INTERTEXT

An Electronic Fiction Magazine

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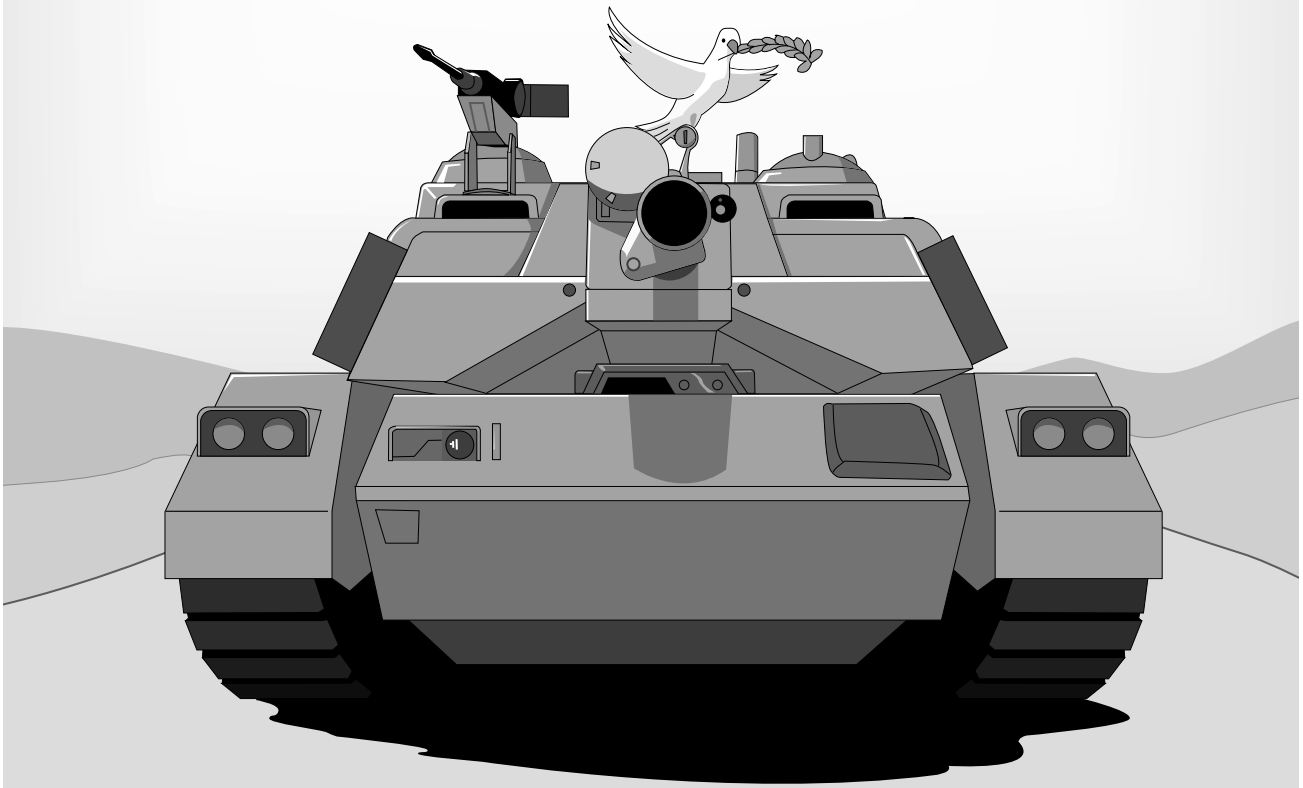
FIRST ISSUE

‘A War In the Sand’ by DANIEL APPELQUIST

PHIL NOLTE

GREG KNAUSS



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First*Text*

Jason Snell

Welcome to Inter*Text*, the new net magazine devoted (well, I'd like to think it will be devoted) to the publication of fiction.

First off, I'd like to thank Jim McCabe, the man who produced *Athene*, for all the work he did on that magazine.

This magazine takes its place, and I hope that you will all find the stories we publish to be entertaining and thought-provoking. Publishing a commercial magazine is a risky business — electronically publishing a non-commericial magazine is risky *and* essentially untried. The only similar magazine that publishes in both ASCII and PostScript™ format in the United States that I know of is Daniel Appelquist's *Quanta,* which has been published since Fall, 1989. (The other netmagazines are *Dargonzine*, which is distributed in ASCII format only, and the *Guildsman*, a roleplaying journal.)

First, a little bit about myself: I'm a Junior at Revelle College at the University of California, San Diego, majoring in Communication with a minor in Literature/Writing. I've been writing fiction since I was in elementary school, though none of it has been professionally published yet. Of course, I haven't submitted any of it, so there's nobody to blame but myself.

In addition to my schoolwork, I put in a ridiculous amount of time at UCSD's school newspaper, the *Guardian*. I'm in my second year at the paper, and I'm the News Editor.

This newspaper thing figures into Inter*Text* in a big way. Namely, this publication is being laid out on the Macintosh computers at the *Guardian* offices. Right now, in fact, I'm sitting at the keyboard of a Macintosh IIfx. I have a Macintosh at home, but I felt that I really needed to use the best when working for the readers out there.

Well, okay, I'll be honest — the IIfx is a really neat toy, and I figured laying Inter*Text* out on this machine would be a good deal of fun. Indeed it is.

What do I expect from this magazine? All I really want to do is bring good stories to the people who subscribe. I'll be hunting down stories on any subject from all over the network, and hopefully we can put out an issue every two months. I'm hoping to alternate with the publication schedule of *Quanta*, so the two magazines will dovetail into a semi-monthly production schedule.

Quanta, if you didn't know, is a bi-monthly net magazine — and its specialty is Science Fiction. Inter*Text*, on the other hand, is for all kinds of fiction. I don't mind publishing SF here, but since *Quanta* is an established magazine with a specific format, I'd expect most of the SF to go there.

Then again, since people who use the net seem to be forward-thinking in nature, I wouldn't be surprised to find that there's so much SF out there that I end up running quite a bit of it. It doesn't matter what kind of fiction appears in Inter*Text*… it's up to you.

Within this issue you'll find an interesting collection of stories, to say the least. A few stories (but not as many as I had hoped) fell into my lap for this issue, including two from *Quanta*'s Dan Appelquist, one by myself, and one by my Assistant Editor Phil Nolte. Still, I'd hope that Inter*Text* won't be dominated by "editor-writers", and so I encourage everyone to submit their fiction. There are some stories (especially non-SF stories) that have no other net outlet, and so you might still see stories by editors here, but we'll try to keep it to a minimum.

(For example, next issue I'll probably end up running another story written by me, just because it's not SF and so I can't really get it into *Quanta*.)

Dan Appelquist's "Anticipation of the Night" is a fascinating piece of work… quite strange, yes, but very interesting. His other story, "A War in the Sand," was sort of written because of this issue's cover. I sent Dan a template of Inter*Text* that jokingly listed a story called "War in the Sand." I guess Dan took me up on it. Anyway, those stories and the closing pieces by Greg Knauss ("The Talisman," a loopy Stephen King parody, and "Schrödinger's Monkey," a deep contemplation of quantum mechanics and bananas) form what I'd like to think of as a pair of strange bookends: two to welcome you to this first issue and two to wrap it up.

In between are Nolte's "Direct Connections," (which we're printing under sad circumstances — Phil gave it to me only after *Amazing Stories* rejected it), a story by me, and stories by Andrea Payne and Mary Anne Walters. I thank everyone for submitting and helping me out with this issue.

Some people have asked about an FTP site for

back issues of this magazine, and for those who'd rather not have the issue pop up in their mailer. Well, with great thanks to Brian Kantor of UCSD Network Operations, Inter*Text* will have an FTP site on `network.ucsd.edu`— look in the `intertext` directory (of course).

Before I go, I'd like to thank everyone who helped out with the creation of this magazine. It has been three months since I began working on this magazine, and many people have contributed. The PostScript cover artist for this issue is Jeff Quan, Graphics Editor of the *Guardian* and Macintosh Graphics God. When I picked the cover of the PostScript edition in November, I didn't know that it would be even more relevant now.

I'd also like to thank Dan Appelquist for giving me help on how to distribute the magazine and for testing the validity of my PostScript code, *zoetrop@ucscb.ucsc.edu* for giving me a program that corrected a major PostScript problem, Jim McCabe for his help in easing the transition and allowing me to use the *Athene* mailing list, *Guardian* Design Editor James Collier both for saying he liked the *Inter*Text design and for taking the picture of me that appears on page three, and, of course, my assistant editors Geoff Duncan and Phil Nolte.

And thanks to all of you for subscribing to the magazine. Feel free to send us letters with your comments about things we should change, things we shouldn't, and anything else you'd like to know. Geoff, Phil, and I will be sure to listen.

A War in the Sand

Daniel Appelquist

Last night I heard rockets. The sound was a familiar one, but it still somehow manages to grab hold of my spine. I lay there, on my concrete bed, shaking, trying not to think of tomorrow. I can't say where the rockets were coming from, or where they were going to. I heard no explosions last night, but perhaps it would have been better if I had. The explosions of the past few nights somehow had the intensity to jar me out of the realm of conscious thought, turning me into a creature of mere instinct, my will to survive primary. The sounds of rockets only made me think harder about who I was, where I was and when the madness would end.

Last week, my cousin and aunt left, setting out on the long trek across the plain, the no man's land. I don't think I will ever see them again. I don't know why I didn't go with them. It had nothing to do with pride, nothing to do with a love of country. Perhaps it was the nagging thought that an escape from the place I have called home would constitute its ultimate destruction. I have no wish to become a refugee, to abandon all I have known, to become a nameless no-one, fleeing like a cockroach from a burning building.

I have heard a rumor that the tanks of the enemy are on their way, rolling in a ceaseless procession through the vast desert sands. If they arrive, they will find no resistance here, in this pile of broken concrete, once a town. I welcome them now — not because they are right, but because they represent an end, a bringing to a close of this ungodly catastrophe. I will greet them with open arms.

This morning, there was smoke on the horizon, a column of dark grey painted on a backdrop of lighter grey. Grey is a color I have become well acquainted with of late. The very air here is thick with a grey soot, a residue from past bombings. A rain will sometimes wash the air, leaving it clear for an hour or two, until the bombs return and the cycle begins again. Lately, there have been no bombings, but neither has there been any rain, so the dust remains, settling only slowly onto the already debris-laden ground.

I went in search of food today, thinking that I might find some bottled water, some canned fish. All I found was a ripped child's cover-all, stained with blood. I stood there for a long while, trying to remember who had lived there, who the small owner of this garment might have been. Discouraged, I returned to my shelter, the basement of some now unrecognizable building.

When I reached the entrance to my shelter, I found a small boy on his way out, shirtless, obviously under-nourished, clutching as many of my supplies as he could carry in the tattered remains of a turban. I was enraged, beyond all reason. I struck him, I don't know how many times, I think I saw in him all that was wrong with us, all the weaknesses that had brought this calamity upon us. After the child ran away, screaming, I sat down in the middle of the scattered cans the child had dropped and cried. I had been reduced to my own object of hatred in that moment. What monsters are we men. Our civilization is pretense. Our science, a sham. Our kindness, a convenience. We would build sprawling empires out of dust.

But when the bombs begin to drop, all our false faces drop with them. Carefully constructed worlds crumble noiselessly at our feet. I stood there in the street for a long time, looking up at the sky, silently cursing God for bringing us to this, then cursing myself.

The engine-roar of a formation of war planes shrieking overhead brought me out of my reverie. How like birds they were, I thought. How graceful in their movements. How awesome in flight. No. Not birds. Birds do not rain destruction upon cities and towns. As if to answer my thoughts, a group of vultures ascended in rapid, flapping chaos from behind a mound of earth. I did not look to see what their quarry had been. Perhaps a friend. Perhaps a relative. I bid them a silent farewell, picked up my cans and descended into my shelter.

Now, I wait for the tanks, for the soldiers. There is no feeling, only a vast, empty nothingness in my head. Now I hear the rockets again, and now the explosions. Why have I bothered? I should have let the child get away with my cans. The nourishment that now keeps my brain alive would have gone to much better use in his mouth. Perhaps his thoughts would weigh not so heavily upon his brow. I wonder when they will come for me, when the fire from the skies will finally seek out my safe haven and make a mockery of my fight for survival. Now? Now?

Now.

Anticipation Of the Night

Daniel Appelquist

Satan, the wiles of the immaculate beast return yet to further trouble my already derided spirit. And what should I have expected, I in my innermost protected sanctum, the fire light of those withered memories casting a pale black shadow upon my craggy pock-marked face.

It was only here, in the tower I created with my own pride, my foolish arrogance, that I felt truly safe, and it was here that the battle over my soul, having been planned and replanned for centuries, was finally fought, and lost. I say this in no uncertain terms, mind you. I have succumbed to that hate, that uncontrollable desire to which all pretend innocence. I have made my peace with it and in doing so I have surrendered, the half-truths of my life becoming full lies, at least now honest in their untruthfulness. I look upon others, those who pretend an existence apart from evil, apart from that which controls, that which contorts, and I laugh. In a corner of my heart I long for that time, the time of ignorance, of blindness punctuated by a joy so foreign to me now that I think I would not recognize it, or would mistake it for pain or anguish.

Call me, then, Jeremiah. I am a man, and yet my heart is the heart of the beast, the heart of the man before Man. My only hunger now is the burning Lack, that which drives me on to commit atrocity after atrocity in hope of fulfillment. The time of my mortal hunger has long passed. My corporeal nourishment provided to me by mechanisms and bodily subterfuge, I cheat Death of her prize quite glibly. Mine is the best life money can buy.

Ah Death, how fair you are, and yet how you must despise me for putting off our wedding date so rudely and so often. We will be joined, Death, you and I — but not yet. I have a little business to attend to first.

And so in the first year of this, a new eon on Earth, I sit, awake, for, in this state, even sleep is robbed from my hardly human body. They come to me, my minions, my demons, and show me things, proofs of their atrocious acts, their foulness reeking through my mind as their memories become absorbed into my own. For them, I have become a bank, a God, and father confessor, rolled into an incongruous one. How they must revere me, my minions. They come to me to deposit their memories, and by doing so to share their experiences, thus to make each act they commit sacred in some small way. A link — to transcend prayer, talk, all earthly modes of expression and cut to the quick. In the instant I sense their waking thoughts (unable to truly break through, to take ACTION!) I become more than myself, and I sense them becoming part of me, their life stories only sub-plots of my own. Perhaps some of them think they control me, perhaps they think they use me for their own purposes, but in their hearts, they fear.

'Jerem', they call me: 'The Reawakened'. My throne, a bed where my wasting body, beyond atrophy, sits vestigially, omnipotent. From there, I sit and relate to them visions of times long past, of things long forgotten; of days when men of power, ruling with steel fists, would stare eye to eye, knowing that even a flinch would silence a million voices, even the memories of whom would be reduced to a puff of smoke. There were such men, and I was among them. My memory of those days is crystal clear. I can lose myself in those memories and I often do, letting the players of my mind act out scenes from my past. It is only the most recent of memories that I now find strangely obscured, no doubt the product of my decrepit brain — ah what a fair instrument you have been.

Some have said that the Brain is not the true center of one's soul; that in this explanation there is no beauty, no harmony to show God's divine influence. They know nothing. Within the beautiful symmetry of the Brain is the ability to have such thoughts, such awful, grinding examples of mortality, that even I have been loath to look upon them. I have known Brains, oh yes. So many that they defy counting. The myth of the mind, that attempt by man to raise his faculties above the level of a simple chemical reaction, beyond nerve and synapse, is his last, greatest lie to himself. There is no mind, only the Brain, that juicy repository of all that makes us truly and grittily human, even to the last.

It is not man we are truly searching for but the image of man, which is embellished within our consciousness through re-telling and re-telling. It is that archetypal hero for which we forever search, unable to come to terms, finally and satisfactorily with the

idea that he does not exist, or has died away. In the time of death, perhaps, we come to this realization and grasp for life to be reborn into this new knowledge, but by then it is too late, the dying embers of our past cannot kindle anew the fire of our forbidden future. We are consigned to once more trace the same circle, forever going back and forth without ever truly knowing ourselves or those around us. For all real purposes, blind, deaf and dumb.

In my false death, my trickery, I have surpassed that terrible knowledge. I no longer search for man or for any sort of earthly fulfillment, save the one single sinking Purpose. See them gather around me in futile hope that they might absorb a measure of greatness, of ultimate power: my acolytes, my priests.

Once, I was possessed of earthly flesh, but that flesh has melted away. It exists, and yet it does so only as a convenience. Once my emotions were such that oftentimes I would close my eyes and weep inwardly, or smile the smile of true happiness. There is nothing that delights me now. I remember when I awoke, after they had taken my body from its cryogenic crypt. "Lead us," they had pleaded, those elite, those men of power. "Bring us power, for in the ways of distrust, we are mere pupils. *You* are the professor-professor."

I resented them at first. I thought them mad to bring me back. I did not want this Godhood that was being foisted upon me, so fresh out of the grave. But it was too late. I had been deified long before my awakening. I remember my morbid fascination with the texts that described my deeds of life. How inaccurate they often were, and sometimes how stunningly correct. They knew truths that had been kept, I thought, only between myself and my own inner confessor, but of my own inner thoughts they knew nothing. Thus my re-awakening, my bane. That I should have been brought back into this world, this never-ending pain.

How I resisted, then, and how they fought me. They did not ever openly oppose me, but their expectations were a ladder, each rung bringing more protestations, yet still leading downwards into unknown abysses. I know now that I was true evil from the moment lucky sperm met unexpectant egg.

And then, resigned to a life such as they had planned, I resolved myself to change this world, this ruined landscape of man's blind stupidity. "Has man not reached the stars?" I asked them in my foolishness. "A foolish dream." they replied. "The planets, then, what of the colonies, teeming with fresh insight, noble spirit and purpose," to which they replied "there never were such places. There never was such a spirit." And in that moment, I despaired. I thought then, in my ambition, that I would bring about a change, a tornado of progress that would shake the foundations of the earth. I was, instead, drawn into the whirlpool of an ever decaying, dead planet.

Now, my minions leave my fatherly care, to destroy, to rape whatever still exists in this filthy, dying world, to release the dragons. Ah, my sweet Delores, if only you could see me now. When I killed you I kept you with me throughout all time, forever reinventing your immaculate psyche. Now they release the Gorgon. Split the fragile egg of your own birthplace. Return its dust to that which, in a child's breath, created all that now is. I know you truly, now, Death. I am your angel. Encircle me with your eager arms and let us embrace.

Daniel Appelquist da1n+@andrew.cmu.edu

Is a senior studying Cognitive Science at Carnegie Mellon University. In his spare time, in addition to sometimes writing obscure fiction, he publishes *Quanta*, the electronic magazine of Science Fiction and Fantasy. He resides in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with his girlfriend, Roberta, and his cat, Emma (more commonly known as the Psycho-Kitten). He plans on spending the remainder of this year in a desperate search for employment.

Direct Connection

Phil Nolte

A Whitman's sampler lay with its lid open on the coffee table. Inside, a jumble of dark brown waxed paper cups lay empty and in disarray. In fact, only four of the little cups still contained their chocolate coated treasures. Janis mentally scolded herself for having eaten most of the bottom layer in one sitting.

"You're gonna miss your target weight for this week, Janis," she sighed, thinking aloud. Still, chocolate was her only indulgence, one she occasionally resorted to for solace, especially after a particularly trying day. Like this one had been. Her hand hovered over the box for a moment as she decided which of the remaining morsels looked the most appealing. Finally she selected one and bit into it, savoring the rich, dark chocolate. Ah, a coconut center, one of her favorites!

Janis Tolbert was alone in her efficiency apartment, sprawled out on the old beat-up sofa, still dressed in her work outfit, a smart, no-nonsense navy blue skirt and white blouse that still looked reasonably fresh in spite of having been worn all day. She had her shoes off and her panty hose-clad legs propped up on the table. The boxed remains of a take-out Chinese dinner added to the clutter on the small table. She knew from experience that nothing worked better to soothe her shattered nerves than a little out of control, self-destructive eating binge.

"I could kill that damned Maynard Hughes!" she thought. "I swear to god if he ever lays a finger on me again I'm going straight to Dr. Parsons!" Hughes was the reason for her present agitated state of mind. He was the office "lech" — a self-appointed God's gift to women—and he was nothing if not persistent. Janis was the present target of his unwelcome sexual advances, probably because she was a new employee, still under six-month probation, and Hughes was confident that she would be reluctant to raise a fuss. Of course, it didn't hurt that he was married to the former Estelle Parsons — daughter of J. Harold Parsons — the founder of the Parsons Sensory Research Institute where both Janis and Hughes worked.

Actually, Hughes wasn't all that bad looking; she had even accepted a ride home once, on a rainy day, before she knew what he was like. In his car outside her apartment Hughes had proved himself to be all hands and terribly hard of hearing. That had happened over three months ago but it was as though the incident had given him some kind of go-ahead signal or presented some sort of irresistible challenge to his male ego because, since that time, he had taken to grabbing the soft and sensitive parts of her body whenever he could contrive to get her alone at work. That was the other problem, Hughes was experienced and clever enough to make his moves only when he could be certain that there weren't any witnesses. Janis found it hard to believe that a man could be so brash and bold and so insensitive to another person's feelings. What an ass!

Just thinking about it made her want another chocolate. She looked the remains of the sampler over carefully before selecting another of the little tidbits.

Janis suppressed a shudder as the day's incident ran through her mind for the hundredth time. She had innocently boarded the elevator to head downstairs for afternoon coffee. Hughes had cleverly dashed into the elevator just before the door closed. As the elevator began moving he hit the emergency stop, which stranded them — alone — and pushed her back into the corner. She could still feel the weight of his body pressing her into the corner and his rough, inept hands painfully mauling her breasts. Janis pushed him away and covered her bosom with her arms. That target no longer accessible, he redirected his efforts to her shapely and unprotected backside, reaching behind her to gather a generous pinch of the soft, yielding flesh. She brought her knee up and slapped him as hard as she could. While he was momentarily stunned, she cancelled the emergency stop and pushed the button for the next floor. Janis stomped out of the elevator, straightening her clothing, her face red with anger, embarrassment and frustration. Her knee had missed its target — at least there had been some satisfaction in the slap, but it wouldn't deter him, it would happen again, she knew that from experience. "Well," she thought, "Just a few more weeks and I'm off probation. Let's just see how that lecherous swine reacts to the threat of a sexual harassment suit!"

Gobbling down most of the little box of chocolates had had the desired effect and she felt somewhat better about the incident. At least she could

think about it without shuddering. Janis yawned and stretched, her arms extended outward and above her head, and glanced at the clock. Time to turn in! Tomorrow was Saturday and though it was normally a day off, she was going back to the Institute to earn some extra money. The secretarial job she had didn't pay well and, her paychecks, like almost everyone else's, were never big enough. The only instructions they had given her was to get a good night's sleep because they wanted her rested and alert for the morning session.

To her dismay, she had to share the elevator in the nearly empty building that morning with none other than her nemesis, Maynard Hughes. She wrapped her arms tightly around her bosom and backed into the corner, ready to defend herself. Strangely, he didn't made any kind of move at all. In fact, he barely seemed to notice her. It was like he was preoccupied with something. But the conspiratorial look on his face was most disturbing. She breathed a sigh of relief when he got off on the second floor.

She stopped outside the door of the appointed meeting place at 8:55 AM, five minutes early. The frosted glass window read:

Room
351 A
Gustatory Studies

She was still a little flustered by her close brush with Hughes on the elevator but at least, to her relief, he hadn't attacked her again. Perhaps her penetrating glare had been sufficient to keep him at bay. She shook it off, took a deep breath, opened the door and went in.

Hardly anyone in the busy room even looked up as she came in, except for one person at the far end of the room. She recognized the man immediately as he tucked his clipboard under his arm and came over to greet her. His was the face in the painting in the main lobby that gazed down at her sternly every time she entered or left the building. It was the old man, none other than J. Harold Parsons, M.D., Ph.D. himself, who was heading the team that she had volunteered to be guinea pig for.

"Good morning. You must be Ms. Tolbert," the distinguished, silver-haired old researcher said jovially. "May I call you Janis?" She nodded nervously, her hands clasped awkwardly together. Sensing her nervousness, Parsons continued. "Did you get a good night's rest?"

Janis found her voice. "Yes, thank you Dr. Parsons," she managed to stammer out.

"Good, good!" he replied. "Well, we'd best get started. But first, let me show you our equipment. Please come this way."

He led her over to a large, complicated chair that was the centerpiece of the room. She followed cautiously and looked it over dubiously. What she saw did not inspire her confidence. It looked like a kind of hyper-modern barber's (dentist's?) chair — one whose specifications had come straight out of a demented electrician's nightmare. There were wires and cables running helter-skelter from the base and down the back of the chair, across the room and into a large glass-fronted booth which covered the entire west wall of the room. Through the wide, waist-to-ceiling window of the booth she could see a battery of control consoles and computer monitors. There was definitely some high-powered research going on, because each work station was manned by a white-coated staff member and there were more than twenty of them in the booth.

At the top of the chair on a moveable arm was a small stainless steel dome, about the size of a large mixing bowl. Its surface was crawling with an even more complex snake's nest of wires that were gathered into a fat, lumpy cable that ran down the back of the chair and across the floor before it too disappeared into the glass booth.

"We're doing gustatory studies here in our laboratory, Janis — research into the human sense of taste. I think it's safe to say that we have made some real breakthroughs in last few months. Make no mistake, what we're doing here will surely revolutionize the science of how and what people eat!" An assistant helped Janis into a white plasticized coverall, gently sat her down in the chair and buckled her in with a sort of webbed seat belt. The chair felt fine, it was softly padded, and supported her in just the right places. Janis was almost comfortable, except for the hard little knot of fear simmering in the pit of her stomach.

"Please relax, Janis," soothed the old doctor. "This will be totally painless. In fact, I think you'll find it to be quite pleasurable." He carefully placed the metal mixing bowl device over her brown shoulder-

length hair — it fit snugly — and after a few minor adjustments to position the fit, he secured it with a velcro chin-strap. He then swivelled a small tray over in front of her. The tray had a stack of wooden spatulas on it and five small containers that looked just like her mother's Tupperware. After looking the whole set-up over one more time, he smiled, patted her on the shoulder, and went across the room to enter the booth. Janis was alone with her thoughts for about half a minute.

"As I said earlier, we are going to do some tests on your sense of taste, Janis." The voice, sudden and unexpected, startled her. In a moment she realized that Parsons was speaking softly into a microphone that was wired directly into a speaker in the mixing bowl headset. "But first we need to calibrate our equipment. Would you please take a small taste of the first sample?" One of the containers on the tray had a large number "1" scrawled in magic marker on its top. She removed the lid, took one of the disposable wooden spatulas from the pile on the left and, expecting the worst, carefully took a small taste.

There was no electric shock, no thunder. It was salt, good old-fashioned table salt. She felt the salty bite of it on the sides and tip of her tongue.

"Excellent, my dear!" came the soft voice from the helmet. "You're coming through loud and clear." She couldn't move her head but from what she could see, it looked as though Parsons and the others were busy making adjustments to their equipment. "Now rinse your mouth with some water from the squeeze bottle and try sample number two.

Number two was pure white sugar that dissolved immediately and tickled at the tip of her tongue. She repeated the procedure for samples three and four. Three was a dilute aqueous solution of quinine, bitter on the back of her tongue and the roof of her mouth. Janis had never developed a taste for gin and tonic and the water rinse was most welcome. Number four was vinegar, wet and sour, which nibbled sharply at the sides of her tongue. Parsons and the others continued to make adjustments to their consoles after each sample she tasted.

His voice sounded soft and clear inside the headset.

"Very good, Janis! You've just finished tasting samples of the four major families of compounds, salty, sweet, bitter and sour, that together make up the human sense of taste. At this stage, our equipment can be considered to be roughly calibrated. However, you probably know that the senses of smell and taste are closely linked. Next we'll try some familiar foods to determine how your individual patterns differ from our previous subjects and to tune in that all-important olfactory component."

The pretty, young assistant brought in a different tray and took the old one away. On it were a number of fruits and vegetables and other everyday foods like bread and cheese. She tasted each one in turn, all the while receiving encouragement from the disembodied voice in the headset. Dr. Parsons made an announcement after the second tray was removed.

"Save this setup on drive B, Hamilton," she heard faintly. Then more loudly: "We're ready to move on to phase two now, Janis." The lights in the room dimmed. "Until now we have been measuring the electrical signals from the receptor cells in your taste buds to the corresponding areas of your brain's taste center. Now were going to use our calibrations to electrically stimulate your taste center. This will allow you to experience selected tastes directly, without chewing or eating anything. Have another water rinse, please." She nervously complied. The voice came again, "Are you ready?"

Janis gulped and said tersely, "Okay."

There was a change in tone of the persistent electrical hum that had pervaded the room all morning. Funny, she hadn't even noticed it until it changed pitch. Very gently she felt a sensation brush at the tip of her tongue. It started out faintly and ended up sugary sweet. Next was sour, followed by bitter and salty. Each was pure and perfect, only the gritty texture of the powders was missing; the equipment could even mimic the sensation of cool wetness that the liquid formulations possessed. Janis smiled — the sensation was definitely weird, but really rather pleasurable, just like J. Harold Parsons had told her at the beginning.

"Excellent, Janis. Okay, now we're ready for phase three."

There was another change in the intensity of the electrical hum and Janis tasted the pure tart-sweet flavor of the orange she had just enjoyed about a half hour before. It was the same... only different. It was somehow amplified, better, this despite the lack of any familiar texture on her tongue or in her mouth. The apple was better, too, and she had never tasted such flavorful bread. Janis was favorably impressed

with the new technique, to say the least!

But they had saved the biggest surprise for last. Using recordings from their previous subjects that had been subtly modified by the computer programs to match Janis' electrical patterns, she was able to experience foods that she hadn't tasted earlier that day. And they had somehow chosen her favorite.

Chocolate!

Chocolate — smooth, almost intoxicating milk chocolate that bathed her tongue and the roof of her mouth in creamy ecstasy. This was the way chocolate was supposed to taste! Too soon, it seemed, it was time for something else. She was terribly disappointed when the wondrous sensation ended.

But only for a moment.

They followed it up with the rich, almost bitter taste of dark semi-sweet chocolate. Perfect! Never had she tasted its like. It was incredibly pleasurable, nearly orgasmic in its chocolate intensity!

But they still weren't done yet!

While Janis was still in sensory shock from the tremendous *chocolateness* of it all, they skillfully layered on a subtle mix of flavors that had her absolutely reveling in a sort of tenth-power chocolate-covered cherry!

She almost cried when they shut off the power and the lights came back on. The assistant came over and helped Dr. Parsons disconnect her from the chair. She swiveled her head to and fro and up and down to get the kinks out of her neck. To her acute embarrassment, the upper front portion of her coverall was soaking wet. Deep in the throes of her chocolate orgy, she had apparently salivated all over it. Obviously they had been thinking ahead by having her put on the coverall.

Parsons held out a hand to help Janis up. She felt fine, outside of being a little dizzy. The assistant helped her out of the coverall and took it away. Red-faced, she wiped off her chin with the towel that Parsons handed her.

"That's one side effect that needs a little work," said the old doctor lightly. "How do you feel, Janis?" She glanced at the clock and was amazed to find that it was nearly noon. The morning was over.

"Uh...Okay, I guess," she said. "Wow, that last part of the experiment, the bit with the chocolate, was incredible!"

"Oh yes," he chuckled. "We like to add a bit of stimulation to other selected areas of the brain during that phase. You might call it 'a blast of chocolate straight to the pleasure center!' You really liked it?"

"Any time you need a subject, just give me a call," she replied. They both laughed.

Parsons' tone became a little more serious, "There are many possible applications for this research. Of course, none of this would be possible if we hadn't created machinery that can directly stimulate the brain using a non-invasive technique. With this technology many things become possible. A weight-loss program would be a snap, because you could experience the pleasure of any food you wanted while never eating a thing! Or you could eat something mundane and have it taste like something sublime. Imagine, for the cost of the electricity, you could eat a cheap, tasteless, nutritious pap, while enjoying the sensations of a gourmet meal! Or keep a library of the world's greatest cuisine in the memory banks, to be experienced whenever you have the desire or ..." He stopped, a little embarrassed. "I'm sorry, Janis. I get kind of carried away when I start talking about it.

They made small talk for a few more minutes and shook hands before they parted. She left the building with a spring in her step, elated with the grand experience she'd just had, glad to have most of a Saturday ahead of her and secure in the knowledge that her next paycheck would be fifty dollars fatter. She went out and did a little shopping and then spent the evening at the movies with her best friend Gwen.

After her Sunday morning workout, she decided to have the remaining chocolates in her Whitman's sampler with a cup of coffee. She carefully selected one of the remaining miniatures in the yellow box and delicately took a small bite of it. Funny, it had the right texture and feel but it didn't taste right at all. The flavor was off, the tidbit tasted more like wax than it did like chocolate. She washed it down with a gulp of coffee and threw the rest of the piece away "Stuff goes bad so quickly," she thought, and reached for the one remaining piece, a chocolate covered almond. The almond flavor came through just fine, but again the chocolate tasted funny, like paraffin. She sighed and finished her coffee and then got busy doing her laundry and writing out checks to pay her monthly bills. She thought no more about it for the rest of the day.

In the evening she noticed that the chocolate mint she had after dinner had the same sort of weird

taste but it really was kind of old. Wasn't it?

She began to get worried when the Mr. Goodbar she bought out of the vending machine on Monday morning to have with her coffee break tasted the same. Alarmed, Janis offered half of it to one of the other secretaries to see if she thought it tasted funny.

"Mr. Goodbar," said the older woman. "One of my favorites."

"Does it taste alright to you, Phyllis?"

"You bet, nice and fresh. It's perfect. Thanks, Janis!"

A few minutes later Janis was outside of room 351, trying to calm herself down enough to knock, enter and explain her problem. She screwed up her courage and rapped softly on the door.

Dr. Parsons answered the door and though she might have imagined it, she thought he looked a little nervous himself when he saw it was her.

"What is it, my dear?" he asked. "You seem rather upset."

"I'm sorry to bother you Dr. Parsons, but I'm afraid there's something wrong," she said.

"Wrong? What do you mean?"

"It's chocolate," she said. "It doesn't taste right anymore. I've tried several different kinds in the last two days, since the experiments, and they all taste the same to me — just like wax."

The old doctor nervously ran his fingers through his hair. "Please sit down," he said solemnly. He took a deep breath and let it out with a sigh. "I'm very sorry, Janis. I was afraid that something like this might have happened. "You eat a lot of chocolate, don't you?" Janis nodded. He continued. "Did you eat a lot it just recently?" She nodded again. Parsons shook his head. "That's what I thought. After you left I noticed that the gain on the transmission unit was two clicks higher than it should have been during the chocolate input test. The result is a sort of fatigue of the nerves as a consequence of sensory overload. We were lucky that it wasn't more intense. Hopefully your condition will get better soon."

"What do you mean by soon?" she asked, just managing to keep her voice controlled.

"Well," he replied. "Certainly less than a year, possibly only a few months."

"A year!" she cried. "This is terrible, chocolate is my favorite food, my only vice, it helps me get by! What'll I do without it?"

"Now, now," he said, lamely. "It could be worse."

"What if I decide to sue you?" she said as her resolve began to crumble, knowing that the threat was hollow even as she made it.

"You did sign a waiver, if you remember," he replied.

It was obvious that Parsons had no idea how miserable life would be for a lonely, single woman who couldn't enjoy a bit of chocolate once in a while! Janis fell back on her last line of defense. She began to cry softly.

Parsons looked at her for a few moments, and his face softened. Even after thirty years as a Psychologist, the old doctor was still a sucker for the young woman's tears. He endured her onslaught for only a few moments before getting up and putting his arm around her shoulder. "There, there," he soothed, "let's not argue. I think I have a solution that we can both live with." She looked up at him hopefully. "You were such an excellent test subject that I'd really like to continue working with you — to find out more about what went wrong, if nothing else. If you really miss chocolate so terribly we can just hook you up to the machine and take you for a ride. What do you say, Janis? I'd like you to become an integral part of our research team. The pay will, of course, be a lot better than your secretarial job."

Janis knew when she was being offered a good deal.

"I accept," she said, wiping her eyes and sitting up straight. "But make sure that those dials are on the right settings from now on, okay?"

"Just be thankful that you're not Maynard Hughes," said Parsons.

Her ears perked up at the sound of the name. It occurred to her that now was the perfect time to bring up that subject.

"Hughes," she said. "I've been meaning to talk to you about him, Dr Parsons. He's absolutely terrible, a real sex fiend, always grabbing at me and the other girls in the hallways and in the elevator. Something should be done about him."

"I had been looking the other way because of my poor long-suffering daughter," Parsons confessed. "That and I'm afraid that his condition is partially my fault. Hughes volunteered to be a subject on the McAllister sexual stimulator a couple of months ago. Unfortunately, the results were not quite what we expected.

"Oh really," asked Janis, intrigued, "what happened?"

"Because of his highly oversexed nature — which I didn't know about, by the way — we had the power set five notches too high when we hooked him up to the simulator. He suffered a numbing of the senses just as you did. That old McAllister unit had one more side effect that we've corrected on the new simulators: the subject was afflicted with an overpowering and irrational urge to satisfy his desires. That explains his awful manners. Maynard would do or say almost anything get relief. Eventually he found that he could only get satisfaction by hooking himself up to the simulator. The poor fool began coming in after hours, boosting the power ever higher with each visit. Hamilton finally caught him one evening. We took away his key and gave him a stern talking to. Unfortunately he must have had a duplicate because he came in and hooked himself up again this weekend.

"Hm, that must be where he was going when I saw him last Saturday," said Janis, remembering her brief panic on the elevator.

"Probably. He set the machine on full power and I'm afraid that he irreversibly overstimulated some of the nerve channels to his brain. This time his condition is not reversible — the power was set too high. It's tragic. If only he'd had a little self-control!"

"Poor Maynard!" said Janis.

"Yes," said Parsons. "Thank goodness we've licked the irrational addiction problem on the new machines."

"I'm glad to hear that, Dr. Parsons," said Janis, getting up. "I really should get back to work now." She glanced at her watch. "Actually, I have about ten minutes left." She thought for a moment. "You don't suppose you could hook me up to that machine right now, do you? I mean, just to see if it works. It would only take a few minutes, wouldn't it? Please? You realize that I haven't tasted any chocolate for two whole days now! Please, Dr, Parsons, please?"

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The Sculptor

Andrea Payne

The marble was flawed. Anyone could see that. Though the translucent block of pearl-white stone appeared whole and lovely, moving into a different angle of light clearly revealed the tiny webs and fractures that made it all but useless for sculpture. The Sculptor eyed the marble with a critical and irritable eye.

"Perhaps Michelangelo could create from this damaged stone," he thought, "as he created the timeless 'David', but I am not Michelangelo!"

He turned and walked around the block where it stood on his artists' pedestal, again and again, taking in the sight of both the glory and failing of the stone.

"I cannot work with this," he sighed. He laid his hand upon it, and felt the tingle of mystic power within the vibrant pillar — deep in his mind he felt fashioned the image of what lay hidden within.

The Sculptor stepped back to his worktable and took up the narrow-bladed chisel and the small wooden mallet, the tools of his artistry. Then returning to the marble he carefully placed edge against the stone, lightly tapped it with the hammer, and the first shaving of his creation slipped away like gossamer on the wind...

Caleb MacDhougal was impossible. He was intractable. He was rude, and curt, and foul-mouthed. He was unapproachable, solitary and unkind. Very few persons in the graduate program for Art Therapy at Brakespear College held much hope for his success in that field. Very few persons wanted anything to do with him, because he was so all-around unpleasant. But in spite of all the negative things he was, he had a way with whatever medium he chose to work in, and the spark of genius could be said to burn in him somewhere.

"If only he weren't so damned secretive and arrogant and unsociable!" said Lindy Walker as she walked with friends toward Hillyer Hall, the site of the first of many practicum classes for art therapy grad students. She spoke to her circle of friends, gathered in the previous year of the program.

"And strange," added Alex Burton. "Always wearing that hood and cape and those tan leather gloves!" He pursed his lips. "I've even seen him in the studios painting or drawing or whatever, still wearing the hood and gloves. I think he's obsessed."

"With what?" asked another of the group. She was a newcomer to Brakespear, having transferred to the school to finish her degree. Alex looked her up and down, as if to say "I don't know you, so why should I answer your questions?"

"Jyl-Ann Korotev," she ventured by way of introduction, and at a slight nod by Lindy, Alex continued.

"I think he views himself as some kind of eccentric artiste, with his put-on airs. He won't make much of a therapist, though, with whatever emotional baggage he carries along with him all the time. That's why he's so rude, you know?"

Conversation ceased as the group entered their classroom. It ceased not because of their entering, but because the subject of their discussion was already there, seated defensively with his back to the far wall, facing the door. Jyl-Ann got her first look at the much-discussed genius cum s.o.b.

There wasn't a lot to see. Caleb MacDhougal wore a long, midnight blue cape which sported a deep hood. This effectively hid his face in deep shadows, even in the bright fluorescent light of the classroom. All that could be seen was the slight movement and angry sparkle of his eyes. His jeans poked out from beneath the cloak, and the hint of a dark shirt could be seen in the sleeves that were firmly overlapped by the ends of long, tan leather gloves covering his hands.

He studiously ignored the others after their entrance, and they all took seats on the opposite side of the room from him.

Jyl-Ann was intrigued. Caleb radiated quite clearly that he wished to be left alone in whatever private hell he was in. Jyl-Ann couldn't imagine what could tear a person up so... or she could, but having dealt with her own darkness with the help of a loving husband and a committed priest-counselor, she sometimes lost sight of the pain and anger that could twist and gnaw and destroy a person's self-respect and self-love.

Rather than join the others in their rejection of Caleb, Jyl-Ann walked over to the seat next to his and asked, "Is this seat taken?"

The hooded head jerked up and bright blue eyes turned to glare up at her... she sensed the utter rage trembling beneath the eccentric clothing. Nothing

was said for a moment, then he croaked hoarsely, "No, sit wherever the hell you like," and returned to contemplation of the sketchbook he was holding.

Jyl-Ann cautiously stole a glance at the image of charcoal tiger lillies and cornflowers on the paper. It was elegant, and she said so. Caleb snorted in disgust, whisking the sketchbook closed and slamming his books upon it with a finality that reverberated across the room. Gingerly she took the seat next to him, surreptitiously finding Lindy's gaze, hoping for support, but finding nothing but tense astonishment there and in the eyes of the rest of the class. It was with relief that she realized Mark Kaiser had entered the room and begun taking role call.

When finished, Mr. Kaiser turned to Jyl-Ann with a reassuring smile. "Ah, yes. A fine new face in our midst. Would you like to take the floor and tell the class something about yourself?"

"Sure. I've been interested in art therapy since I was a senior in high school. I took one of those general interest computer tests and realized art therapy was the perfect combination of my love for the visual arts and what I believe to be a gift for helping people. I don't want that to sound conceited, but I have been told over my lifetime that I'm sensitive — sometimes overly so — to the hurt felt by others, and have wanted to alleviate that hurt as best I could whenever possible. I've been working toward this degree on and off now for over seven years, and am very glad to settle down and finish it here at Brakespear."

"Well, good. We're glad to have you here. Now for an icebreaker to get everyone loosened up for the year ahead. Think of an object or group of objects that symbolizes what you would like to accomplish this year. Using any media you have available, depict that object or objects, and then partner up with one or two people and tell them about your goals."

Jyl-Ann watched Caleb while arranging her materials. He sat still, but for twirling a silver pen, staring into space. She settled to work, mentally sighing and asking for prayerful guidance. Her gentle scrolls were abruptly interrupted by a series of low growls from Caleb and the scrape of rough strokes of charcoal meeting paper. Then silence.

She shifted her weight to lean closer to the dark form next to her and cleared her throat expectantly. "Caleb." A nudging. Soft. He began twirling the pen again. Before him on the page lay a stark, reflective hunting knife glistening with fresh blood. He said no word.

"Caleb." She brushed his shoulder with her hand. He started violently and leaned back away from her to stare viciously. "My friends call me Jyl. Um, my goals are depicted here" she moved the pastel scroll-work of vines and leaves around a glowing cross closer to Caleb's workspace "by the obnoxious growth of these flowers... I hope not only to be taught how to be an art therapist, but also to be my own client, working with others and God to better understand me and my inner soul."

Caleb stared at her with clenched jaw until she squirmed uneasily, then slowly turned to his own drawing, tapping a slow beat on the blade of the knife with the pen at each uttered word. "Revulsion. Fear. Mutilation. Death."

After class Lindy caught stride with Jyl, popping with questions. "What do you think of Caleb, Jyl? How could you stand to sit next to him? Did he say anything to you? Haven't you heard the stories about him? Did you get a look at his face?" At this last Lindy put on a contorted expression.

Raising an eyebrow in question Jyl replied cautiously, "Alex was right about Caleb having a lot of baggage."

"His face and hands are withered and welted with ghastly scars! Jason told me during class that he caught a glimpse of them when Caleb was rinsing his face in the men's room during that heat wave last summer. Caleb tried to get him to keep quiet about it, but Jason's a born blabbermouth."

And you're certainly not helping matters, thought Jyl, looking around guiltily at the throng of people they'd entered near the Towers snack grill.

"And Alex says he heard that Caleb got those scars from attacking a woman with a knife and trying to rape her—but she got a hold of the knife herself and cut him up!"

"Knife?" Jyl gulped as she remembered Caleb's chilling drawing in class.

"But Sherry says he was caught in a horrible house fire while babysitting two boys."

"Did they survive?" Her voice held a note of sarcasm as she recovered from her personal panic at the rape story. All of this was probably an active textbook case of rampant rumor.

"No. Personally, I think he murdered them and hid them in the basement."

"Lindy, that's ridiculous."

She quickly put a finger to her lips as a threateningly cloaked figure stepped in line two or three people behind them.

"Do you think he heard us?" rasped Lindy in an ill-disguised stage whisper.

Eyes flashing warning, Jyl shook her head curtly and said, "Even if he didn't, which isn't likely, most of the students in our class are probably wondering about him, and I'll bet your talk has piqued interest in our present company, too. Has anyone actually asked Caleb why he wears his cloak?"

"Are you out of your fucking mind?! I won't go anywhere near him!"

"Uh-huh. Which means you've compounded his isolation. Now instead of simply an obsessive oddity you've created grotesque reasons to be both ridiculing and curious of him.

"I want to be your friend, Lindy. And Alex's, and Jason's, and Caleb's, and everyone else's friend. If not close, then politely amiable. I doubt Caleb trusts anyone. But believe me, I want to change that. After all of this spewage gets around, whether or not it is true, Caleb will be doubly hellish, I'm sure. If you have curiosity to cure, confront him yourself. I want no part in your cruelty."

Jyl turned away from Lindy's shocked open-mouthed "O" with sick grumblings in her stomach...but not before they both sensed and saw Caleb gazing steadily at them.

It was with a great shuffling that the girls gathered their food and moved into the room. Jyl stopped and looked apologetically at Lindy. "I'm sorry. He scares me, too. But I'm determined not to let my fear keep me from trying to get to know him better. I'll see you later. I'd like to be by myself for awhile." Jyl moved away slowly and took a seat in an almost-deserted alcove and picked dejectedly at her salad, her appetite long gone. Brooding, she glanced up to see stark blue eyes gazing at her from the depths of a hood not more than two table lengths away.

The form was there. A basic, rough-hewn shape almost clawed from the stone by the chisel laying inert now in The Sculptor's slick- sweated hand. A precarious balance was held in this block. He traced the dark flaws with his fingertips, straining in his mind to see how he might integrate this ugliness into the frozen beauty he wished to create. A misplaced tap, a too-eager breaking out of the form toward the details he saw deep within the rock could end in absolute, shattered chaos. It was a precarious balance indeed.

Jyl stared at her salad for a long moment, stabbing at it with a trapped vengeance while under Caleb's scrutiny. Why does he watch me so? "...trying to rape her..." It's only a vicious rumor... right? She pushed her bowl away in contempt. How could she allow herself to fall into that talk trap...even momentarily? She set her chin in the cup of her hands, fading into thought.

So what's wrong with admitting I'm afraid? He does cut a menacing figure, even if I don't know the true reason why. How would he react to such honesty? Is he afraid of nothing? The memory of his staccato croaks, "Repulsion. Fear. Mutilation. Death." echoed in her mind, causing her to narrow her eyes and lean into her hands to attempt to read the suddenly guarded sparkle staring back. Or does he soak up all fear and hatred and shock encountered from others to reflect it out again in a front of omnipotence? If it's only a front...

But even if it is a front, I still can't bring myself to ply excuses for Lindy's "revelation" about him. Surely he heard. And I doubt he's a fool.

The best I can do is try to find the good in him and focus on it.

What if, inside, hidden beneath the shield of dark shadows and wicked silence there is a man repulsed, afraid, and lividly hateful of himself?

Then I can only accept him as he is, reach for the good, and continue to be honest. Perhaps he may come to trust me.

At this she walked over to him and waved meekly. "You've frightened me, watching me this afternoon. What do you find so fascinating about me?"

Caleb snorted, retorting, "You're afraid. Good."

Jyl felt a shiver of dread pale her face ashen. "They're only rumors!" she screamed to herself.

"As to fascination, I could ask the same of you." He rose then, towering above her in a swirl of cloth and scent of soap, and stalked from the hall, whipping his dishes on the conveyer belt with a clatter.

Over the next few weeks, Jyl gently and persistently greeted Caleb every day in their classes with a soft "Good morning" or "Hello". Tense and silent, he turned his back on everyone while working, jealous in his protection of his project plans before completion.

Jyl never intruded, but she let her presence be felt by tentative verbal nudgings when the frustration of artistic failure loomed too closely.

One morning, Jyl came to class early to gain some quiet time for finishing a project, and Caleb's entrance was felt more than actually seen. Her greeting to him was subdued and preoccupied. He settled with a huff, then grumped a low "Hi" in her direction. Jyl froze for a fraction of a second, her eyes grown wide at the gutteral sound. Her smile of pleasure was evident despite her attempt to control it.

Another sliver fell away. With an exasperated expulsion of air, The Sculptor pushed away from the table and stood to stretch. The faint hint of a leaf. But that damn flaw held him in check. He was tempted to crack it with one deft blow...but that would shatter the grace he'd been coaxing from the stone. Little pieces of marble, some no longer than his thumbnail, littered the floor. This was the only way.

To Jyl's dismay, her classmates did not share her desire to befriend Caleb. Most simply ignored him. One or two bordered on the obnoxious with references to the "Phantom of the Opera" and "the Shadow knows". And of course there were the rumors. The frequency of halted conversations at her entry and Caleb's increased gruffness caused her to be afraid.

Did Caleb even notice the energy she used to protect him from Jason and Alex's incessant teasing and spying? She tried to pierce his menace by being present for him, tried to remain vulnerable and accepting to ease him into a friendship with her. She shuddered with the realization that he could heartlessly rend what threads of watchfulness and privacy she'd already drawn with only a few curt words or actions. He was cold, arrogant, and sealed in a shroud of crushing bitterness. Was she really up against the monster Lindy hinted lurked in that hood? One who did not want her protection nor her attentiveness no matter how subtle she was? This possibility had not occurred to her before. And it hurt like hell.

Maybe she could work out some of her anxiety in the ceramics studio. Clay didn't move as freely as a pencil and paper, but she did find it was safer to punch around than most other solid objects, like apartment walls.

Anxious and pensive on entering the room, she found a little relief in that there were only a few people present, but not so much that Caleb was one of them. Her greeting to him was barely a whisper. He shifted his weight uncomfortably, gave her a shallow wave, then returned his attention to the potter's wheel he contemplated. She quietly stepped up beside him and studied the cylinder of clay with him. "What will it be, Caleb?"

"A study in clay netting. Coiled lace on the outer walls."

"You must have very deft fingers for detail work like that, Caleb. I'm sure it'll be gorgeous." Jyl turned to slice off a chunk of clay from the storage supply, and began kneading it and mashing it just for its energy absorbing properties. Caleb fired up the wheel and began weaving the shining coils around his vessel. As the pattern grew, Caleb half stood in his concentration. Out of the corner of her eye Jyl saw Christy lugging a five-gallon bucket of glaze behind Caleb, trying to get through a space too narrow. With a clunk and a splash the bucket hit Caleb in the back of the knees, throwing him forward.

The sound of Caleb's work collapsing beneath his body seemed loud in the sudden silence of the room. For a moment, everything seemed frozen in a tableau. Then Caleb was straightening up, whirling on Christy who backed down the aisle between two worktables, terrified at the angry fire in his eyes. Caleb's arm was an accusing lance pointing at her as he hissed, "You clumsy... stupid... fucking FOOL ! DAMN you!"

Jyl covered the distance in two strides, yanking on Caleb's shoulder in urgent determination. "Caleb! Caleb, stop it! Look at me!" Jyl stepped between Caleb and his quarry, near-desperation in her eyes. She took his hands in hers, encased though they were in clay-mucked plastic and leather gloves, and peered into the deep hood.

She would have recoiled at the danger she saw there, but suddenly the pressure of control between them was not hers. "Caleb?" she whispered, fighting down the apprehension as she stared at the shadowy fissures and weathered parchment that were the left side of his face.

"I have been working for two months on this piece, and she doesn't even have the grace to say 'excuse me'? I could have moved aside, you know." Christy's inane babbling apologies caused Caleb to turn on her, still gripping Jyl's hands. "You're careless. You're an idiot. Why didn't you just ask me to

move? I don't know how you ever got into this program. You've destroyed two months of my work!"

Jyl tugged on his hands, drawing his attention back to her. "Caleb, was this a project for one of your classes?" she asked.

"Hell, no," he said bitterly. "I was just doing this for... for... me. Just because I like ceramics... and sculpture... just because..." His anger was lessening. His grip on her hands weakened. And finally, his lips pursed tightly in a thin pale line, he brusquely pulled his hands from Jyl's. He turned to the wheel, swept the crushed fragments of his creation to the floor, and strode coldly from the room without a backward glance.

Jyl didn't know if she should give chase or remain still. But she probably should breathe again. With a whoosh she let the tension of the last few minutes go, and sucked air into her lungs once more. Christy was crying. "He's not a monster, you know." Jyl looked at her defiantly, threw her poundings and Caleb's fragments into the scrap barrel, and left.

A quick stop at the front desk confirmed Caleb's apartment being a floor up from Jyl's. She climbed the stairs, and soon found herself poised to knock on his door. But the muffled sounds of metal against stone stopped her. Working again. Didn't his ideas ever stop? Didn't he ever get blocked? Didn't he ever get tired? Jyl smiled, shook her head. He's okay. And she snuck back to her rooms as quietly as she'd come.

Jyl remembered she still had to mount three drawings for the critique tomorrow. It was actually a finalist judging done by the art professors for the Brakespear Student Art Show. They would choose no more than five entries from each class. Hope and competition was high in the studios this time of year.

Jyl hoped Jason wouldn't throw a fit about Christy. They'd been going together for two years, and he was almost fanatic about his protection of her from Caleb. Nothing had happened. Jyl had seen to that. But events like that always managed to blow out of proportion. She sighed and settled to work. Only morning would give the answers.

When Jyl entered the gallery the next day where the judging was to take place, Jason and Caleb were already having an argument. Or rather, Christy was standing off to the side with a smug look on her face talking to Lindy while Jason yelled at Caleb. Said midnight tower stood his ground in silent contempt.

"One of these days, Mr. MacDhougal, you'll go too far. Then you'll be sorry you ever haunted the Brakespear campus." Jason never addressed Caleb by his first name. The formality lent more non- humanity to his attacks.

"Don't threaten him, Jason." Jyl walked over.

"Oh, so now you've got a guardian angel, Mr. MacDhougal. Is she acting as your tongue today?"

"No." One word.

"Let it be, Jason. Caleb didn't hurt Christy physically, and he was rightfully angry. Caleb lost a piece of artwork. Christy lost a little courage. It's over."

"That's what you think." Jason crossed the hall grumbling.

Jyl didn't like the look of things. She shot a side-long glance at Caleb. He met her gaze. "While the profs are puttering around, how would you like to do a tandem critique of our own work?" she asked.

"You want to know what I think of your work?"

"And I'd like to see what other ingenious ideas you've tried and been successful with. That vase was fantastic."

"Yeah." Gruff. "Well, come here then."

Their voices were low as the judges started their rounds. Jyl was careful to praise and encourage, and to ask Caleb before handling any of his pieces. They were all sculptured in some form.

"How do you do that, Caleb?" Jyl remarked on a three-foot-high marble carving of a gnome. "It's stone, for God's sake. How do you get a creature like that out of stone?"

"You've seen my woodcarving, right? It's like that only the surface is much harder." Caleb moved in front of Jyl's softsculpture train. "I think your embroidery balances the cab and cars well. You're talented in sculpture and details too, Jyl." Jyl blushed under the fond warmth in his eyes.

They sat on a bench to critique other students' work for the rest of the afternoon. And immersed as they were in their world of color and symbolism, they both started when Jason exploded in fury at the judges' announcements of the show entries.

"I should have been in this show. Not YOU!" He pointed a vicious finger at Caleb. "What did you do to weasel your way into this thing, you son-of-a-bitch?"

"He didn't do anything other than produce work better than yours, Jason." Jyl looked from Caleb's gold -starred gnome to Caleb with a smile.

Jason turned on Jyl with disgust. "And you!"

Jyl's head snapped up in surprise. "What the hell do you get out of being near him? A good fuck? Is he "loveable and capable"? Do you "ease his pain" with sexual favors? You're a goddamn fucking SLUT!"

Jyl sputtered and shook at the absurd cruelty of Jason's words. She suddenly felt very small. Choking back a sob, she ran from the room to escape the eyes that stared at her.

Caleb rose slowly from his seat, and glared at Jason squarely in the eye, measuring him. "I usually let shit run off me like water off the back of a duck. But not when it involves my friends." He hauled back and hit Jason in the stomach, doubling him over. Caleb looked at him dispassionately and then stalked from the hall.

The Sculptor had been working for hours. Paper was strewn over the table and floor in utter disarray, sketches of the form before him. Maybe it would work. Why hadn't he thought of it before? Could he actually make the flaw a fair part of the statue?

The next day, Caleb's chair in class was empty. Jyl tapped her pencil on the table. He'd never missed a class. She looked furtively at Jason and Christy. The former was stonefaced. She traced circles over her paper with her fingertips, made some weak scribbles. She frowned. Was he sick? Had something happened to him? She made a face at her work and threw it away.

Afterwards, Lindy came up to her with awe in her eyes. "You should have seen what Caleb did to Jason after you left!"

Jyl's stomach took a flip. "What did Caleb do after I left?"

Lindy put her arm on Jyl's shoulder confidentially and said, "He rumbled something about crap not affecting him unless it had to do with his friends, and then he slugged Jason in the gut!"

Jyl's eyes were wide with concern."What did Jason do then?"

"He just doubled over moaning, and Caleb walked out of the room."

Jyl looked around, hoping to see the familiar dark shadow, but he wasn't there. So why hadn't Caleb been in class?

She practically ran to Caleb's apartment, surprised to find no answer to her knock, and the door unlocked.

But more astonishing was the fragile marble cluster of flowers on the table. Polished and glowing, it sat in elegant splendor among a sheaf of scattered sketches, which showed various views of a deep flaw in the stone. Jyl traced the delicate form with her fingertips, then remembered why she'd come.

"Caleb?" She walked to the living room. No one. She walked down the back hall, and knocked softly at his bedroom. No answer. She peeked in. He lay sprawled on his bed in peaceful slumber, bare to the waist. His scars extended down his arms and chest, slightly warping the muscles in streaks of white and faded brown. Embarrassed to find him so vulnerable, she approached slowly, and drew the cover over him to his neck. Her touch awakened him.

He pulled back somewhat, his eyes shifting between question and guarded uncertainty. "What are you doing here?"

Jyl's embarrassment increased. "You...you weren't in class this morning. I...I was worried about you. So I came up here to check on you."

"Oh." He burrowed deeper in the blanket, gazing at her uncomfortably. "Why were you worried about me? Why bother?"

Jyl smiled and gently touched his scarred cheek. He started to pull away, grimaced, then allowed himself to come back against her hand. "Caleb, you're my friend." She squeezed his shoulder, then rocked back up on her feet. "C'mon. Get up. I'll go in the other room so you can get dressed."

"Jyl."

"Hmm?"

"Thanks."

She walked out in the hall, then called back, "Those flowers on the table are gorgeous."

"Oh that. I've been working on that for a long time. The biggest bitch was trying to work around the flaw."

"How did you do it?"

"I realized I had to work with the flaw, and not against it. I think the whole thing is stronger now."

"Like Michelangelo's 'David'?"

"Yeah, right."

They were silent for a few moments, then Jyl scuffed her toe on the carpet and asked, "Why didn't you go to class today?"

A long pause, then a sigh. "I had some thinking to do."

"About?"

"My scars."

Jyl nodded to herself, stroking the scars on her arm, remembering the hopelessness and pain in a young girl's mind so many years ago. "Do you want to talk about it?" She moved to the living room as Caleb emerged in jeans and a green short-sleeved shirt.

He stood running his fingers through his hair, watching her. Abruptly, he turned to trail his hand along the edge of the table. "I've been working on this all semester, you know." He grazed the petal edges of the statue with his fingertips. "Do you recognize it?"

Jyl moved to stand opposite him. "No...you've never done... wait a minute! Cornflowers and tiger lillies!" She locked her gaze with his in confirmation. "It's from that drawing I saw the first day of class, right?"

She crouched down at eye level with the piece to scrutinize it more closely. Then she turned and said softly, "Does this tie in somehow with what's bothering you?"

"Yeah." He ran his fingers through his hair again, not looking at her.

"Caleb." She rose, taking one of his hands in hers, gazing at him plainly. "I'm your friend. Talk to me."

He pulled away and strode to the window. For some time he simply stood gazing out at the lawn. "When I was in third grade my art class took a field trip to a glassblower's shop," he spat through his teeth.

"A field trip."

"Yeah." His face took on a pained expression, his knuckles white on the sash of the window."Some of the finished pieces sat on a shelf, cooling. They glowed. I thought there was some kind of magic inside." Then he turned and slowly sat down on the couch. "Why the hell am I telling you this? You don't need to know this! I feel like it's being pulled from me one fucking word at a time."

Jyl wondered if he'd ever fully trust her. Her voice was very quiet as she spoke. "What do you think I'm going to do to you if you keep talking, Caleb?"

"I don't know. Go away."

"That's right. You don't know. And I'm not going away, either. That's what everyone else has done, isn't it? Talk to me."

Caleb turned to stare at her. The light in his eyes was hard. "What do you know about what others have done? Except run away from me as fast as they could because they were terrified at what they saw?"

"Caleb, I didn't run away from you. And I don't blame you for your being scarred. Did you ever think that the others ran away from you not because of what they saw, because you've always worn your cape, but because of what they've felt from you? When I approached you that first day of classes, I could almost tangibly grasp your anger."

"Of course I know that!" he exploded. "I drove them away! That fucking cape is my protection against this whole shit-filled world!" His voice caught and he covered it over with a cough. "But hiding doesn't work anymore." he added softly.

He sat there for a minute or two, clenching and unclenching his fists. Then he laughed without mirth, saying, "When no one was looking, I put my hands around one of those fucking vases." He mocked childlike wonder and the fateful action. "The shock sent me into convulsions, and the glass spread and splattered over my body like the Blob." He rubbed at his arms and hands as though to scrub the scars off, then wiped his hands on his thighs. He looked reluctantly at Jyl. "The damage was already done by the time the teachers could get there to help me."

Jyl sat still for a long time, letting his words sink in, trying to send acceptance to him. She slowly held out her hand. "Magic is a great thing, you know. And I think there's still a spark of it inside you, because you've managed to become a successful artist despite the pain you experienced."

He glanced at her then, and back to his open, welted palms. "Yeah. Pain. It's interesting, isn't it, that I'm a sculptor now, and that I work with cold things... clay and marble and the like." Uncertainty still lingered in his voice.

"Jyl." He gingerly placed his hand in hers. "I realized yesterday that I've never let the bitterness go." His grip tightened. "For all these years I've clung to the rumors, to the teasing and the cruelty and the ugliness, and let them devour me into a shadow." He took a shaky breath, looked at her squarely. "I've never stood up for me as a man. I...I've always lived as the monster everyone's said I am. I've had to come to terms with that."

Jyl smiled at him, stroking the back of his hand with her thumb. "You've taken some large steps toward that goal right here, Caleb."

"I know. But I think I've still got a long way to go. I've only begun to break my own shell." He paused, thoughtful. "I realized something else, too."

"What's that?"

"Being present and listening to a person is 95 percent of being a therapist. Not jabbering advice." He looked at her with a spark of hope in his eyes. "Thanks for being here, Jyl."

"That's what friends are for."

They sat that way, in comfortable rapport, for the better part of half an hour. Then they stood, and Jyl moved to give Caleb the hooded cloak hanging by the door. But he stopped her with a wave of a disfigured hand.

"No, I don't need that anymore."

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Mister Wilt

Jason Snell

I was so tired that I couldn't keep my eyes open. It was eight in the morning and I was sitting, hair still wet from my early morning shower, on a cold wooden pew in church. It had taken me until 2 a.m. to get the skinny, squinty-eyed girl I had invited over "to watch television" into bed with me, and it took me over two hours to get her out of the house once we were finished. I had managed to get three hours of sleep that night, and I didn't feel very cheery.

I was tired, I didn't like the feeling of my wet hair, and church is not my favorite place in the whole world. My mother and father were sitting on my right, and my little sister was in my mom's lap. Andi was asleep — mom is a more comfortable backrest than these horrible Methodist pews.

When we moved to Clarkesburg, I figured that my life would be pretty much like it had always been. But instead, my parents had decided to transform their lives into something straight out of the fifties. That was appropriate for my new hometown of Clarkesburg, Pennsylvania, which was also straight out of the fifties. Maybe even the eighteen-fifties. The whole town was either Baptist or Methodist. Half the town was sitting on the same hard pews that I sat on.

A little man with a wrinkled face sat on my left, evidently unconcerned about the time of day and the pain caused by those awful pews. Old Wrinkly was wearing a plaid shirt and a bow tie, and sat with his hands folded together in what I assumed was a praying position. A good supposition, I think, considering that we were in church.

I assume he saw me staring at him, because his tiny eyes popped open and he turned to look at me.

"What's your name, boy?" he whispered to me.

I straightened up and looked straight ahead at the minister.

"Jim," I said out of the corner of my mouth.

"Talk to you after the sermon," the man said.

A wrinkly old Methodist wanted to talk to me after the boring service. It was just what I wanted to hear. At that moment, there was no place that I would have rather been than back home in bed — except maybe back in California. No such luck.

After the service, my parents and I stood outside of the church. Before we could move toward our car, the wrinkly old man sauntered up and began talking to us.

"Hello there," he said to my father, and held out his hand. "Name's Mr. Wilt. Pleased to meet you."

My father shook Wilt's hand and smiled. Yeah, my dad had fallen for this down-home Pennsylvania bullshit. He loved the hard pews, the boring church services (we're from California, for pete's sake — we're not supposed to go to church*!),* and especially the crazy people who lived in this town. Wilt was just another nutty old Methodist. I was sure of it.

"I was talking to your boy in church earlier," Wilt said, and pointed at me. "I don't recognize you folks. Guess you're new to Clarkesburg, aren't you?"

"Yes, we are," my father said.

"Wonder if you might like to come over to my place for Sunday brunch? My wife, she's a Baptist, but she's still one hell of a cook." He chuckled at his joke. I didn't. "Seeing as though you're new here, I thought it would be hospitable of me to invite you all over."

My father's face lit up. Of course, nobody was this nice in California, but dad didn't have to actually accept the guy's offer. "Thanks for asking, have a nice day" would be acceptable enough, right?

Wrong. Like I said, my dad is completely enchanted with the "quaint old-fashioned charm" of the people of Clarkesburg. He accepted Wilt's offer.

Any hope of my getting back to sleep was gone. I could only pray (it was Sunday, so why not pray?) that Mrs. Wilt's food was edible.

Wilt's joke was right — even though she was a Baptist, Erma Wilt made a wonderful breakfast. The tiny gray-haired woman cooked and served us bacon, eggs, pancakes, and orange juice all by herself, and managed to keep a smile the entire time. It didn't taste that bad, and just the fact that we were being served authentic Pennsylvanian hospitality cuisine made my father very happy.

I really wanted to be home in bed, asleep, or at least propped up and watching a football game or something. Then I remembered: football doesn't start until one in the afternoon out here. What kind of place was this?

"So," Mr. Wilt asked as we finished our brunch, "how did you folks end up here in Clarkesburg?"

"Well, I got tired of the hectic lifestyle in Los

Angeles, and decided that my family and I needed a change. My parents grew up just few miles down the road, in Bucks County, and so I figured we'd come back here."

My father is a writer. He bought a computer and a modem, and suddenly living in a city near his agent became pointless. Using new technology is all well and good, but dad didn't have to move us all to an area with nothing but bearded men driving wagons, old Civil War battle sites, and wrinkly Methodists.

"It's so nice here," my mother said, and smiled. She had bought into dad's fantasy. She was entranced by the Wilts' old-fashioned charm.

I, however, felt extremely ill.

"Can I go outside, mom? I need some air." I didn't need to hear my parents rave about the virtues of eastern Pennsylvanian life again.

"Jamie, that's very—"

Mr. Wilt cut her off in mid-sentence.

"Sounds like a good idea," he said. "Let's go get some air, boy."

Wilt led me outside into his backyard, and showed me an old wooden shed, overrun by moss.

"This shed was my workshop years ago," he said. "Back then, I wasn't a God-fearing man. I just did my work and figured that everything else would take care of itself."

Then Wilt's eyes opened wide, he turned around to see if anyone was nearby, and began to speak in a whisper.

"Turns out, I have to be a God-fearing man. If there aren't enough God-fearing men, then Satan wins."

Maybe Pennsylvanians weren't as dull as I had thought.

"Satan's out there, boy, and he's working against all of us. Doesn't matter if you're a Methodist or a Baptist or a hedonist or anything. He's still out to get us. You've got to fear God if you're going to survive. Understand, Jim?"

I nodded. I figured that if I said the wrong thing, he might try to exorcise me.

"Fearing God's not enough, though. You've got to know the secret. My wife, she's a Baptist. She can't know the secret. Your parents, they're from California. They can't know the secret. Your sister, she's too young. She can't understand the secret. But you, Jimboy, you can understand. It's not too late for you."

He was speaking quickly, but his voice was so soft that I could barely hear what he was saying. Still, it was hard to miss his general point.

"This is the secret, Jim. Don't tell anyone unless they can be trusted. They've got to pass the test! You understand?"

I nodded again. Sure, Wilt, sure. Whatever you say.

"When people are eating their food, that's when you've got them. Check to see how many times they bite into the food, boy. Five, ten, those are fine numbers. Twenty's even fine. Up to twenty-two, you've got no problems. But if that person sinks their teeth into the food one more time, twenty-three, and then swallows, they're in on it. They chew their food twenty-three times, then down it goes. Those are the people who work for Satan. Got it, Jim?"

"Twenty-three times," I said, and nodded yet again.

"Good, good boy. Now, you've got to be careful — all sorts of people are in on it. I remember seeing one of those state dinners on TV, and Gerald Ford was eating sirloin steak. Sure enough, twenty-three bites. Not even Clarkesburg's safe. My wife made chicken for the mayor one night last year, and like clockwork, he chewed on each piece of that bird twenty-three times."

There was a knock from the house at this point. Mrs. Wilt had opened a window from the kitchen and was looking out at us.

"Don't scare the boy, dear," she said. "Come on back inside."

He waved, nodded, and started back in. Why did I have the feeling that Mrs. Wilt had seen her husband behave like this before?

"Not a word, Jim," he said. "Not a word."

It turns out that I chew my food about eight times before I swallow it. I counted. Wilt probably counted my chewing too — before he took me out to the old shed, he made sure I didn't swallow after my 23rd bite of Erma's bacon, eggs, and pancakes and swallow.

After 23 bites, all food is reduced to nothing but a disgusting wet paste, made more of spit than of food.

I guess that's how Satan likes it.

Jason Snell jsnell@ucsd.edu

Is the editor of this publication, and his frightening visage appears on page three.

Do You Have Some Time?

Mary Anne Walters

He looked down at the gold Rolex on his wrist. The time was 1:00, Eastern Standard Time. He thought, once again, that there is never enough time.

"Excuse me, do you have some time?" A simple question.

She was tiny and pert looking, and very well-dressed. She was also in a hurry. There was no time to stop and chat. With an irritated glance at her watch she said, "Yes, it's 1:00," and went to move on.

"No, no, no. I didn't say 'Do you have *the* time.' I said 'Do you have *some* time." You see, I've run out and need some more."

Her eyes glazed over, and the look on her face was one that most people save for use only when they are required to deal with a child, a fool, or a lunatic. "I'm sorry, I'm in a hurry. I have no time for this."

With that, she scurried off, like a tiny, pert looking rat in a maze, rushing nowhere, but determined to get there on time nonetheless.

He sighed. He walked a block more. Turning, his eyes scanned the crowd. They were all rushing. But, there, in the shadow of a building, was a young man in jeans and a tee shirt. The T-shirt said *IF YOU HAVE THE MONEY, I HAVE THE TIME*. Quickly, he walked over to the young man and said, "I have the money. Do you have some time for me?"

"Sure, dude. I got all the time in the world." The boys vapid face was surrounded by stringy blond hair. There was a bit of fuzz on his upper lip. The boy grinned, but it looked more like a leer to the man, who cringed.

"While I doubt you do, in fact, have *all* the time in the world, I would like to avail myself of some of the time you *do* have. You see, I seem to have run out of time myself, and I could use a little more. So, if you will tell me how much you charge for your time, it will be easy for me to compute what amount of money I will need to acquire the amount of time I desire. I have found that 24 hours in a day is just not enough—I, myself, would prefer about 32 hours..." As he spoke, he say the boy's leering smile turn to a scowl.

"Buzz off, buddy. One thing for damn sure is that I got no time for weirdos like you!" The boy sauntered away and resumed his languid pose in another shadowy corner, where he was soon approached by a timid little man with a bald head, glasses sliding off the end of his nose, and the look of a rabbit gathering the courage to sneak under the fence into the cabbage patch.

He sighed again, heavier. Once more, he scanned the crowd. He needed someone with time to spare, but who understood the importance and the value of time. People in a hurry had no time to spare. People who seemed to have an abundance of time, like the boy, were somewhat unbalanced. He searched for the perfect mix.

There, on a park bench, was an older man, reading. He wasn't reading a book (took too much time) or a magazine, but was reading the newspaper—and not just the headlines, either. Aha! Could this be the one? He approached slowly.

"Excuse me, sir. Do you have some time?"

The man on the bench was wearing a rather wide, garishly patterned, luridly colored tie. His suit was on the dusty side of grey, made of some thick material that gave off a damp-closet smell. He looked up, and answered in a booming voice, "Sure, the time is 1:24."

NO, No, No, NO! Not *the* time, *some* time! I wanted *some* time!"

"Well, there's no time like the present. What time did you want?

"Did you want some of my time? I'm usually a little short of it myself. Hey, maybe I should take some of your time! Heh, heh, heh. Actually, you're in luck. I have some spare time right now. We could spend some time together. And, speaking of time, let me show you some of my samples." The loud man spoke fast, in a machine-gun-like stream of patter. He looked down, reeling from the assault on his senses. The loud man was opening up his briefcase and there within it was a display of watches, all cheap, and all ticking. The hours were wasting away before his very eyes. With a look of horror, he flung a hand up over his face, as if to ward off a blow, and blocked the sight from his eyes. He recoiled, and looked for a way to escape this wretched man.

"Wait! Don't go! My bus is late. Stick around for a while—we can kill some time together."

That was it. The final straw. He spun on his heels and fled.

The bus driver was only trying to make up for lost time. That broken traffic light put him way off schedule. Now, time was of the essence. He had to be on time—not early, not late. His record was one of the best, and he was proud of it. And, he was mad at the delay that had robbed him of the precious minutes and had made him late. With all these thoughts on his mind, it was no wonder he never saw the well-dressed, wild-eyed, and generally harried looking man that dashed out in front of the bus. By the time he realized, it was too late.

"Shit! Now I'll never get back on schedule!" This thought was echoed by the majority of the people on the bus, to include the tiny, pert, well-dressed woman who got on at the last stop, as well as by the timid, balding man in the car behind the bus (whose passenger was a dirty, languid blond boy, his lip curled into a leer).

The loud and damp smelling man stepped off the curb and walked over to where the previously well-dressed (but now considerably rumpled) man lay, sprawled in the street, still as a stone. He reached down and took the gold Rolex of the now-broken wrist. The bus driver walked over, unsure whether he should attempt to stop this ghoulish act.

"Don't worry," the loud man assured the bus driver, "I saw the whole thing—this guy stole one of my samples, then ran out into the street, right in front of you. That's what happened, all right." The loud man replaced the gold watch with a cheap imitation, and let the wrist drop back to the pavement. "That's what I'll tell the police." He winked a particularly nasty wink at the bus driver, who breathed a sigh of relief nonetheless. The loud man laughed.

"I guess his time ran out, hey buddy?"

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The Talisman

Greg Knauss

Duncan watched as the fat little disk that had so shaped his life bounded up and down in front of him. He stared at it intently, almost hypnotized by its motion — so regular, he thought, so precise, so easily controlled. He flicked his wrist in a thoughtless motion and the flattened sphere obeyed his command, knowing what he wanted without him speaking.

God, I love that, Duncan thought.

It hadn't always been as easy as it was now, sitting here. They had taunted him back when he had cared, called him meaningless things that had seemed tremendously cruel at the time. Worst of all, they made fun of *it.* The disk, the one thing he loved.

Dun-can, Dun-can, the yo-yo man! Dun-can, Dun-can, the yo-yo man!

The yo-yo sped up and down a little faster as he remembered, his motions became a little more intense. He never had to look at the yo-yo while he used it, but now he stared intently into the distance, his jawline hardening, his eyes no longer those of a nine-year-old.

He didn't blame his parents. He loved them more than he would have normally — they gave him this friend on a string when he was only two years old. He had taken to it immediately, quickly becoming an expert in the yo-yo parlor tricks of the early eighties.

He had taken it to his first day of school, clutching the smallish plastic disk instead of his mothers skirt and soon the older kids began to lay into him.

Hey, Dun-can the yo-yo man! People who carry yo-yos wet the bed!

Yeah, Dun-can! Wassa matter? You wet the bed?

Ha ha ha ha!

He tried to ignore them. He tried to find friends with common interests, friends he could relate to, but nobody at school seemed to be interested in yo-yos. He told his parents about the big kids making fun of him, but they didn't understand. They wanted to take his yo-yo *away!* They said that if that was the only thing causing the trouble he should stop taking it to school.

They didn't understand. His yo-yo was the only thing that kept him happy, kept him safe. He loved his yo-yo, and his yo-yo loved him, he was sure of it.

He was getting better, too. He had moved past everyone he had seen on TV and was now inventing tricks of his own. His beloved yo-yo would whiz around, up and down, back and forth at speeds where he could no longer follow it with his eye. But he knew where it was at all times — he and the yo-yo were one, connected by twine.

One day, during recess, he was in a corner of the playground, casually using his yo-yo, when he was approached by the group of bigger kids who found endless fun in mocking his love.

Hey, hey, Dun-can. How's the old yo-yo? Looks pretty good to me.

Can I have it?

Duncan froze, the yo-yo spun up its string and he closed his fist quickly around it. No, he thought. No, no, no . . .

Yeah, it looks mighty good.

Maybe I'll just take *it.*

No! Duncan's wrist flipped up and the yo-yo shot out from his open palm. It hit the big kid in the stomach and he looked as if he'd been hit with a fist. The kid doubled over as the yo-yo swung back towards Duncan. He whipped it behind him, over him and down, in a high, graceful arc, into the back of the kid's head. There was a soft crack.

Uungh.

The kid was on the ground. He could have been sleeping, but there was a yo-yo embedded in the base of his skull.

The other kids scattered away from Duncan as he flicked his wrist and forced the yo-yo up its string into his palm. He smiled.

The yo-yo rolled steadily up and down its string as he wandered away.

He was sitting on the curb now, slowly rubbing the blood off his yo-yo. He could hear sirens in the distance and he supposed soon they would find him and want to take him away. He knew what he had done was a bad thing, but just letting that kid *take* his yo-yo would have been worse.

He supposed they might try to hurt him, but Duncan wasn't really worried.

His yo-yo would protect him.

Schrödinger's Monkey

Greg Knauss

If nothing else, it explains a lot.

For those with a technical education in physics, it seems the Everett-Wheeler-Graham interpretation of quantum indeterminacy, with a few addendums, turns out to be correct. For those without, a little explanation is needed.

Physics, for years now, has had a central question: What is wrong with quantum mechanics? Quantum mechanics is a method of calculating values on the atomic and sub-atomic level, a little like Newtonian mechanics can be used to calculate values on a larger scale. Newtonian formulas can predict where a rock will fall if someone throws it in the air, quantum formulas try to do the same thing for atoms.

But it never worked quite right. Newtonian physics, real-world physics, always comes up with one specific answer — it many not be the right answer, say, if some factor was forgotten, or some measurement misread, but it is always a single answer. Quantum physics, though, always produces more than one answer, *all* of which are technically, mathematically correct. It's called "indeterminacy." Newton says the rock will land *here;* quantum mechanics says that the rock will land *here* and *here* and *here.*

This is, of course, impossible.

In the real world you can't have more than one answer. It's not a question of actually throwing the rock and seeing where it lands. The formulas should provide one answer, and one answer only. Period.

Schrödinger came up with his famous cat to try to illustrate the problem. Imagine: there's a box, with no holes or windows, that contains a cat. The cat has some sort of lethal device hooked up to it — I always liked to think of it as a guillotine, but Schrödinger used poisonous gas — that can be triggered by some nameless quantum event.

Now, after a specific period of time, is the cat dead? Quantum mechanics will return a number of answers, one of which might say that the cat has been killed, another of which might not. So without opening the box, is the cat dead or alive? Schrödinger said it was both — an obviously false statement — just to point out that quantum mechanics has a gaping hole in it.

There were a number of explanations for what was going on. Einstein had the Hidden Variable, Von Neumann and Finkelstein had Quantum Logic, Bohr had the Copenhagen Interpretation, Walker and Herbert had "Consciousness" Nonlocality, Sarfatti had "Information" Nonlocality. They were all attempts to rectify what quantum mechanics predicted with what actually happened, ways of looking at the universe to make it fit quantum answers.

As it turns out, events have proven Drs. Everett, Wheeler and Graham correct. Their model suggested, perhaps fancifully, that for every indeterminacy — every Schrödinger's Cat — an entirely new universe is created, exactly the same as the first, but for that single quantum event. In one universe, the cat would be dead; in the other it would be alive.

Of course, quantum events are happening by the trillions every second, by the trillions of trillions. Universes would be splitting and re-splitting and splitting again, taking every possible course imaginable. Judging by the rough estimate that the universe is 10 billion years old, the number of entirely separate universes is beyond human imagining. The amount is inconceivable.

I suppose it should be obvious that eventually they'd run out of room.

The way I see it — and this is just my particular model, obviously derived in a hurry, last night — each universe acts something like an atom of hydrogen might, enclosed in a glass jar. When there are only a few hydrogen atoms, they float about freely, gaseous, and rarely collide. This is the Gas State.

If these atoms, however, were able to duplicate themselves, along the lines of Everett-Wheeler-Graham, the jar would slowly begin to get crowded. Collisions with divergent universes explain a lot of what we're seeing.

Of course these collisions would become more frequent, and pressure would eventually begin to build. As more atoms were created, eventually liquid hydrogen — the Liquid State — would condense out of the ever more crowded gas. Collisions would be innumerable nearly constant, even.

And that's what's happening to us. I don't claim

to know what the "jar" is — Thornton Wilder would probably call it "the Mind of God" — but I think that collisions don't take place physically, at least not in the lower three dimensions. There's no thud of our universe running into another one.

Universes seem to "tap" each other lightly — perhaps there's some sort of natural repulsion or elasticity — and only a small exchange takes place. Parts of the other universe slosh over into ours and parts of ours spill over into it, following some upper-dimensional conservation of momentum, like giant bowls of milk.

What does this mean in practical terms? If nothing else, it explains a lot.

It explains Jesus rising from the grave, for instance. Say three days after his crucifixion, there was a rare Gas State collision with a universe where he wasn't killed, and their Christ was bumped to our world.

It explains what happened to a Spanish book that disappeared from my locker in high school.

It explains what happens to everyone's car keys, and the one sock that's always missing from the dryer.

lt explains Atlantis and Big Foot and the Loch Ness monster and unicorns and every other myth or legend in the world.

It explains why there's another me, very close to an exact duplicate as far as I can tell, sitting in the kitchen gorging himself on bananas. We talked for a long time last night, after he appeared in my bathroom, and the only glaring difference we found between our universes was that in his, bananas never evolved. Some quantum event far back in the past prevented whatever it was that eventually became bananas from mutating in a certain way. He — the other me — loves them, and has eaten over three dozen by my count.

Now that the universes are condensing into the Liquid State we'll be seeing a lot more of that sort of thing. I wonder how much longer some sort of societal order will hold out. Somehow I doubt people will be too concerned with the law if they know that everything they know as fact might cease to exist at any particular moment.

And I wonder how long we have before the Solid State.

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