

## Double Helix, Downward Gyre

by Carl Frederick

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**On a historic scale, everything changes, and new kinds of knowledge accelerate the process. The hard part is deciding when—and how—to react.**

It seems to get worse every day.” Herrick pointed a butter knife toward his son. “I wouldn’t be surprised if, before long, the only fundable science left was Creation Science.”

“Oh, it’s not that bad, Dad.” Niels hoped he could head off another angry rant; it was not good for his father’s blood pressure. “I expect Congress—”

“Congress!” Herrick gave a harsh laugh. “As a whole, they’re as dumb as a Kansas school board.”

Niels made shushing motions. “Not so loud,” he said in a voice a little above a whisper. “It’s not safe talking like that these days.”

Herrick glanced around the restaurant. “We’re safe here, I imagine. Technically, this is New Zealand territory.” He returned his gaze to Niels. “I think it is, anyway.”

They sat at a table at Maori’s—a trendy Pacific Rim cuisine restaurant attached to the New Zealand mission to the United Nations.

Mission restaurants for the poorer countries were a source of revenue, but for wealthier countries, those with a declining birth rate, they acted as a lure to recruit immigrants. Herrick and Niels, for their weekly father/son dinners, had eaten their way through many of them. But then, acting on a recommendation, they tried Maori’s. They liked the food, had no feelings of ill will toward New Zealand, and so settled on Maori’s for their weekly culinary excursion.

Herrick grimaced. “This can’t go on,” he said, pushing away his half-eaten dessert, a chocolate-topped Pavlova. “Soon it’ll be impossible to do any scientific research at all in this country.”

Worried by the grimace, Niels watched as his father surreptitiously moved a hand over his stomach.

“And it doesn’t help,” Herrick went on, “that our government seems to mark top secret every scrap of paper down to and including toilet paper.”

“Indigestion again?” Niels tried to keep the worry out of his voice.

Herrick shrugged, then gave a smile, clearly labored. “And there’s no money for physics anymore.” He pointed, this time with his forefinger. “It’s good you’re in medical research; aging politicians need you.”

Niels knew his father was trying to move the topic away from his indigestion, and Niels, for the moment, would let him. “Actually, they *don’t* seem to need me.” Niels said. “In fact, I’ve been denied tenure.” He looked down at his hands. “Great way to end the academic year,” he added under his breath.

“What?” Herrick sat back from the table as if struck. “No! I can’t believe my alma mater would act that way. Not Yale.”

Niels forced a smile. “Some wealthy alum objected to my Evolutionary Biology course.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Nothing.” Niels stirred his coffee, even though he drank it black. “As long as I don’t make a stink about it, the university will simply ignore the situation.” For the sake of his father, he tried to downplay the insult. “My teaching and research won’t be affected. I just won’t be tenured. No big deal.”

Niels saw his father bite down and, almost as if in reflex, move his hand toward his stomach and then abruptly change direction and pick up his teacup.

“Look, Dad.” Niels leaned forward. “You’ve got to get that looked at.”

“What?”

“That indigestion.”

“It’s nothing.” Herrick chuckled. “Probably just the result of a few too many hot chili lunches at Taco Diplomacy.”

“You can’t just keep laughing it off. What are you afraid of?”

“I’m all right,” said Herrick, his voice raised.

Niels silently glowered at him.

“All right. All right,” said Herrick, wilting under the stare. “I am a little worried about it. Hypochondriac that I am, I’m afraid it might be a serious disease.”

“So what? Most everything can be treated these days.” Niels stared into his father’s eyes. “That is, if one doesn’t wait too long.”

Herrick bent his head as if critically examining his dessert. “I’m worried that the disease might have a genetic component.”

“Ah.” Niels sat back in his chair. “So that’s it.” He smiled as he speculated on a reason his father was, at his age, so set against sterilization. “Dad. Are you, by chance...” Niels felt embarrassed asking his father this. “Are you engaged in some, um, intimate behavior?”

“You mean, am I having sex these days? No ... unfortunately. Not that it’s any business of yours.”

Niels, glancing at the other diners, made shushing motions with his hands.

Herrick smiled, obviously enjoying his son’s discomfort. But the smile was fleeting. “A Genetic Component Disease automatically triggers the Genetic Patriotism Act—doubly automatically now that all medical reports are sent to the Department of Health.”

“So it might be a GCD,” said Niels. “You’re a little old to have more kids—so what, other than aesthetics, is your objection to sterilization?”

Herrick shook his head sadly. “When I was a teenager,” he said, speaking more to the table than to his son, “I was afraid of dying from some terrible disease. But now...” He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. “Almost no one dies of disease or congenital conditions.” He let out a breath. “Maybe the government’s right. Maybe the fact that we can cure most things *has* counteracted the survival of the fittest.”

“You don’t really believe that,” said Niels. “Forced sterilization for the sake of the gene pool.”

“No—” Herrick cleaned his glasses with an edge of the tablecloth, an action Niels recognized as a sign of stress. “—and I certainly don’t like the government considering me ungodly just because I happen not to have been created in God’s genetic image.”

Niels slapped a hand gently to the table. “Tomorrow, I’ll pick you up at noon. You’ve got to have a complete physical. We’ve got to know if it’s a GCD.”

“No.” Herrick shook his head.

“Why?”

“You do know that the Genetic Patriotism Act has been renewed?”

“So?”

“They slipped in a provision that children of a GCD victim must be tested for the defective genes. If they’re found, the children must be sterilized as well.”

“What? I didn’t know anything about that.”

“It’s a classified provision. It can’t be mentioned by the media.”

“The bastards!” Niels balled a fist. “Well, I’m prepared for them.” He tried for a confident smile. “You’ll get your exam. I know a good ‘back room diagnostician.’”

“A what, please?”

“Someone who can do the tests and won’t forward the results to the government.”

“I’ve heard stories,” said Herrick, “of medical blundering and even blackmail.”

“This guy’s reliable. I’ll pick you up at noon.” Niels motioned for the check. “Oh, and bring Fleabiscuit.”

“What? What does my dog have to do with this?”

“The diagnostician’s a veterinarian.”

Herrick cast a glance to the ceiling. “Oh, great! It’s good I’m not a horse. At least he won’t shoot me.”

“Don’t worry,” said Niels. “The guy has a good lab. We’ll use the cover that Fleabiscuit needs a check-up before our family holiday in—” Niels glanced around at the restaurant’s décor. “—in New Zealand.” He gave a thin smile. “The way things are going in America right now, I’m just about tempted to emigrate.”

“You and me both,” said Herrick.

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Early next morning, Niels made the appointment for his father’s exam. Then, as soon as his bank opened, Niels withdrew some cash, much more than he would have been allowed at the ATM; the exam was a cash transaction. As he stuffed the bills into his wallet, he felt he was entering uncharted waters, tawdry and dangerous. He thought about his father’s plight and decided it might do to have some insurance. Pulling out his cell phone, he did an Internet search for another kind of bank—and foreign-owned, protected from the prying nose of the government.

He found a local office of the *Zürcher Stern Samenzellenbank*, phoned, and made an appointment. He had just enough time before having to pick up his father.

At the bank, he paid to open an account, after which he was shown to a private room where he could attend to the details of his deposit. Fifteen minutes later, feeling remarkably exhilarated, he bounded out of the door of the establishment in happy possession of an anonymous numbered account at a Swiss-run sperm bank.

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At one o'clock, in his car parked across from the veterinarian's office, Niels kept watch for his father's return. While he waited, he talked on his cell phone to Susan, a colleague from the university, a postdoc in his department. She was a New Zealander, the source of the Maori's recommendation, and over the last few months she'd become rather more than just a colleague.

"We'd no choice but to use a back-room diagnostician," said Niels.

"Why?"

"The 100 Percent American Act. For genetic security, they say. Don't you know it's un-American to keep medical records from the government?"

"Couldn't he get a... a critical personage exemption, I think it's called."

Niels laughed bitterly. "Not a chance—unless you're a political leader, a televangelist, or a big-time corporate donor to the White House." He pounded a fist against the dashboard. "They're all a bunch of corrupt bastards. Pardon the language."

"I'd be careful how I talked over the phone," said Susan.

"Why? It's not as if the government can monitor all the millions of cell phone calls going on."

"Haven't you heard of the Real-time Conversation Analyzer?"

“Fine,” said Niels. “Bomb, embryo, terrorist, hijack—that should get their attention. “Revolution, assassination, abortion.”

“This is not something to joke about.”

“Why not? You either joke or go nuts.”

They talked until Niels saw the door of the veterinarian’s office open and his father step through it, pulled forward by his elderly greyhound.

“Got to go,” said Niels. “My dad’s coming back—and he doesn’t seem happy. See you at the club.” Niels slipped the phone into his jacket pocket, then leaned over and opened the passenger-side door.

Fleabiscuit jumped in, then wiggled through to the back and wedged his nose out of the partially opened rear window. Herrick tossed the end of the leash into the car and settled into the passenger seat.

“How long until you get the lab results?” said Niels as he started the car.

“Already got them,” Herrick said in a flat voice. “The vet had Insta-lab. And it was pretty obvious.”

“What is it?”

“I’d rather not talk about it.”

“A GCD?”

Herrick nodded.

“Curable, I assume.”

“Yes—if I act soon.”

Niels, white-knuckled hands on the wheel, wanted to scream. His father was gravely ill, and they were talking as if they were discussing an accountancy textbook.

“I don’t know what to do,” said Herrick.

“Susan has a plan.” Niels tried to inject some life into his voice. “You remember Susan. She’s the one who recommended Maori’s.”

“And what exactly is that plan?” Herrick’s voice sounded less than hopeful.

“I don’t know. Wouldn’t say over the phone. Says we should join her for afternoon tea at the Commonwealth Club. She said to drop by about three.”

“Fine.”

Niels pulled his car into the high-speed lane. “I’ll drop you at home and pick you up at two thirty. Okay?”

“Fine.”

They drove in silence. After a while, Niels noticed a black car behind them that seemed to be echoing his turns. *I must be getting paranoid.* For the remainder of the trip, Niels split his attention between the road ahead and the car behind.

When Niels reached his father’s house, the black car was nowhere to be seen. Niels, relieved, said goodbye to his dad and accepted a lick on the face from Fleabiscuit. Then he set off for home.

A few blocks later, Niels saw the black car again. After a flash of fear, he forced his mind calm. He’d not done anything wrong. He had nothing to fear. *At least they’re not after my dad.*



When he reached home, he didn't park, but repeatedly circled the block. The black car followed but after four circles, veered off. Niels circled twice more and then, seeing no sign of the pursuer, parked and darted into his house.

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An hour later, Niels got a phone call from his father.

"Well, the good news," said Herrick in a "not good news" tone of voice, "is that I've had my first treatment for my GCD."

"Dad," said Niels, confused. "What happened?"

"Apparently either the veterinarian or your friend Susan is a government informant."

"Are they holding you? Where are you?"

"Oh, I'm quite free," said Herrick. "They've no further need for me. They performed the—the other procedure on me and let me go."

Niels stifled a gasp. "Without appeal or due process? That can't be."

Herrick laughed without mirth. "It appears that genetic security trumps the Constitution."

"So quickly?"

"Apparently, in some matters," said Herrick, "our government is coldly efficient."

"Dad, that's horrible. We have to take this up with—"

"What's done is done," said Herrick. "It's you I'm worried about. Get out of there. They'll be coming

after you next.”

“It’s a one in two chance I don’t have the defective gene.”

“Unacceptable!”

“Dad, wait. We’ve got to meet.”

“Get out of there!” said Herrick. “I’ll contact you somehow. I don’t know how, but I’ll find a way.”

“Wait. Let’s meet at, I don’t know, at seven thirty at—”

“Don’t say it!”

“The phone? Wait. Let me think.”

“You don’t have time to think,” said Herrick almost at a shout. “If you ever want to have kids, get away. Get away while you can.”

Niels grasped at an idea. He whistled the first line of *The Whiffenpoof Song*, the signature song of the Yale singing group his father had belonged to.

“What?”

“Later, Dad. I’ll talk to you later. Eli Yale!” Niels hung up.

As he returned the handset to its cradle, Niels noticed he was shaking. He only hoped his father had understood the clue. And he felt like a heel for not rushing to Susan’s defense. There was no way Susan would have turned him in. Not Susan.

At the sound of a knock, Niels jerked his gaze from the phone to the door. He took a quick step toward

it, then froze. It took a moment for him to identify his emotion: fear—stark terror. Not since he was a kid running from school bullies had he felt like this.

He dropped prone to the floor, eyes squeezed shut, overcome with rage. Either the vet or Susan had betrayed him. He directed his hate at both. Then another thought struck. He himself might be the guilty party; maybe Susan had been right. Maybe his cell phone *was* being monitored. He felt like a rat for suspecting Susan. *Amazing how fear can even make us turn against our friends.*

After a few frozen minutes, he crawled toward the front window. Inching himself up, he peeked through an edge where the blinds allowed a pinhole-like view of the sidewalk.

He could see no one outside, but the black car was parked directly across the street. Its windows were tinted and, against the sunlit street, he could make out none of the occupants.

He stared longingly at his own vehicle—parked directly in front of the black car. Slowly, he dropped his head to below window level and crawled to the front door. There he got to his knees, engaged the dead bolt, and activated the alarm system. He felt under siege in his own house.

He skulked off to his bedroom, packed an overnight case, and then padded softly toward the back door. He stopped. That's what they wanted him to do—to go out the back. The car in front was just a ploy.

"Damn it," he whispered. "Why don't they just come in and get me?" He realized the likely answer. They wanted to take him without a fuss—without people around. This was not a police operation, but something extrajudicial.

An idea began to form. There'd be a significant flux of people on the street after the 5:42 commuter train arrived from the city. And his car had a remote starter—so in the winter, his car would be warm when he got into it. That remote starter could give him the extra few seconds he needed. He'd make a break for it when the 5:42 came in.

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Overnight case in one hand and car keys in the other, Niels peered through a gap in the blinds. His car, sleek, blue, and alluring, seemed an island of hope. He waited until he saw a wave of people flowing down the street. Taking a sharp breath, he activated his car's remote starter and then pushed the *unlock car doors* button. He flung open the door and sprinted for his car.

Running diagonally across the street, he saw the driver get out of the black car. The man held something metallic. Niels anticipated being shot down in his tracks—but then realized that what he'd thought was a gun barrel was the antenna of a transceiver. The driver fiddled with the device, and that gave Niels the crucial seconds he needed.

As he threw himself into his car, he saw a man running from behind the house toward him. Niels gritted his teeth and bore down on the accelerator. He felt like a criminal as he sped away. In the rearview mirror, he saw the black car coming after him. He'd not planned past this point. The car behind was chasing him, but to where? He had no idea. He struggled for a plan—even a thin vestige of a plan. Maybe he could try to lose himself in the city.

The black car kept its distance—following, but not overtaking. He had some breathing room. He buckled his seat belt and smiled. That simple act of fastening his seat belt gave him satisfaction, a small feeling of being in control.

Keeping one hand on the steering wheel, he fumbled for his cell phone and powered it off. He'd be unconnected, but at least no one would be able to track him. Seeing the phone display go blank, he had a sense of his tether to the world being broken. He felt like a criminal, like an alien in his own country. He returned the phone to his pocket and, as his hand encountered his wallet, he got an idea. He transferred his transit card from his wallet to his shirt pocket and drove on into the heart of the city.

Next to a major subway station, Niels screeched to a stop. Gripping his travel case, he leapt out of the car and sprinted down into the subway station. Yes, the car would acquire traffic tickets to an amount approaching the national debt of some lesser countries, but he didn't care.

He took the stairs two at a time, swiped his transit card, darted through the turnstile, and threw himself into a subway car just as its doors were closing. He had no idea where the train was going.

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Twenty minutes later, sitting on a train to God knows where, Niels found himself in mental gridlock. In mind if not in deed, he'd betrayed Susan, and he knew that not until he'd made amends could he concentrate on a plan.

Looking out the window—the train was above ground now, traversing a seamier region of the metropolis—Niels's mood echoed the landscape: bleak, lonely, forlorn.

He visualized Susan, her auburn hair and cream complexion. *My God! She's waiting for me at the Commonwealth Club. What time is it?* He pulled out his cell phone but the time display was dark; he'd forgotten he'd powered it off. Eager to apologize, he moved a finger to the power button but stopped himself, his hand turning into a fist.

When the train had rumbled to a stop at the next station, Niels ran out and searched for a pay phone—he didn't even know if pay phones still existed. But he found one and dialed the Commonwealth Club. Aware of the pounding of his heart, he waited while Susan was being paged.

"Niels. Where are you?" said Susan. "I've been so worried."

Contrite, Niels described the recent events.

"I'd still like to get together," said Susan. "Would you mind if I joined you and your father tonight? Where are you meeting?"

"Um."

"Oh," said Susan. "I understand. Are you on your cell?"

"No, a pay phone in a subway station."

"Then I wouldn't worry too much," said Susan. "We're very unlikely to be monitored."

Niels felt he had to offer an act of faith, an act of trust. "Susan. Seven thirty tonight. We're meeting at Maori's. I think it would be great if you were there."

"Thank you," she said. "I'll come around eight. That'll give you and your father some time to talk."

Niels leaned his forehead against the pay phone. God help him if his trust was misplaced.

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After several hours of riding random trains to throw off pursuers, Niels arrived at Maori's. In shirtsleeves at the door of the restaurant, he felt scruffy and underdressed.

"Do you have a reservation, sir?" asked the maitre d' in a clipped New Zealand accent. He was formally attired and looked as if he'd just come from addressing the General Assembly.

"Well, actually," said Niels, "I don't think so. I had rather a busy—"

"Could I have your name, please?"

"Niels Pederson."

As the maitre d' consulted a notebook, Niels continued, "I'm meeting people here." His hand moved to straighten his nonexistent tie. "And it's possible my secretary didn't—"

"Ah," said the maitre d', looking up from the book. "Doctor Niels Pederson. Please follow me. Your table is ready."

Niels stood perplexed for a moment; he knew he didn't have a reservation. Nervously, he glanced around and then followed the man to a prime table near the re-created waterfall surrounded by tree ferns. He ordered a chardonnay and kept an eye on a wall clock, which displayed the time in both New York and New Zealand. It was all he could do; he had no plan past this point. He didn't even know where he'd sleep this night. All reputable hotels required photo ID and a government Insta-check. Maybe there were still flophouses in the city. But he couldn't bring himself to consider that option.

At seven thirty, he began to worry that his father hadn't understood his clue. At seven forty-five, he was all but certain of it. But at seven fifty, Herrick sauntered in.

Niels rose. "Dad, I was worried."

Herrick chuckled and motioned him to sit. "That I wouldn't understand the clue?"

“Well, yeah. Especially since you’re never late.”

“The phone eavesdroppers would know I was meeting you at seven thirty, so I made sure I was somewhere else then.” He motioned for a waiter. “And as to the clue, it was rather obvious. *The Whiffenpoof Song*. Now, really!” He chuckled. ““From the tables down at Mory’s,” he sang softly, “to the place where Louie dwells.”” He chuckled again. “Maori’s, Mory’s. Bit of a stretch. It’s good I didn’t get sidetracked by wondering where Louie dwelled.”

The waiter came to their table. “Mind if I join you?” he said.

“I didn’t think waiters were allowed to do that,” said Herrick.

“Do we have any choice?” said Niels, convinced, for some reason, that the man was an operative of the Genetic Security Agency.

Looking hurt, the man pursed his lips. Then he gave a ritual smile, dropped a New Zealand travel brochure on the table, and began to walk off.

“Wait,” Herrick called after. “That was rude. Please forgive us but, you see, my son’s been under a lot of stress lately.”

The man turned and came back to the table.

“Yes, I apologize,” said Niels, pulling out a chair for the man. “I’m very sorry, but I thought you might be a government official.”

“Oh, but I am,” said the man as he sat. “Division of Tourism.”

“Tourism and Immigration, I assume,” said Herrick.

The man turned to him. “Are you interested in New Zealand?”

“Yes,” said Herrick. “I think perhaps more than you know.”

The man smiled. “Perhaps I know more than you think.”

“Such as?” said Niels, “Mister...”

“I’m Gordon Ridgedale,” said the man. “And for starters, I know you are Niels Pederson. You are thirty-seven years old, in good health, a professor of embryonics, and might be considering immigrating to New Zealand.”

“How did you ... What makes you think I’m—”

Herrick put a hand on his son’s arm. “Let’s listen,” he said softly. “This might be a way out.”

“And I must say,” Gordon went on, “that you have more than enough New Zealand immigration points.”

Herrick cleared his throat, drawing Gordon’s attention.

“And you, sir, also have sufficient points to immigrate.”

“Thank you,” said Herrick. “It’s something my son and I will have to discuss.”

“Very good.” Gordon stood. “Why don’t you have that discussion now?” He pointed to an inconspicuous door at the rear of the dining room. “Then come visit me in room six. Through that door. The door code is 4444.”

“Not very secure, is it?” said Herrick.

“Oh, it’s not to keep out foreign operatives and other riffraff; they’d doubtless break in through the back. It’s just so as not to tempt honest blokes.”



Niels gazed at the man, framed against the waterfall and the tree ferns. “Does every potential immigrant get such royal treatment?”

Gordon smiled. “If they’ve been recommended by NZ-SIS, they do.”

Niels wrinkled his nose in puzzlement, but then he caught sight of Susan walking into the dining area. He waved her over.

Herrick and Niels stood as she approached. Gordon turned to follow their gaze. “Hello, Susan,” he said.

“Oh.” Susan shifted her gaze from Niels to Gordon. “Hi, Gordon. Have I missed much?”

“You know each other,” said Niels. Mentally, he slapped himself for stating the obvious.

“Niels, dear boy.” Susan gave a soft, good-natured laugh. “There are not very many of us Kiwis in New York at the moment.”

“Are you here to recommend another restaurant to us?” asked Herrick, coolly.

“I beg your pardon?” said Susan.

“You’ll have to forgive my father.” Niels pulled out a chair for Susan. “He’s somehow gotten the idea that you’re a CIA intelligence agent.”

“I am an intelligence agent, actually.”

“What?”

Susan sat, as did Herrick. Niels, stunned by Susan’s admission, remained standing.

“NZ-SIS, New Zealand Intelligence,” said Susan. “Part-time, of course.”

“Oh.” Niels slowly sat.

“I’ve suggested,” said Gordon, “that our guests join me in room six after they’ve had some time to discuss the situation.”

“Am I invited?” said Susan.

Gordon stood. “You’re the guest of honor.” He nodded politely to each of them, turned, and walked to the door.

“So.” Niels bit his lower lip. “You’re an intelligence agent. And I assume that’s how this Gordon person knows all about us.”

“Yes. But I’m here as your friend.” Susan placed a hand over his. “You’ve got to believe that.”

“Well, *I* believe it,” said Herrick. He smiled warmly.

Susan smiled back. “Thank you.” She turned to Niels. “I should let you and your father have that discussion.” She stood. “When you’re finished, I’ll see you in room six. Did Gordon give you the key code?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” She patted him on the shoulder. “I really think you should emigrate. You’d have a great future in New Zealand.”

“Could it be arranged?” asked Herrick. “Now? Immediately?”

“Yes. That’s the whole idea.” Susan pointed to the unobtrusive door and walked toward it.

When she'd gotten out of earshot, Herrick said, "She's right, of course. There's no future for you in the States at the moment."

"It would solve a lot of problems." Niels sighed. "But abandoning my country. Do you really think it's the right thing to do?"

"Your country?" said Herrick almost at a whisper. He smiled. "Yes, it's the right thing," he said with some hesitation. "But I can't say I'm not biased by my desire for grandchildren."

Niels nodded sadly. He knew he should mention the *Samenzellenbank*, but he felt clinically uncomfortable about bringing up such subjects with his dad.

"You'll marry her, of course."

"What? Dad!"

"I'm not going with you," said Herrick, softly.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm comfortable with my life here. I'm not in danger—not any more. The government will leave me alone now. And anyway, it would be hard to flee the country with Fleabiscuit."

"I'm certainly not going to leave without you."

"You must." Herrick leaned forward, eye to eye. "You'd be doing it for me; I do want those grandchildren." He gazed off toward the door. "New Zealand's not the end of the world." He turned back to Niels. "Well, maybe it is. But we both have computer-cams."

Niels opened his mouth to protest, but Herrick waved him quiet. "On emigration," said Herrick, "the government reclaims private Social Security accounts. And, frankly, I need the money."

Niels balled his fists. “Damn this so-called government of ours.”

Herrick slumped in his chair. He looked old and tired. “Things will swing back to normal,” he said. “The pendulum always does.”

“Pendulum? It’s more like a descending spiral.”

Herrick drew himself up straight in his chair. “You’d better give me your house keys,” he said in a business-like tone. “I’ll ship stuff to you when you need it. And where did you leave your car?”

“My car. Forget about it. The traffic fine will be more than its value.” Niels sniffed. “Dad, I can’t believe it’s come to this.”

Herrick took off his glasses and wiped his eyes. “The pendulum will swing back,” he said. “I’m sure of it. You’ll be able to return. Although after living in New Zealand, I’m not sure you’ll want to.”

“Dad, I…”

“Go. Don’t keep them waiting. The decision’s been made.” Herrick reached an arm around Niels’s shoulder. “I love you, son.” Quickly, as if embarrassed by the show of emotion, Herrick withdrew the arm. “Go! Please!” Then he added in an unemotional voice. “What about your passport?”

“I always carry it. I prefer it to these damned National ID Cards.” Slowly, Niels stood. He exchanged a forced smile with his father, turned, and strode to the door. Before keying the lock code, he glanced back and saw his father idly toying with the remains of his chardonnay.

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Room six seemed to be half office and half lab. Cold fluorescent lights illuminated a desk, some chairs, a worktable, and a few wooden cabinets. A mountain landscape filled almost an entire wall in the thirty-by-twenty-foot, windowless room.

Gordon had just set up a forearm scanner on the worktable. He motioned Niels to come over. “Susan,” he said, without taking his eyes from his work, “how would you feel about a summer vacation back home—at your government’s expense? Our embryonics professor here could well do with a guide.”

Niels inserted his arm in the reader and looked over at Susan. She sat in a swivel chair, a bemused expression on her face.

“It’s good timing, actually,” she said, looking at Niels. “There’s no summer money for postdocs—not for foreign nationals, at any rate.” She transferred her gaze to Gordon. “So yes, I’d be happy to spend a few months back on free soil if the agency will foot the bill.”

“I think we can do that,” said Gordon, “considering the nature of the catch.” He glanced at Niels. “No offense, of course.”

“It’s all right. I don’t mind being treated like a prize trout.”

Gordon smiled, then turned his attention to the reader. “It’s an advanced Level-II biochip,” he said. “Can’t mask it. It’ll have to come out.”

Niels jerked his head around to look at the screen. “I thought only government agencies could read those.”

Gordon, his eyes locked on the monitor, smiled. “You thought that, did you?” He flipped off the scanner and swiveled around to face Niels. “Not to worry,” he said. “We have a good doctor attached to the mission.”

“Not a veterinarian, I hope.”

“What?” Gordon seemed puzzled for a moment, and then said, “Ah, you’re referring to New Zealand sheep. Yes, we do have a lot of them. But I think you’ll find New Zealand rather more advanced than you imagine.” He laughed quietly, seemingly to himself. “You Americans don’t much travel abroad these days, do you?”

Niels shook his head.

“Pardon me for lecturing,” said Gordon. “But your politicians like to say that the US is at the forefront of science. That might have been true once, but not anymore. In New Zealand, we don’t turn our backs on science. Instead of your Genetic Security laws, we employ science to strengthen the genes and to—”

“Not *my* laws, if you please,” said Niels.

Gordon gave a tight-lipped smile. “Sorry. Even we diplomats have to vent sometimes.”

“Excuse me,” said Susan. “But how are you planning to get me, us, home?”

“We’ll get you into Canada, then book you on a plane to Auckland.” Gordon turned to Niels. “We’ll arrange for you both to be on the same flight.”

*The same flight.* Niels felt a furtive flush of pleasure.

“The Genetic Patriotism Act allows your government to act outside the law,” said Gordon, “and that works to our advantage. Since you’re not officially charged with any crime, you can enter Canada—that is, if we can get you there.”

“And can you?” said Niels.

Gordon sprung to his desk and opened a drawer. “We can find the little mouse holes in the fortress wall. We’ve done it frequently.” He withdrew a file folder. “We’ve, just as a contingency, already arranged your papers.” Opening the folder, he motioned Niels and Susan to the desk. “We’ll slip you through at Niagara Falls. You’ll pose as newlyweds.” He looked up from the folder and into their faces. “Objections?”

Niels feeling himself blush, shook his head. Suddenly, he thought of his father. The man would be laughing himself silly.

Sitting at his desk, Gordon took a long breath. “Speaking for my country, we’ll be very happy to have you as a new citizen.” He pulled a form from the file folder and placed it on the desk, facing Niels. “But, I’m afraid one can’t escape paperwork. If I could just ask you to fill this out.”

“*Ka mate, ka mate*,” said Susan, looking over Niels’s shoulder at the form. “There’s always paperwork, isn’t there?”

“Give that girl a chocolate fish,” said Gordon, a smile on his face.

Niels gazed quizzically at them both.

“It’s death. It’s death,” said Susan. “In Maori.”

Niels persisted with his puzzled gaze.

“*Haka*,” said Gordon as if that would explain everything, “and the chocolate fish: Kiwiana—New Zealand culture, so to speak, popular culture.”

Still, Niels glared.

“The *haka* is a rich, Maori ritual dance,” said Gordon. “And since the All Blacks adopted the *haka*, pretty much all of us have.”

“All Blacks?”

“Our national Rugby team,” said Susan.

“Your national team has only black players?” said Niels in astonishment, wondering if New Zealand was quite as enlightened a nation as he’d assumed.

“What?” Now Gordon looked confused. “Oh,” he laughed, “I see what you mean. No. All Blacks refers to the color of their uniforms.”

Gordon and Susan exchanged amused, knowing glances.

Suddenly Niels felt a deep sadness come over him. For the first time, he appreciated that New Zealand really was another country, with its own traditions, its own culture. Maybe he was being hasty. Yes, he felt like an outsider in his own country; how would he feel in another? Perhaps he shouldn't rush into this.

"The form," said Gordon.

"What?" Niels stared down at the sheet of paper, an island of lined whiteness on a sea of black mahogany. "Oh."

"This is an important decision you're making," said Gordon, gently. "If you're having second thoughts, this is a good time to have them."

"No, not really second thoughts." Niels paused. "But I'm torn," he said. "On one hand, I want to get the hell out. But my instinct says to stay and fight."

"Fight?" Susan scowled. "How can you, single-handed, fight the entire United States? They can do bad things to you."

"I've made a deposit at the *Zurich Samenzellenbank*." Niels balled his fists. "I'm ready to take on the bastards."

"The *what* bank?" said Suzan, her head canted in puzzlement.

"It's ... I'll tell you later."

"You *are* having second thoughts," said Gordon. "Aren't you?"

"No, I..." Niels bit his lip. "I wonder if we might invite my father in; this concerns him, too."

"Certainly." Gordon stood.



“Thank you.”

“I can appreciate your misgivings.” Gordon waved Susan to stay seated, then led Niels toward the door. They passed into the corridor and then on to the door to the restaurant. Gordon opened it and took a step out. Abruptly, he backed up, forcing Niels to retreat into the corridor. He closed the door quietly and then turned to Niels.

“By chance, were you or your father expecting company?”

“No. Why?”

“There are a couple of chaps in black suits sitting with your father.” Gordon led the way down the corridor to a different room, one filled with electronics. Inside, he pulled a chair up to a video display and motioned Niels to do the same.

The monitor showed the seating area of the restaurant. Using a joystick, Gordon zoomed in on Herrick’s table. There, one on each adjacent chair to Herrick’s, sat two men, all but identical save for their different colored ties.

“I wish I could hear what they’re saying,” said Niels. “Especially the red-tie guy. He seems to be threatening my dad.”

“*Mox venit.*” Gordon moved his hand toward a bank of switches. “Coming right up.”

“More Maori?”

“Latin.” Gordon threw a switch.

“...*easier for you if you cooperate with us,*” said red-tie.

“*Go to hell,*” said Herrick. “*I’ve done nothing to warrant your loving attention.*”

“The tables are bugged?” said Niels.

“Unfortunately, it is necessary,” said Gordon. “Self-defense, in a manner of speaking.”

The man in the blue tie spoke. “*We just want to speak to your son.*”

“*I told you,*” said Herrick. “*He hasn’t arrived yet.*”

“*Then we’ll wait with you,*” said blue-tie. “*We’ll even buy you another drink.*”

“*Thank you,*” said Herrick. “*But my son is notoriously imprecise concerning time. It might be a long wait.*”

“Your father should be in my line of work,” said Gordon. “He has a talent for it.”

Red-tie pounded a fist on the table. “*This is serious, Dr. Pederson. Your son is wanted for questioning for criminal violations of the Genetic Terrorism Act.*”

“*What are you talking about?*” said Herrick.

Just then, Susan walked into the room. “I wondered what happened to you two.”

Niels shushed her and pointed to the screen.

“*Conspiring to propagate defective genes,*” said red-tie. “*His sperm bank account has been impounded.*”

“Sperm bank?” said Susan.

“*Sperm bank?*” For a moment, Herrick seemed bemused. Then he took on a more aggressive expression. “*You can’t do that,*” he said. “*That’s a clear violation of banking laws.*”

“Violation!” Niels shouted at the screen. “*I’ve* been violated.”

“*Well, we’ve done it,*” said red-tie. “*You can take it up with your congressman.*”

Suddenly, Herrick looked concerned. “*Does that mean that my son does indeed have the faulty gene?*”

“*How do I know?*” said red-tie. “*That test requires a court order.*”

“That does it!” said Niels.

“*Well, fine,*” said Herrick. “*You’re welcome to wait with me. But I must say, you’re not exactly my preferred drinking companions.*”

The three at Herrick’s table sat silently glaring at each other.

Niels turned to Susan. “You’re right. I can’t fight them—not from here, at any rate. I’d decided to stay and fight, but now I’ve no choice. Emigration seems my only option.”

“I’d like to think,” Gordon cut in, “that New Zealand is a desirable place to be—and not merely a no-choice option.”

“Yes. Sorry. You’re right.” Niels smiled. “And now that I’ve made the choice, albeit under duress, I’m very much looking forward to being a new New Zealander.”

“Excellent!” said Gordon. He stroked his chin. “But with your father’s guests out there,” he said after a pause, “getting you to the safety of Canada poses something of a challenge.”

“Wait. I’ve an idea.” Niels stood. “Is there a computer with Internet access I can use?”

“Yes,” said Gordon, getting to his feet. “But I can’t guarantee it will be secure. In fact, I think I can guarantee that it isn’t.”

“Good. I’m counting on it *not* being secure.” He swiveled to Susan. “I’d like you to take a message to my dad.”

“Sure.” Susan stood as well. “But I don’t see how I could get a private message to him—not with those two suits out there with him.”

Niels gave a bark of a chuckle. “I don’t want it to be private. Tell him you got a phone message from his son saying he can’t make it to the restaurant.”

“Ah, I see,” said Gordon.

“And tell him,” Niels went on, “that his son said that they could talk at ... at eleven o’clock at the place where ... Let me think ... where they used to watch the planes.” He looked expectantly at Susan. “Okay?”

“Okay.” Susan touched his arm. “That’s sweet. Where did you two watch planes when you were a boy?”

“What? Planes? Nowhere? But my dad’s sharp. He’ll figure out what to do.” He ushered Susan to the door. “Tell him the message before he gets a chance to greet you. I think that would work better.”

Susan left the room while Niels and Gordon went to the video monitor.

“I’m afraid I don’t fully comprehend your idea yet,” said Gordon.

Niels pointed to the screen. They watched as Susan walked to the table, delivered the message and started back.

“Well,” said Herrick, rolling to his feet. “*It’s been pleasant, but I’ll say goodnight, now.*”

The other two at the table looked at each other, then stood. “*Where are you going?*” said blue-tie.

“*Home,*” said Herrick. “*It’s past my bedtime.*”

“*Where did you two watch those planes?*” said red-tie.

“*I have no idea.*”

“*Look,*” said red-tie. “*We could take you into custody, you know.*”

“*On what grounds?*”

“*Just temporary custody—just until eleven o’clock.*”

“*On what grounds?*” Herrick repeated.

Red-tie smiled. “*No grounds.*”

They glowered at each other for a few moments. Then Herrick swiveled and strode toward the door. “*If you’re going to do it, then do it,*” he called over his shoulder. “*Otherwise, good night.*” Followed by the two men in suits, Herrick left the restaurant.

“So far, so good.” Niels looked to Gordon. “Now for the Internet, if you would.”

“Certainly.” Gordon switched on a computer and logged on. “It’s all yours.”

Niels searched and called up the Air Canada website. “I’m going to make a reservation on a midnight flight to wherever it’s going—in Canada, that is.” He found a flight, NYC to Vancouver, and began to book it. Then he stopped. “This won’t work,” he said. “I can’t use my credit card. That’ll tell our friends that I’m here.”

“Ah, I see,” said Gordon. “You’re setting up a false trail.” He chuckled. “Nice. But we’ll use a consular account. You can pay us back sometime when you’re settled in New Zealand.”

“Thanks.” Niels stood and Gordon took his place at the computer. “Maybe you can cancel at the last minute.” He turned to Susan. “Are you okay with Gordon’s plan?”

“Going to Niagara Falls?”

“For a night of wedded bliss in the land of make-believe,” said Niels, giving a hint of a mock bow.

“Make-believe wedded bliss, that is,” said Susan, smiling.

“Sadly, so.”

“Then,” said Gordon from the keyboard, “as newlyweds, you’ll simply stroll over the Peace Bridge to Canada. Our Commonwealth cousins make it a point not to harass visitors.”

“And fortunately,” said Niels, “the US is much more concerned with keeping people out than keeping them in. And they’ll be looking for me, not a couple.”

“Fine,” said Susan. “Although it would have been nice to pack and settle my affairs: cancel my lease, forward my mail, that sort of stuff.”

“Not to worry,” said Gordon. “The consulate will take care of it.”

Niels bit his lower lip. “All we have to do is figure out how to get out of the restaurant and to the Port Authority bus terminal. I’m not convinced our friends won’t be keeping an eye on this restaurant.”

“Not a problem,” said Gordon. “My car has diplomatic plates. I’ll leave with Susan and meet you at, say, the corner of Forty-sixth and Third Avenue in say, twenty minutes. I’ll pick you up and drop you off at the terminal. You’ll leave by the service entrance, dressed as a waiter.”

Niels looked at the man with new respect. “You’ve obviously done this sort of thing before.”

“On occasion.”

\* \* \* \*

As the Greyhound bus pulled out of the Port Authority Station, bound for Toronto, Niels let out a breath. “Well, we’re on our way.”

Susan patted him on the knee. “I know a good New Zealand restaurant at the Falls—Canadian side, of course,” she said, her face showing gentle amusement. “Expatty’s Mutton House. A lot of former Americans hang out there. You’ll like it.”

“Former American.” Niels shook his head. “Already, I feel like an observer of life—not a participant. I feel old—a retiree.”

“Old.” Susan chuckled. “I’m sure when we dine at Expatty’s, someone will invite you to join age.”

“Thanks a lot.”

“No, I mean A.G.E., The American Government in Exile.”

“What?”

“Their aim is,” said Susan, speaking softly, just barely above the sound of the engine, “by all legal means, to promote regime change in Washington.”

“Geez!” Niels shook his head. “I can see why you’re talking softly,” he said. “These days, even just speaking this way could get you put away.”

“On an airplane, maybe,” said Susan. “But not on a bus; nobody pays attention to people on buses.”

\* \* \* \*

Sixteen hours later, Niels and Susan, hand in hand, strolled casually across the Rainbow Bridge separating the American and Canadian cities of Niagara Falls. Canadian Customs passed the ersatz newlyweds through without trouble. They had a pleasant dinner at Expatty's, where Niels indeed was invited to join A.G.E. And he did.

It was well after midnight when they boarded their bus to Toronto and almost dawn when they hopped a taxi to the Lester Pearson International Airport.

A day later, after much sleep at fifty thousand feet, they deplaned at Auckland International and took the shuttle bus to the New Zealand Immigration Centre. Susan waited in the reception area while, in a bright, cheerful office, a Mr. Clarke helped Niels with his papers.

"Welcome to New Zealand, Dr. Pederson," said Mr. Clarke. "Speaking for my country, we're very pleased to have you as a prospective new citizen."

Niels looked over the man's shoulder at the New Zealand flag adorning the wall.

Mr. Clarke turned to follow Niels's gaze.

"A rather different star-spangled banner," said Niels, his eyes on the flag's four red stars representing the Southern Cross.

"Quite!" Mr. Clarke chuckled. "We rather think of ourselves as the land of the freer and the home of the braver."

Niels himself chuckled. "Words by Francis Scott Kiwi, I presume."

Mr. Clarke raised his eyebrows.

Again, Niels chuckled. "You must forgive my giddiness," he said. "It's partially due to time change and



lack of regular sleep, but mainly, I think, it's your openness. I've spent most of my life in Fortress America, the world's largest gated community."

"Gated?" Mr. Clarke seemed surprised. "We regard it more as *quarantined*."

\* \* \* \*

After Niels had filled out some forms and had gotten his visa upgraded, he rejoined Susan in the reception area. She took him by the hand. "Come on," she said. "I know a good restaurant."