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Glinky
by Ray Vukceovich
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1

Not a Bird

Glinky is on TV.

The man with the abdominal gunshot wound isn't watching Glinky.

What the heck is Glinky anyway?

Is he a mouse?

No!

Is she a cat?

No!

It's Glinky, Glinky, Glinky!

The wounded man wants to somehow get to the telephone on the table near the couch and call for help. It's a long way to crawl. Glinky sings him a little song of encouragement, but it's clear the cartoon is mocking him.

When the man gets to the table, he looks back and sees a long smear of blood across the carpet and beyond that Glinky glaring at him from the TV.

Who in the world is Glinky?

Some monkey?

No.

A flying fish with horse lips and dog ears?

No, he's just Glinky!

The man stretches up an arm and bats around on the top of the table for the phone. It isn't there. No, wait, there it is. He pulls it off the table and tries to catch it as it falls, and fails, and it hits him in the face, but the pain is nothing like the pain in his gut. The pain from the phone hitting him in the face is trivial. It might as well not be pain at all. He drags the phone into his lap and picks up the receiver and puts it to his ear.

There is no dial tone.

He pulls at the phone wire that leads to the wall. Soon, he's holding the end. The shooter or someone (maybe Glinky?) has unplugged the phone.

He crawls under the table to look for the outlet. He finally spots it behind the couch. Should he try to get back there and plug the phone back in? No. He won't be able to move the couch. He will have to crawl to the front door and yell into the street for help. The door is so far away it looks like he will have to Alice down to a very small size to fit through it. But he must get there first. A journey of a thousand scotches begins with the first scotch.

Will he make it, Glinky?

"No!"

So, he'll never get out of here?
"Not unless he buys something."
What must he buy, Glinky?
"The farm!"

2

To Your Left

Oddly, I'd been on my way to the Medical Mall that day anyway. It was company policy that all my employees undergo annual medical checkups, and the fact that I was my only employee did not tempt me to relax the requirement. Karl Sowa Investigations had procedures, and we followed them. I didn't expect to be a one-man operation forever.

I could have driven the few blocks from my office on Eleventh Avenue to the Medical Mall, but instead I made the healthy choice and walked. It was a glorious Oregon day. The sun was shining for a change. The birds were chirping. The squirrels were gathering nuts or whatever urban squirrels gathered. The traffic was a steady hum with not so many horn honks.

Spring at last.

I was thinking I should maybe whistle a happy tune when right behind me, someone shouted, "To your left!"

Meaning, I thought, I should jump to my left.

Wrong.

The bicyclist behind me yelped and swerved to the right at the last moment and clipped me, and I stumbled off the sidewalk where a great wall of metal rushed by, and for a moment I thought I'd stepped onto railroad tracks that had not been there a moment before, but then the thing passed, and I could see it was a city bus. There was some kind of big rodent with huge red eyes painted on the back of the bus. It studied me with smug amusement.

I looked back to see the bicyclist peddling full speed toward a place where the sidewalk made a sharp turn at a building. Probably a kid, I thought, judging by the fact that there were things sticking out of her helmet like horns or ears and long red hair shooting out in all directions -- some kind of costume?

Surely she would slow down for the turn. I had a sudden feeling of total satisfaction at the thought of her hitting the building with a cartoon splat, but then I felt guilty for thinking that and then felt okay, realizing it wasn't like it was actually going to happen, but then it did.

The wheels were a blur and for a moment I thought they were not wheels at all but the galloping feet and legs of some kind of furry beast, but before I could get that thought fully formed, the rider ran headlong into the building. Instead of crashing or bouncing back out into traffic, she passed right through the wall as if it were made of smoke.

Before I had time even to doubt what I'd seen, someone shouted, "Don't move!"

Then there were hands all over me. A young woman told me everything would be okay, you'll be fine, just relax, you're hurt, but we're here to help. There were three of them -- two big blond guys with very short hair and the young woman with the soothing voice, all of them wearing white medical coats. One of the guys grabbed me under the arms from behind and the other snatched up my feet, and they lowered me onto a gurney.

"Hey!" I yelled and tried to get off. The woman put both hands on my chest and pushed down. She was pretty strong, but she didn't have to hold me long, because one of the guys pulled a leather strap over my arms and chest and fastened it. Likewise another strap across my lower legs.

"Okay, let's go," the woman said.

One of the guys pushed me onto the sidewalk. The woman walked along beside me patting my shoulder and looking concerned. I lifted my head as much as I could and looked down the length of my body and between my feet and saw the other young man take off running while waving his arms and making siren noises. The guy pushing my gurney picked up the pace, and the woman jogged to

keep up. Soon we were zooming along dangerously fast.

The guy making the siren noises didn't slow down for the big automatic glass doors of the Medical Mall. The doors opened just in time, and we zipped into the mall.

The waiting areas were set up like sidewalk cafes so consumers of medical services could watch other consumers strolling up and down the mall. There were small white metal tables and chairs and roving venders offering cola or cappuccino. The doctors were arranged by body parts or maybe alphabetically (podiatry followed by proctology) or maybe metaphorically -- is that a kick in the ass or what? Bings and pings now and then interrupted the Muzak which was a song about buying this or buying that, come on, do it for the Glinkster, don't be a tightwad.

We were still moving pretty fast as we passed through one of the cafe waiting rooms and banged through a set of double doors into a huge bright room. The guy pushing the gurney let it go, and I flew forward spinning like the jack of diamonds tossed at a big silk top hat.

I tightened up for the forthcoming crash and pain, but someone caught my gurney before it hit a wall.

A new team descended on me. My eyelid was peeled back and a bright light shined into my eye, first on the left and then on the right. Someone else stuck a needle in my arm behind the elbow.

"Hey, I'm not hurt," I yelled. "Let me up."

"Relax, Karl," a woman said. "Everything is going to be fine."

How did she know my name?

I felt the familiar coldness of a stethoscope on my chest and looked down to see that I was now wearing only my underwear and that my arms and legs were no longer strapped down.

The guy listening to my chest put away his stethoscope and said, "Get up now, please."

I got up. There were two women and one man dressed in white like the ones who'd snatched me off the street. I looked around the big room and it did not seem so big now and the gurney I'd ridden in on was now an examination table and instead of three people, there was only the one nurse, neat, maybe mid-forties, very efficient, no nonsense, and she directed me to a scale and weighed and measured me.

"Boy oh boy," she said.

"What?"

"Nothing, just your weight and height."

"Is it unusual?"

"We're all individuals, aren't we? Jump back up on here." I sat on the edge of the examination table, and she checked my reflexes.

"Whoa!" she said when my knee jerked.

"What?"

She turned my head to one side and put something in my ear and said, "Well, this is interesting." She turned my head the other way to look into my other ear. "Here, too," she said.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Nothing," she said. "Everything is shipshape."

"But what about my ears?"

"What about your ears?"

"Never mind."

"Well, just relax," she said. "The doctor will be with you shortly."

Which meant sometime in the indefinite future but probably before I died of old age or hell froze over.

I had lost track of the number of times I'd gone completely through my compressed Tai Chi routine by the time the doctor stepped in. I froze in the middle of Lan Ch'ueh Wei (Grasping the Bird's Tail).

"Well, I see you can still dance," he said. "I'm Dr. Jones." He held out his hand for me to shake. "Sit down, Mr. Sorrow."

"Sowa," I said. "Karl Sowa."

He was maybe fifty with no hair at all on his head or face and that made him look a little rounder than he probably was. Oddly, his nametag said Dr. Smith. He flipped through the pages on his clipboard. "Things look pretty good, Karl. I see you've been eating right and exercising regularly."

"How could you know that?"

"The usual channels," he said. "No jogging?"

"No jogging," I said.

"Yes, well, never mind. I see you don't smoke. Moderate alcohol. Good, good. A little goes a long way, as they say. Ha ha. Your cholesterol count is good. All things considered I'd say you're in excellent health."

"That's good to hear," I said.

"Except for the bus, of course," he said.

"Actually it was the bike," I said. "The bus missed me."

"You may be confused," he said. "But even so, what about next time? No, I won't beat around the bush, Mr. Sorrow. You are in the awkward position of being totally healthy. That is, the odds of you dropping dead from some disease are quite small."

"Why is that awkward?" I asked. "It sounds pretty good to me."

"Awkward for you," he said. "This makes you perfect for us."

"Perfect for you?"

"We have something to help you."

"Help me with what?"

"The bus," he said. "The healthy ones always get hit by a bus."

I waited for him to smile, but he seemed deadly serious. After another moment of eye contact, he said, "There is a new medication from our corporate partner, Philosophical Pharmaceuticals, called Pilula Omnibus. Just out. The latest thing."

"What does that mean?"

"You could call it the 'Bus Pill.'"

"I don't get it," I said. "What's it for?"

"For people like you," he said. "Guys like you you're all the time exercising. Right? You get a lot of fiber in your diet. Not much red meat. Vitamins. You don't smoke. Maybe a couple of fingers of Old Cow after dinner, am I right?"

"I think that's Old Crow," I said.

"Whatever. So what happens to you?"

"What do you mean?"

"All that clean living means you've just got to get hit by a bus, Karl."

"And you mean this pill...."

"Exactly," he said. "Pilula Omnibus protects you from life's last little irony. Here's a sample." He put a small blue pill in my hand.

"So, does it work on other stuff?" I asked. "Like icy sidewalks?"

"Well, I don't know about that," he said. "Let me get you some water."

He walked over to a water cooler and brought me back a little paper cone of water. "Go ahead. Take it."

So, I did. Hey, he was a doctor, after all.

"Good. Good." He walked to the door. "Now just wait here."

"But what am I waiting for?"

"The next bus," he said and closed the door behind him.

I found my clothes on a chair to one side of the examination table. My socks were in my shoes. My pants were folded neatly on the chair. My shirt was draped around the back. It didn't look like an arrangement I would have created myself, but at this point I could not be sure. I got dressed.

I wondered what the pill would do.

I didn't feel any different.

But then I caught a whiff of tobacco smoke. Incredibly, someone somewhere in the Medical Mall was smoking. The smell got suddenly stronger and louder as a woman stepped out of a nook over by the soda machines, and the space expanded and filled with many people moving in all directions, everyone

with a noise to contribute to the heavy echo in the big bus station. I could see lots of cigarette butts crushed out on the floor where the woman had been lurking. She must have been waiting for some time for the doctor to leave so we could be alone in the crowd.

"There's no time to lose," she said. "We've got to get you out of here before they realize what I'm up to." She meant the people watching through the big glass windows above the mezzanine -- it could have been the whole medical staff up there elbowing one another and pointing and whispering behind their hands.

Now along with the cigarette smoke, there was the heavy odor of old cooking grease and diesel fuel.

The woman was more than thirty and dressed in jeans and a shirt that wasn't long enough to hide her navel. Long frizzy red hair poking out at odd angles, brown eyes, no smile at the moment, but I imagined her smile would be a very nice thing to see. I didn't know her, but I did recognize the bicycle helmet under her arm. It had fuzzy donkey or maybe deer ears attached to it.

"Look out!" she yelled and pushed me back, and a bus roared between us.

When it passed, the woman who had just saved my life was still there. She hurried across to me, and we ran. People got out of our way, but when we tried to merge with the bus station crowd, they wouldn't let us in. Whenever we approached they pushed us back into the path of the buses. I took the woman's hand, and we ran again. I could hear the next bus screaming up behind us.

I thought the bus pill was supposed to protect me from buses. Instead it seemed to be attracting them. I imagined someone up there among the medical people was telling the others it was time to go back to the drawing board. Get another test subject. This one was going to be a goner soon. There seemed to be no safe place for us.

But then an idea hit me. "Wait." I looked around but didn't immediately see what I wanted and felt a moment of despair, and then I spotted it and said, "Over there," and took off, dragging her behind me.

I pulled us to a halt by a small blue sign on a post. The sign read, "Bus stop."

"Get back up on the sidewalk," I said, "and then follow my lead as fast as you can."

I waited until the next bus appeared and then put out my hand to signal the driver. I got up on the sidewalk beside the woman and waited. As the bus roared ever closer, I lost all confidence in my plan. What was there to stop the bus from crashing onto the sidewalk? Nothing. Maybe we should run again. Too late.

The bus didn't run up on the sidewalk after us. It stopped at the sign and the door hissed open. The woman hurried on, and I followed right after her.

Something was holding me back. Getting on the bus was like forcing my way into a high wind. The bus pill had not made it impossible for a bus to hit me, but it was making it hard for me to get on a bus. There were certainly more than a few bugs in the formula.

"Come on," the woman said. She grabbed my hand and gave me a good yank, and I passed through the invisible barrier and nearly stumbled into the driver.

The woman dropped coins in the coin device, and the driver closed the door. We found seats together about halfway back.

3

"Ask not what your action figure can do.

Ask what you can do with your action figure."

She had to hand it to him. Getting on the bus instead of trying to run from it was a great idea. She went to work on his shirt buttons starting at the top.

"Be still," she said. "And relax."

"What are you doing?"

"I'm putting a big Band-Aid on your tummy where the bus hit you."

"Okay, I guess, that's okay," he said. "But it was the bike."

He slumped in his seat and became perfectly still. He was the very embodiment of the idea that "this seat is taken." Better than a straw hat with fake daisies, but she needed to get him back into his major mode -- tough wisecracking detective.

She slipped her hand into the front of his pants.

No dice.

Probably she should have bought the optional Auxiliary Dick Kit (batteries not included).

Maybe he would feel more confident if he were holding his gun.

She checked the placement of the bandage over his wound and buttoned his shirt back up. No shoulder holster. So, maybe he carried heat in his belt at the back? She bent him forward and pulled the coat up around his shoulders. Nothing. Don't tell me he's unarmed, she thought. What the heck am I paying for? She pulled his coat down and sat him back up.

She would have to improvise.

She picked up his right hand and straightened the first finger and cocked the thumb creating the classic bang bang you're dead position for cops and robbers.

A light came back into his eyes.

"Better?" she asked.

"Much," he said. "Thanks." He poked his hand into his coat and when he pulled it out, the gun she had formed of his fingers was gone.

"Let me tell you what's happening," she said.

4

I Eat a Sandwich

"Where are we going?" I asked the woman with the bike helmet. No, wait. She wasn't carrying the bike helmet now.

"Brooklyn," she said.

"What did you do with your helmet?"

"I dropped the head," she said.

It's always important to have something to say when you're confused.

"Did it bounce?" I asked.

It was like we were talking through a layer of maple syrup or maybe like we were communicating with Morse code and it took a few seconds for her to work out what I'd just said. Or maybe we were not sitting right next to each other. Maybe I was still in Oregon and she was already in Brooklyn and it took a while for my voice to make it all the way across the country.

"Here we are," she said.

I had not been to the East Coast in many years, but I had no trouble believing I was looking out the bus window at a Brooklyn neighborhood.

We got off in front of a storefront window with the words "Phil's Kosher Deli" in big white letters. The woman took my arm and walked toward the deli. Up close, she smelled very nice.

Bells jingled when the door opened. She let go of my arm and walked to a high glass butcher case and spoke to a big guy slicing meat.

She glanced back at me. "I've ordered you a Black Forest ham and Swiss on rye. You want a big dill pickle?"

"What are we doing here?"

"This is my favorite deli in all the world," she said and looked back at the man slicing meat who now had a big grin. "And Phil is my all time favorite deli guy."

"Here you go," Phil said. He put a plate with a huge sandwich on top of the display case. "You want that pickle?"

"Sure," I said. "Why not?"

Phil dipped into a gallon jar and put a pickle on my plate and pushed the plate forward a little as if to say, well, go on, take it. I picked it up

and held it, not knowing what to do next. Phil and the woman both looked at me like they were waiting for me to catch on.

Finally, the woman said, "Well, take it to a booth."

She turned back to Phil who got back to the business of building another sandwich. I watched them for a moment, still not moving. Phil stopped slicing meat. The woman looked over her shoulder at me again.

"Well, what about something to drink?" I asked.

Phil laughed a huge laugh, and the woman's smile made me feel like maybe I was getting the old patter back. I'd been right; it was a wonderful smile.

"Give us a couple of cream sodas, Phil," she said.

Not wanting to push my luck, I took my sandwich to a booth.

A few minutes later, she slid in across from me, and a moment after that, Phil delivered the cream sodas in tall brown bottles along with a couple of glasses of crushed ice.

"Yummy," she said and picked up her sandwich and took a huge bite and chewed and gazed off into space with a look of absolute contentment on her face.

I took a bite of mine, too. It was very good. In fact, it was probably the best ham and Swiss I'd ever eaten. The cheese was so fresh it was crumbly. And the ham ... well, you couldn't get ham like that in Oregon.

"I'm Karl Sowa," I said.

"Over there," she said.

"You're suppose to tell me who you are when I tell you who I am," I said. "And maybe what's going on?"

She put her sandwich down and reached under the table like she was searching her pockets or maybe digging in a purse. She produced a business card and handed it across to me.

Urbana Fontana -- Scene Shifter

Black block letters on white. No address. No phone.

"Is that really your name?" I asked.

"Over here," she said.

"What is this over here and over there business? Why not just tell me what's going on?"

"Over there, you're Karl Sowa," she said. "Over here, you're Chuck Sorrow. Over there, you're legal to do private investigation work. Over here, well, let's just say you get things done for people who don't ask too many questions. Over there my name is Jane Boyd. Over here, I'm Urbana Fontana and I can change little things. Get it?"

"Not even a little," I said.

"Let me put it this way," she said. "Earlier today an incursion into history occurred. Something from Elsewhere muscled into our reality. Since it was never supposed to be here, there was no place for it. It made room for itself by pushing other things aside. And since those things couldn't just go away, they were all crushed together and thereby got a little strange."

"I see," I said, but my sarcasm was wasted on her.

"The Squeeze," she said, "has caused a Disturbance which is washing backward and forward in time changing things. One of the things that is clear over here is that there was a plague of sympathetic magic involving the name game back in the eighties. Do you know the name game?"

"Robin robin bo bobbins...."

"Don't!"

"Why not?"

"Are you crazy?" she said. "Do you want to cause absolute chaos? Don't you remember the riots in the streets?"

"Actually, I don't," I said.

"How strange," she said. "Maybe it hasn't gotten to you yet. When it does, you'll remember it. Anyway, over here, my mother thought I would have an easier time in life if it were hard to work me into the name game. Her first thought was Terpsichore, but then she realized people would call me Terp, and

that would be too easy, so she named me Urbana. Totally ineffective, by the way, since some people think it's harder and some think it's easier."

I couldn't help myself. Silently, I sang, "Urbana Urbana bo burbana."

There was a deep thud, and the lights flickered.

"Stop it," she said. "I can see what you're doing."

"It's clear," I said, "I'm having a bad reaction to the Bus Pill. I'm probably collapsed in the mall back in Oregon."

"Don't you think it's a little strange there even is a Bus Pill in the first place?"

"Well, there is that," I said.

She picked up her sandwich and took another bite, which reminded me that a bad reaction to some medication back in Oregon wouldn't explain this excellent ham and Swiss on rye. The texture of the dark rye bread. The crisp dark green lettuce of a variety I couldn't name. The sweet smell of red onions and mustard. The sandwich was simply too much in and of the world as I now knew it to be an hallucination.

Not to mention the cream soda.

"So, what is this something from elsewhere?"

"Glinky," she said.

I knew that name but I could not remember why. It had something to do with my current case. Of that much I was certain, but every time I reached for it, it scuttled away to the shadows where it watched me with red eyes. Red eyes also reminded me of something but I couldn't pin that down either.

"Everyone knows there are an infinite number of universes," she said, "many of them just a step this way or that way from this world."

"I think I saw something about that a couple of years ago during the very last season of PBS," I said. And speaking of PBS, the very idea of "Public" things was pretty strange these days. Public education? A dead dinosaur. Social security? Don't make me laugh. Public lands? Get out of here. Public airwaves? Oh, shut up.

"Glinky has jumped from one of those universes and has inserted itself into ours. Your mission, as you very well know, is to drive it out of here and save the world."

"Somehow that doesn't sound like a mission I would gladly undertake," I said. "In fact, all of this smells fishy to me. How do I know you're playing straight with me?"

"Think about cilantro," she said. "Do you remember that having anything to do with Mexican food when you were growing up?"

"Well, no."

"Now it's as if it's always been a big part of the cuisine," she said. "And don't even talk about broccoli."

"What about broccoli?"

"No one knew about broccoli when I was growing up. It's like it hadn't been invented. But now everyone knows it's been around forever."

"But I remember broccoli always being around."

"That's what I'm saying," she said. "Things are uneven. Soon, you'll remember growing up with all kinds of things."

"You mean until this morning there was no broccoli? That's a little hard to believe."

"So, consider Portobello mushrooms," she said.

I considered Portobello mushrooms.

"And what about the way cold fusion suddenly started working?" she asked.

"Science is like that." I could hear the doubt in my own voice. "Right out of the blue something pops up."

"No," she said. "None of that happened until this morning when Glinky showed up and his arrival reverberated through time changing things. The real danger is that everything we know will be pushed aside, crowded out. There is only so much room in reality. When Glinky got here, it pushed us all out toward the edges. As it elbows more and more room for itself, we will get more

and more squeezed. Things will be pretty terrible when we're all just smears on the inside of the jar that is reality."

"So, how do you know so much about Glinky?" I asked.

"He wasn't always such a rat," she said.

"They never are."

"Back when we were in college," she said, "he told me no matter how good the Business got, it would still be just the two of us."

"But now you think there's someone else?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think so?"

"Little things," she said.

There were always little things.

"Well, now you know everything, and you can go do your job," she said.

"Finish your soda."

Why not? I sighed and picked up the glass. "Drink me," I said, and tossed the rest of it down in a couple of big gulps.

"Okay, now put your arms up like this." She held up her arms like she was reading a very big invisible book. "And close your eyes."

I held my arms up and closed my eyes. "Now what?"

I heard her slide out of the booth, and my fingers closed around what I recognized at once as a steering wheel, and my heart lurched. I opened my eyes and swerved back into the right lane. The car rocked as a bus screamed by honking in the other direction. I got the car and my breathing under control and looked around. Yes, this was my old Mercedes, and yes, I was back in Eugene, Oregon. A moment later I passed a street sign and confirmed that I was driving in the South Hills of the city on my way to find out if Daniel Boyd was really cheating on his wife.

5

Danny Boyd

You might suddenly realize you are here right now -- totally present. It's like you wake up and think, oh, yeah, here I am, and this is all there is and all there ever was or will be. The things you remember are all part of this moment -- just stuff you might be thinking about now. If you consider history, all you're doing is considering history. It's not like you can ever be right about it. The steps, causes, reasons for your current situation are simply a story you tell yourself so you won't freak at the thought that you've just popped into existence and that there is no reason to think you won't pop out again as soon as you lose that feeling of here-and-nowness. At least you were blissfully ignorant before there were Glinky waves to wash you off your feet.

I pull up in my aging Mercedes in front of the South Hills love nest of Daniel Boyd, the dynamic CEO of Philosophical Pharmaceuticals, who has inserted himself into our community and has become an overnight big shot. My plan is to ring the bell, and when his squeeze answers the door, snap her photo.

The idea of "plan" is very strange in this context. Do I even have a camera? Does thinking about the future have any value when you only exist now? And if I have already pulled up at the front of the house, why am I still moving?

I park up the hill and walk down to the house where Daniel Boyd keeps his mistress. Boyd has been buying and selling stuff, backing this project and opposing that one, building megastores and pushing aside the little guys, changing the landscape with broad, brutal sweeps of money, getting his smiling face in the papers and on TV. He runs a local infomercial called Why? WHY is the NYSE symbol for Philosophical Pharmaceuticals. The show is mostly about why you should take Danny's pills.

I ring the bell. The woman who answers the door looks just like Jane Boyd, Danny's wife who hired me to find out what he's up to. I am momentarily thrown totally off my game.

"Jane?"

She blows smoke my way and says, "Jane Jane bo bane...."

"Please, don't do that, Sweetheart." A man behind her puts his hands on her shoulders and pulls her back into the gloom. Danny Boyd takes her place in the doorway. He is so tall, dark, and handsome, he should be modeling men's suits for guys already at the top instead of selling pills. He says, "Mr. Sorrow, I presume?"

He may not always have been a rat, but he's a rat now, and he's got a gun. He motions me inside.

The woman who answered the door is pouring herself a drink. The bungalow opens right into a living room from the fifties -- a flowered couch and end tables, a rotary dial telephone, bar and bar stools, a couple of chairs, and a big TV with rabbit ears. The TV is on and muttering softly to itself.

I see now that the woman might not be Jane after all. Why would Boyd be fooling around with a woman who looks so much like his wife? Maybe he isn't really fooling around. Maybe he has a woman who looks like Jane in every one of his houses around the world -- duplicates so he doesn't have so much to pack when he travels.

"Move over by the bar," Danny says.

"What's this all about?"

"Give him the envelope," he says, and the woman hands me a big brown envelope.

She walks over to Danny who keeps the gun pointed my way. He takes the drink from her. "Go wait in the car."

She sighs like she should have seen that coming and leaves. As soon as the front door closes behind her, Danny says, "Open it."

I pull a big eight-by-ten glossy out of the envelope.

Me and Urbana on the bus. My shirt is open all the way down. She's got her hand tucked into the front of my pants. Where in the world was the photographer standing?

"Now you know," Danny says.

"No, I don't," I say.

He shoots me and goes on out to join his wife in the car.

So, now how am I supposed to save the world, Glinky?

"You can't!"

I could call a friend, but the phone will just hit me in the face and then not work anyway. I can keep scootching for the front door, but I know I'll never make it.

What would happen if I turned Glinky off? I hang a sharp belly right and squirm for the TV.

"Hey! Hey! What are you doing?"

I struggle up to sit right in front of the flickering rodent. The flaw in my plan is now evident. No buttons on the TV and no remote.

Glinky sticks out his forked tongue at me and then turns and shows me his backside, waggles his naked tail at me, makes blubbery raspberry sounds with his horse lips.

I put my palms flat against the warm glass of the screen. It's just me and the Rat from Elsewhere now. I make my last desperate move. If there are to be riots in the streets again, so be it.

I chant, "Glinky Glinky bo binky."

He screams.

"Banana fanna fo finky."

Now there are a couple of big dials and knobs on the TV.

"Me my mo minky."

Don't touch that dial!

"Glinky!"

I turn him off.

Just like that.

I hear someone making siren sounds in the distance. I hope it's the

guys with the gurney.

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