have replaced it by a scowl, but all her upbringing militated against it.

Having waited just long enough for her to answer if she chose, Tadcaster went on, “Well, I'm sure you'll do what you can tomorrow to defend his reputation. But I really think that someone who relies on weird alchemical texts as the basis for a so-called ‘scientific’ hypothesis owes more to his colleagues than a presentation by someone totally without qualifications in the field. With all respect, Miss Andrassy. But you don't yourself possess a degree of any kind, I'm told—is that correct?”

A hot and horrible blush was spreading over Lies's round face; she could feel sweat starting to loosen the grip of her spectacles on her nose. She was afraid even to nod miserable confirmation of Tadcaster's charge, for if she did she could imagine having to rescue them from the table, or worse yet the floor.

“Well, it's very irregular,” Tadcaster said, making to turn away. “But I suppose the organisers must have their reasons. I think, though, we should make certain such a thing doesn't happen twice.”

Several nods greeted this remark from the party standing at his back, those whom Jacques had termed cronies.

Lies sat rock-still, wishing she were safely home in Foulwater... even if, back there, she was always the wallflower, always the gooseberry, always the unwanted third. Being humiliated in person was nothing compared to sitting here and feeling her father humiliated through herself. Didn't Jacques realise? Was he going to say nothing?

Just as she was prepared to believe she had been betrayed, he gave a little sleepy smile, turning toward Tadcaster.

“If you'll forgive my saying so, Professor, I think you may be in for a surprise. I've had the pleasure and privilege of a preview of Professor Andrassy's paper, and in my view the logic is unassailable.”

“Have you now!” Tadcaster exclaimed. “And by what right did you enjoy the preprint of this paper, which has been denied to the rest of us?”

“Oh, come now, Professor,” Jacques chided mildly. “You know as well as I that the provision of preprints is optional, and in fact most participants prefer not to destroy the spontaneity of discussion which follows a live presentation. As a matter of fact, I recall that you yourself have delivered eight papers at conventions of this Society, and not one was circulated as a preprint.”

Tadcaster was taken aback, but only momentarily. He said, “I was complaining that a preprint had been made available to some people and not to everyone!”

“Oh, that’s not the case. I’ve merely had the good luck to consult with Miss Andrassy, and coach her on a few points concerned with presentation of what I assure you is a most remarkable and insightful argument.”

For a second Tadcaster seemed at a loss. Then he collected his wits and, bending close, carefully read Jacques’s name-badge. Straightening, he said contemptuously, “Oh, you’re from Miskatonic, are you? Never heard of it.”

“Most people say the same,” Jacques sighed. “Until...”

“Until what?” Tadcaster blinked uncertainly.

“Until,” Jacques concluded briskly, and turned back to Lies. “Now, my dear, let’s just run over that matter of the ~~u~~-to-wshift again, and I think you should be able to cope with any questions anybody throws at you.”

Visibly disturbed—to Lies’s great delight—Tadcaster withdrew, while his cohorts pestered him with questions he was plainly in no mood to answer. His food grew cold on the table, and he kept casting anxious glances in Lies’s and Jacques’s direction.

Very shortly, however, she was so engrossed in Jacques’s commentary on her father’s paper that she was able completely to ignore him.

Eventually:

“Well, I’m damned! It’s eleven o’clock!” Jacques exclaimed, consulting a watch which, like everything else about him, was slick and up-to-the-minute.

“Oh my goodness!” Lies said, paling. “And I promised father I’d get to bed early tonight, too, because—well, you know they’ve put me on first thing tomorrow morning, at nine o’clock.”

“In the dead slot,” Jacques said, signalling a waiter and flourishing a pen to sign the check with. He amplified: “At a time when people who have spent the first evening partying neither wisely nor too well won’t be around to pay attention! But never mind. You’re assured of one thing. Tadcaster will be there.”

He scribbled something generous ending with a percent sign on the form the waiter proffered, and rose, extending a hand to assist Lies. Not that she needed assistance, she assured herself. It was just that with

so many bits of paper spread around...

“You have your key? You remember your room number?” he inquired, as he escorted her across the lobby—where late arrivals were still checking in—towards the elevators.

“Yes, of course,” she said a trifle crossly. She might not be in the habit of staying in hotels like this, but forgetting her room number was...

Was a recurrent nightmare since the moment she realised she might have to come here alone. Was there no limit to this man’s insight?

To damp that down, she produced her key with a flourish. Catching sight of its tag, just as an elevator arrived and shed its passengers, he exclaimed, “Why, 668! We’re neighbours—I’m in 666!”

And ushered her into the empty elevator and hit the DOOR CLOSE button.

For a brief while they were silent and alone, enclosed by the warm and purring walls of the machine. Hundreds of improbable thoughts flashed through Lies’s mind, creating an infinity of imagined futures... but in fact all that happened during the brief upward ride was that he gave her a broad grin, and she felt the muscles of her face responding to it.

They stepped out on a long deep-carpeted corridor, and—still in silence—walked the twenty or thirty paces to her door, turning one corner on the way. And they had arrived.

He stood facing her, less than arm’s reach distant, and smiled again.

“I’m very glad to have met you, Lies,” he said after a brief hesitation. “You’re underestimating yourself, you know. I can’t remember when I last enjoyed talking to somebody so much.”

The alarming thing was, he sounded as though he meant it. She felt another hateful blush redden her face, and hoped the late-night lighting was not bright enough for it to show.

“Thank you!” she forced out. “And—”

“Yes?” He glanced at her alertly.

“Just now you said one thing was sure about tomorrow morning...” Her voice faded on the final word. He went on looking at her with complete attention.

“Yes?” he repeated.

“Well—I mean... *You’ll* be there, won’t you?”

He threw his head back and laughed, taking her free hand in both of his.

“My dear Lies, I wouldn’t miss it for the world! I think you’re going to make mincemeat of Tadcaster, and I’m sure your father is going to be very proud of you. As a matter of fact, *I* shall feel proud of you, because it isn’t often that someone takes a rise out of that puffed-up, self-important, egotistical stick-in-the-mud!”

“Are you sure?” she ventured timidly.

“Sure as I can be of anything!” he declared. He still had not let go of her hand. And went on after another brief pause, “I do like you, you know. Very much. May I kiss you good night?”

It wasn't the first time Lies had been asked that, but it was the first time—so at least it felt to her in that instant—that she had been asked by somebody who was genuinely asking *her*, instead of just the last girl left over at the end of a dance, or a party. Blushing more furiously than ever, she gave a timorous nod, not quite knowing what to do with *this* hand holding her key and *that* hand holding her file of papers.

Not that it seemed to make any odds. He embraced her with a mixture of confidence and delicacy, and with the tip of his tongue he stroked her lips apart. For the first time (was there no end to the first times he could create?) she found herself enjoying the taste of a man in her mouth—a little of his cigars, a little of something else, a trace perhaps of the wine from dinner, a little of something *him*...

She had no idea how long the kiss lasted. She only knew it was marvellous, delectable, fantastic, and made shivers go through her clear down to her heels. Only the sound of the elevator doors cycling made her break off, and that was with regret.

He drew back to arm's length, not letting go of her, and gazed into her eyes.

“Thank you!” he said in a faintly impressed tone. “You're delicious!”

No boy had ever said that to her, back home in Foulwater. She felt giddy. All she really wanted to do was start again, now it was plain that the people from the elevator had turned the other way; their cheerful voices could be heard receding. On the other hand, that wasn't the only elevator, and there were already sounds that suggested another group of people was about to stop off on this floor...

An idea gripped her, which was at first horrifying, then somehow incredibly natural. She almost giggled.

*This is me? Me, Lies Andrassy, having this kind of thought? I don't believe it! It's shocking!*

*But I like it!*

The other people from the elevator had stopped to say goodnight to one another, which implied that some at least of them would be coming this way in a moment. She turned to her door, raising her key, feeling magnificently brazen.

“Won't you come in for a moment?” she said, copying the phrase from something she had heard or read.

And what would be his reaction? Prompt, and flattering, and at the same time sympathetic—everything she had ever dreamed of in a man.

“I'd love to! But—but I'd hate to keep you up so late you didn't have all your wits about you in the morning! So only if you're absolutely certain...?”

Without the slightest fumble she had slotted the key into the lock and given it a brisk turn. By the light which leaked from the corridor she was able to put down it and her other burden as he followed her over the threshold.

Turning, she said, "I'm not going to sleep either way, am I? So I might as well choose the nicer."

The door clicked shut on darkness as she found herself thinking again: *This is me? This is really me?*

But nineteen years of instruction in decorous, lady-like behaviour were evaporating in the heat of their renewed kiss.

He was fantastic. He was incredible. He was everything she had ever not quite dared to dream of, even down to his oh-so-polite inquiry about the Pill and her momentarily panicky admission no, and his utterly matter-of-fact follow-up question on a subject she had never talked about to a man before, and his brief pause for calculation and the assured statement that if there were a safe time in her month it must therefore be exactly now, a statement which she accepted on trust more total than even what she would have accorded to her father. Whereafter he did amazing things to her body, and made her laugh and sob by turns, and ultimately melt into his arms, asleep.

Even that, however, didn't prevent her having nightmares in which she was standing on the dais of a huge lecture-hall confronted by thousands of faceless people all of whom were simultaneously bombarding her with questions she didn't know the answer to. There were many such dreams, and the last brought her awake gasping, in the conviction that Jacques too had been a dream.

He wasn't. He was there at her side, and soothing and caressing her and uttering words of reassurance.

It wasn't going to stop. He enjoyed her again, and then showered with her, and looked over the wardrobe she had brought and overrode her choice of apparel, and advised her on makeup, and escorted her to breakfast in the hotel's coffee-shop with his arm round her as though he were genuinely flattered by her company... an idea which, little by little, she grew timorously to accept. Even this early, even in the large stark coffee-shop, there were women looking predatorily about them, and now and then their eyes lingered on Jacques, and then on her, and their faces registered surprise before they glanced away.

She said nothing as she drank her orange juice and coffee and swallowed some dry toast, but her heart was singing, and she was telling herself that whatever happened from now on she must *must* MUST remember that she could be a whole person in her own right, not just a shadow of the mother she now only vaguely remembered because her recollections had been overlaid by her father's non-stop comparisons, not just a surrogate for someone other... but herself.

Jacques was gazing into her eyes again, with a penetrating stare that seemed to transfix her very soul. And saying, "Was it by any chance your first time?"

Instantly she was embarrassed, seeking a flip phrase to cover the fact. Looking anywhere but at him, she said, "Was it so obvious?"

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way!" He caught her hand and squeezed it hard. "I swear, I couldn't have guessed except—Well, except that you were so *delighted* with everything!"

And, not letting her speak, he leaned close and whispered confidentially, "If that's how well you can make out on a 'first time,' then Tadcaster is in for a rough ride, just as I predicted!"

Which brought back her nervousness in full spate, and she had to abandon the rest of her breakfast.

But even for that Jacques had a remedy. He said in a clinical tone, “You have stage fright. All the great actors always say that if they don’t they turn in a lousy performance!”

Which cheered her up all over again and carried her through the ordeal of making her way to the lecture-hall where this, the first major event of the entire convention, was scheduled to take place. The place was only half full when the chairman, a polite grey-haired man with an absent-minded manner, led her on to the platform and introduced her to the young man who was going to display photostat pages from her father’s books on an overhead projector.

But among those present were Tadcaster and his entourage, and at the sight of the red-bearded man Lies’s heart sank. He looked as though he had a head like a bear’s, and kept snapping at even the friendliest remarks.

It encouraged her only marginally when she saw Jacques take his place in the front row and signal her okay, making a ring of his thumb and forefinger.

She almost blushed again. Somewhere in the course of checking up on her father’s references she had run across the real meaning of that commonplace gesture.

And then it was too late to worry any more, for the chairman was saying, “Much as we regret the absence of Professor Andrassy, I’m sure his daughter will prove an admirable stand-in...”

In a tone which made it plain that he didn’t believe a word of what he was saying.

The lights went down, except for a shaded one over the lectern where she had disposed her text, and the first page she was supposed to invoke as authority was projected on the big screen hanging behind her.

The last image she carried into the near-darkness was of Jacques smiling at her, and it worked the miracle. She found herself able to believe that it *was* important to know how one particular word was pronounced by people long dead on another continent. The chains of inexorable reasoning which led from one conclusion to another seized her; now and then as a fresh document appeared, copied from one of those mouldering tomes her father was so proud of, she heard a hissing intake of breath from somewhere in the shadowy hall, and once or twice the chairman actually had to call for order as a buzz of excited conversation broke out.

At the very least, she realised, she wasn’t going to disgrace her father.

But the discussion period loomed, and no matter how long and loud the applause which followed her presentation of the paper, it wasn’t going to save her from being roasted.

The lights went up, and there was Professor Tadcaster first on his feet and speaking without benefit of microphone, yet audible to the farthest corners of the room.

“We have heard a most seductive argument, Mister Chairman! And I’m sure it is not in any sense the fault of the young lady who has so gallantly stepped into the breach due to her father’s—ah—*indisposition...*”

He paused, and was rewarded with sycophantic chuckles.

“No fault of hers, as I say, that it is *too* elegant, *too* neatly tailored to fit purported evidence which I’m certain none of us here ever had the chance to examine under strict scientific conditions! Indeed, had the conclusions been reached in advance and the evidence prepared to support them, there could scarcely have been a closer match!”

This time the chuckles were more like guffaws, and some people in the seats nearest nudged one another.

“Not, of course, that I’m for a moment suggesting that there has been any falsification! Far be it from me to impute such motives to someone who, as we all know, suffered terribly in his early days, and was only able to secure a post at an academic institution here in the free world thanks to the miraculous preservation of a corpus of otherwise unknown and inaccessible texts, dealing with *mysticism* and *alchemy* and *devil-raising!*”

Lies wanted to scream. This man was a past master of snide innuendo. He had said nothing outright libellous, yet every listener knew he was undermining her father’s reputation—implying that he had been mentally deranged by his experiences, hinting that whether or not the texts he relied on were authentic, they could not be regarded as authoritative because of the questionable nature of their subject-matter. How could she rebut an attack on this abstract level?

Yet she must. She must find a way, or her father would be sneered at for the rest of his life, and even in the quiet purlieus of Foulwater his colleagues would reject him. . .

Tadcaster hadn’t finished. He was winding up to a peroration.

“It therefore seems to me, Mr. Chairman, that we would be ill-advised to discard our traditional understanding of these pronunciation shifts on the mere say-so of someone who, leave us face it, was not even brought up to speak a member of the Indo-European language family as his mother tongue!”

And there it was, nakedly out in the open: the ancient hatred of the believer in Aryan culture for anyone whose parentage stemmed from Finno-Ugrian, or any other stock. . .

Of all the people who had worshipped Aryan culture, the Nazis had been the fiercest. Didn’t this man know that?

Lies looked a wordless appeal at the chairman, but he was saying to his microphone, “I think we must all agree that Professor Tadcaster has a valid point, and we shall all be most interested to know whether Miss Andrassy has a counterargument. Miss Andrassy?”—turning to her.

She sat petrified, hunting in vain for a perfect retort, for several eternal seconds. And then—oh, miracle!

“Mr. Chairman!” In a voice that was nothing like as loud and impressive as Tadcaster’s yet contrived to carry as far. Jacques was on his feet, attracting the chairman’s eye.

On the nod, he identified himself—“Dr. Jacques DeVille, Miskatonic University”—and continued.

“I think I can set Professor Tadcaster’s mind at rest quite easily. We are—are we not?—considering whether Professor Andrassy’s view can be substantiated, or validated, or in a word proved.”



“Oh, proof!” Tadcaster was heard to say.

“Very well, I accept the correction. Shall we settle for a balance of probabilities? I am convinced Professor Andrassy is right. I think that if the gentleman in charge of the projector will be so kind as to put back what I recall as the third of the pages we have seen on the screen. . . and if the lights could be lowered again. . .”

There was a pause, and buzz of hushed but excited comment. The tenor of it was a question: who was this person from some university no one recognised?

But soon enough the lights were lowered and the page requested was again thrown on the screen.

Jacques said, “Professor Tadcaster, you can read this passage?”

“Of course!” he said crossly. “Its an invocation to raise a devil called Jacaroth!”

“Would you care to read aloud the first two lines? In your preferred pronunciation, that is.”

“Oh. . . ! Oh, very well!” Tadcaster rose to his feet again, just as Lies caught on. Twisting around in her chair, she recognised the passage Jacques had selected as the very phrase she had uttered under her breath when he crossed her in the hotel lobby yesterday.

And Tadcaster was reading it aloud, in accordance with the precepts he believed in—nothing like the way she herself had pronounced it.

There was a pregnant pause. Eventually the chairman said, “Dr. DeVille, was that the only point—?”

“No, no! Just the first point. Nothing happened, right?”

“Ah. . . Well, nothing that any of us noticed, I guess!”

“Exactly as I would have expected. Now, Professor Tadcaster, be so good as to repeat the passage in the pronunciation Professor Andrassy advocates. I seem to recall that a transcription in IPA is available—”

“Never mind!” Tadcaster hauled himself to his feet again. “I don’t for the life of me see what merely reading it over in another version is supposed to prove, but—Oh well! Here goes!”

And he spoke the words.

Afterwards Lies remembered something like a giant lightning bolt which spanned half the hall and for the moment it lasted took on the shape of a claw, or talon. Later still, but mainly in her dreams, she remembered a warning on the page preceding the invocation Tadcaster had been persuaded to read aloud, to the effect that some sort of diagram must be inscribed on the floor around the person uttering the invocation—a five-pointed star, or something equally ridiculous—but all that immediately belonged to the past.

For there was no Tadcaster, not even a trace of him, except just possibly a smell in the air as of roasting meat, and the applause for her presentation was still going on, and she was rising and bowing shyly

and...

And being complimented on how well she had made her fathers case, and asked to send him best wishes for a speedy recovery, and interrogated about the corpus of material he based his theories on, and given the phone-numbers of the editors of journals where his next paper—or, come to that, hers—would be sure of publication, and so forth.

It lasted all day.

Not until, long after midnight, she wearily opened the door of her room and switched on the light, did she think again about the amazing Dr. DeVille, or the wicked Professor Tadcaster.

Then she stood transfixed, realising suddenly that since the conclusion of this morning's lecture she had heard no mention of either. They might as well never have existed.

A sheet of paper propped against her bedside lamp caught her eye. She picked it up. For a moment it conveyed a clear and unambiguous message.

*Yesterday you spoke the invocation, so I came, astonished to find you protected by a pentacle of virtues: love, duty, honesty, humility, and self sacrifice. No one else has ever called on me without the vices of selfishness and greed.*

*So I looked around, and decided that neither you, nor your father, nor the academic community, deserved a Tadcaster.*

*When he called on me, I came again in my true form, and when I went, I took him with me.*

*But in between I came with you, and much enjoyed it. Not all of us DeVilles are as nasty as you humans like to make out. I hope you learn, soon, to make out with one of your own kind. Hell be a lucky man. Just in case you don't, you will remember one special passage in your father's books, even though you're obliged like the rest to imagine that what actually happened didn't.*

*I don't think we shall meet again, though. You're too much your own woman to follow in your father's footsteps all your life. Lots of love (no, love is not forbidden us!).*

— Jacques Roth DeVille a.k.a. Jacaroth

Then, between blink and blink, there was a dazzling flare and a tingling in her fingertips and a reek as of brimstone, and all she could think of was how she was going to tell her father that in future he would have to present his own papers at these conventions because she was far more interested in—

Well, something else. Tomorrow would be soon enough to work out what. Happily she undressed and tumbled into bed, and by the morning Tadcaster was no more than a nightmare and Jacques a pleasant dream she was determined to live up to.

