

LAST WAVE

THE LAST BEST HOPE OF SPECULATIVE FICTION

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THE NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Felix C. Gotschalk

TIME-SLIT THROUGH A RICE PAPER WINDOW

Jessica Amanda Salmonson

Steve Rasnic Tem

Parke Godwin

David J. Sheskin

Philip K. Dick

K.W. Jeter

Mark Williams

Even Malzberg Gets The Blues

The following exchange of correspondence between Scott Edelman and Barry N. Malzberg appears without further editorial comment. Letters of opinion on the issues raised herein are invited for publication in the next issue of *Last Wave*.

January 14, 1984

Dear Mr. Edelman:

If there's a magazine devoted to the cutting edge of science fiction, I hope you'll agree that I ought to be in it, inasmuch as I paid heavy dues through the 70's for *la causa*. Regardless, I wish you well with the magazine and would like to see the first issue...and might be interested in doing some occasional reviewing if you think that could be worked out.

Enc: "Febrility," 1000 words; "Comforters of Narcissus," 2000 words.

Regards,
Barry N. Malzberg

February 5, 1984

Dear Mr. Malzberg:

If I was choosing stories on the basis of the 70's dues-paying that the authors went through, rest assured that you'd be one of the first on my list. I loved much of the work that you did back then. But as much as I'd love to publish you, "Febrility" and "Comforters of the Narcissus" will not be the pieces that will do it. There just wasn't enough to either of them, and if I did use them, it would be a great insult to you, for I'd only be buying your name for my cover. I just don't think these two pieces are good enough, and will not use them even if I do think that they would probably help sales. Sorry.

Also, I won't be using reviews, per se. I am, however, thinking of moving the magazine more towards a fiction/nonfiction mix such as that in *The Atlantic*, and to that end I am looking for well-written essays. To show the sort of thing I am looking for, I am pointing to the books *On Stories* by C.S. Lewis, and *Dickens, Dali...* by George Orwell. So, I'd be willing to take a look at any essays along the lines of those that filled your own *The Engines of the Night*.

Please feel free to submit again.
Scott Edelman

February 7, 1984

Dear Mr. Edelman:

The temptation is strong (my late father would understand this precisely) to send back the two stories and say, "Oh, come on, insult me greatly, buy them just for my name on the cover" (or like the famous Nichols/May skit; "If I did it you wouldn't respect me," she says, "oh, honey," he says, "I'd respect you like *crazy*."), but I won't; I'll just send another which I think is much stronger than those two and see if you find this any more confluent with your purposes.

The only essays I am writing nowadays are on direct commission (and I have absolutely no unsold nonfiction around) so I guess I can't offer you anything; every now and then I get an urge to write a review but like Sam Clemens' philosopher, I can lie down until the urge goes away.

Best regards,
Barry

February 25, 1984

Dear Barry,

Sorry, but I do not think that this one is for me, either. "The Song of Solomon," while experimental in construct, is not ambitious enough for me. Thanks for trying it with me.

Barry, I've been reading you for fifteen years, and have a lot of respect for you and your work. I do want to publish you, and have been giving these stories a serious reading. Unfortunately we have not yet clicked on the precise story that both of us will be in love with. I do want to publish you, and hope you can put up with my pickiness until we come to an agreement.

Thanks for trying me again.
Scott Edelman

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TIME-SLIT THROUGH A RICE PAPER WINDOW

by Jessica Amanda Salmonson

First you must picture a man wearing bamboo armor, a man who is standing very far away. In fact he is in a valley and you are seeing him somewhat from above. You must not expect to understand his motivations, even if he does something which you would do in a similar circumstance. It is the great falsehood of fiction that a reader can identify with a character. The reader identifies only with the reader, and shapes the character to that. In this case, the reader must bear in mind that nothing makes definite sense even when it appears logical; and nothing is outrageous even if it looks absurd. The activities you are about to witness, through words on paper (think of the page as a rice paper window through which a slit is made into another place and time), simply *are*. Or, they simply *were*, since the events take place somewhere in history.

The man in bamboo armor (the armor is lacquered black) has a name (it is Kohachi Takuro), but you should think of him as not having a name at all, or you may begin to feel you know him better than you do. You do not know him at all. He is even too far away to see his face. If you could see his face, you might also feel you were getting to know him a little bit. But even close up, you would not be able to see his face, for he is wearing a warrior's mask of iron. It covers the jowls, nose, and chin. His eyes are visible (not from so far away, of course) but there is nothing special about them, except that they are, to Western perception, slanted. The eyes of the reader may or may not be similar. Probably the reader's eyes are not similar since this is being written in English (the author takes no responsibility for the quality of any translation). Or perhaps the reader's eyes are in fact similar to the eyes of the man in the valley, for certainly there are a large number of English-speaking (and reading) Asians, not to mention the fact that even some Caucasians have eyes which slant. But whether or not your eyes are slanted like his, you must not imagine you have anything in common with him. He is from a different time, which we can only intellectualize about, and he is his own person, unique and not to be twisted into something you feel more comfortable about, something you feel is similar to you.

A second man enters the valley. It appears as though the first man has been waiting for him, but perhaps he was not waiting for anyone and the second man happened there by coincidence. The second man is also wearing bamboo ar-

mor, which is lacquered blue. The two men look a bit like turtles, which in the mythology of this place is quite suitable, for turtles represent warriors. Turtles also represent long life, and that is not appropriate at all, for the two men are instantly hostile to each other when they meet. They draw forth long sabers and begin to duel. From your view overlooking the valley, it seems as though the clang of steel against steel is out of synchronization with the picture, as in a badly dubbed movie. This increases the feeling of looking through a time-slit in the window of the page. Actually the reason for this is that it takes a little while for the sound to reach you. Swords cross. Then, you hear sound. Swords cross again; a moment later, you hear it.

The warriors seem to be awkward, but it is only because the bamboo armor hangs loose and shakes upon their shoulders and arms and thighs. Their bodies are actually highly coordinated. They are very scientific about what they do, which is try to kill each other. One or the other, if not both, will not live long like a turtle.

One of the men acquires a serious wound. It is the man with blue armor who is wounded. The other, who is our protagonist Kohachi whom we must not pretend to understand, goes for the victory, and achieves it. His opponent is dead. It seems Kohachi is not satisfied yet, although we do not really know why he feels compelled (by code? custom? personal wish?) to cut off the dead man's head and carry it away. If you personally had just killed someone with a sword, would you then take away the head with you? Would you show it about as a trophy? Would you have it delivered to your foe's lord or employer as a boast? Or would you bury it with some sort of ceremony, unconcerned about the rest of the corpse? Probably you would not take the head at all, nor have any idea what to do with the head if you did happen to take it. Kohachi will not have the head the next time we see him, so we will never know what he did with it. If we did some research on the time, we could find some reasons why heads were taken, but generalizations are foolish. We will never know why Kohachi wanted the head. If the story took place in the Congo, we could guess what happened to the head. As it is, we have no idea.

* * *



Now Kohachi is wearing a yukata, which is a sort of kimono worn when one is relaxing at home. He is not at home, however, but in a private room at an inn. There is a table in front of him. It's a small table, very small indeed. But it is the right size for Kohachi, for he is not so big himself; furthermore, he is sitting on his knees, so a small table is obviously just the thing.

You may have thought Kohachi was a large fellow, being a warrior and a successful one at that. That's what happens when you see someone far away in a valley. You cannot tell how big he is. That's also what happens when you believe things with no real basis in life, such as the belief that warriors are quite large. In fact most warriors are frail in appearance, being often enough about eighteen years old. Kohachi is probably older than that, but not very. Now that he is not wearing an iron mask, it is possible to see how good looking he is. When he is older, perhaps he will look ordinary. But as it stands now, he is still young enough to have a girlish quality, a prettiness that belongs mainly to youth. After seeing him kill his foe in the valley (for what reasons we may never fully understand, except that these things happen all the time, even in our own age) you may have imagined him with a hardened visage, just as you imagined he was quite large. But warriors are not like that at all, at least not in Kohachi's time and place. In fact Kohachi is a poet. He does not write poems about war, either. He writes about plum blossoms, which are symbolic of innocence; or he writes about cherry blossoms, which are symbolic of life's transient beauty. In a way these poems of innocence and transience are after all about war.

Also in the room is a woman dressed in a very fancy kimono of bright colors and her hair is piled up high on her head with sharp pins holding it together. To tell the truth, it does not look as though all of that hair is hers. She is probably a geisha, although the term may suggest too high a station. She serves Kohachi sake and talks to him (he rarely talks back) and pretty soon he is intoxicated. At one point he acts as though he is going to ravish the woman serving him, but for some reason changes his mind. Perhaps he thought of warrior codes which prohibit idle copulation. Perhaps he prefers women with less make-up and gaudy appearance. Perhaps he remembered his girl back home, or his mother. All we know for sure is that he almost took the woman with some selfish intent (she didn't act as though it would have bothered her, not that her passivity or resignation meant she was glad) but in the end he went to sleep instead.

Kohachi lay upon a "wafer futon," that is, a mattress thinner than a worn-out blanket. He is covered with a second quilt of similar threadbare thinness; it is a wonder he doesn't shiver. Kohachi is not staying in a poor inn really.

The cupboards have nice, thick quilts in them. But he had previously requested wafer futons. If we had gotten to the inn in time, we could have heard him say the reason: "Austerity is better than comfort." The maids of the inn talk about this a long time, thinking it extreme even for a spartan warrior (not that Kohachi is from Sparta).

In the morning Kohachi has a salty soup and a bitter tea and before long is on his way from the inn to somewhere else. We are somehow able to stay very close to him and not have to see him from far away. In fact we ("we" being the readers along with the writer) can look right over his shoulder and see the dusty road Kohachi is walking on. We have no idea what he did with his armor. Possibly he left it in the same place he left the head. Perhaps it wasn't his armor in the first place. Whatever he did with it, he doesn't have it now. He has a straw hat, however, and he is wearing it, we may guess because the sun is very hot. It is unusually hot for Autumn. Leaves fall on the dusty path. They fall on Kohachi's straw hat. One of the leaves stays there on his hat (Kohachi doesn't know about it until later).

Because we are so close and know how pretty he is and how he likes to sleep and what he ate that morning and how he walks so carefree, because of all this, we may feel we're coming to know Kohachi a little bit. That's what happens when you observe someone for a while. But really people are usually wrong when they make guesses about people. We don't understand Kohachi at all, or know him in the least, and he is liable at any moment to do something we cannot understand. (He just this moment picked up a rock and threw it off to the side of the path. There were other rocks he didn't pick up, and there was no reason to throw the rock anywhere at all. We've no idea why Kohachi threw the rock. Yet, if we were walking on the path — as indeed we seem to be, so close we can see over Kohachi's shoulder — we might have thrown a rock just that same way and for as little reason. And if someone looking over our shoulder wondered why we threw the rock, we could not tell them, and they could not guess, because really there was no reason. Though Kohachi may have had some reason we will never know about.)

After a long walk and when the sun is cooler (and Kohachi's hat is hanging down his back), there appears far ahead another man dressed similar to Kohachi. Now Kohachi, as a warrior, has two swords with him, thrust through the belt which holds his kimono together. The man in the distance has two swords also. These two men converge. The other man is older. They pass each other by, and nothing happened at all. They didn't even bow to each other a little bit. We may have expected something to happen. It just goes to show how little we understand things.

Later on there is another man, and another man after that, this latter with a child; but none of them have swords, being of a different class than Kohachi. The man after that is with a woman. She has a sword but he does not. This is



not common, but it is not surprising to Kohachi, so it shouldn't be to us. In any event, nothing happens with any of these people, and we begin to be off guard, thinking nothing is going to happen whatsoever. Nothing does. For once, we are right about something.

* * *

Kohachi stayed in an inn much like the one he'd stayed in the night before, but we didn't hang around to see him there, and we don't know if he slept with the woman who waited on him or not. If he did so, he probably had to pay a little extra sum for the lodging, but we don't know anything about that. Somehow we have gone ahead in time and are with Kohachi once again, in the afternoon. How we shot ahead in time this way in interesting to think about. Time travel is quite ordinary in fiction, and not just science fiction, any kind of fiction at all. Most people think time travel is impossible, but in stories it happens all the time, and we hardly ever think about it. If not for time travel, we would have to watch Kohachi pee and sleep and clean his teeth and things would get very dull. Sometimes it is even possible to travel backward in time in a story. This is most interesting of all. Moving forward in time can be explained by our having gone to sleep or something like that. But how do we go backward? That is harder to explain. But sometimes it happens.

About a month earlier, Kohachi met with an old man named Doko. Doko is an armorer and his worst enemy is another armorer named Tosiki. "You must be my champion in about one month!" Doko pleads. "My rival Tosiki says his armor makes a warrior invincible! I say only my armor can do that. So he will choose a champion to meet my champion in a certain valley. Will you do it?" Kohachi says yes to the old man. Kohachi likes adventure, apparently, although we don't really know that for sure. Perhaps cases like this have something to do with duty or honor, so for some reason Kohachi couldn't have said no. In any case, now we know why Kohachi was in that valley. He was testing Doko's armor against Tosiki's. No doubt Doko is doing a better business now, and Tosiki is making excuses.

One would think Doko would at least have let Kohachi keep the armor as payment, but perhaps Kohachi didn't want it, or such payment was too lavish. If we were to ask around, we might be able to find out if Kohachi received any payment at all, but it's difficult for the reader to ask anything of the people in a story. "Hello, Doko," we might say. "We're several people reading this story — perhaps a million people if the author has any luck — and we'd like to know if you paid Kohachi to kill that man in the valley a month from now." (We say "a month from now" because we have not yet time-travelled back to Kohachi's present.) "And by the way," we also ask: "Did Kohachi give that

head to you? We were wondering what became of it."

Although we have just asked Doko these questions, he doesn't seem to hear us. Getting ourselves inside a story is really much harder than time travel. It just goes to show that it is not really possible to get inside a character and understand him. We can't get in the story at all. We can't change it. You might think the author could do so at least, but you'd be surprised. The author doesn't know anything either. The people an author writes about are very puzzling even to the author.

"Hello, Kohachi!" someone shouts (we are in Kohachi's present once again). Kohachi turns around and for a moment we think he is going to see us since we have been looking over his shoulder. For a moment we may even think it is we who called out to Kohachi and, unlike Doko, he heard us. But no, there is someone behind us, and we turn around too. We are standing between Kohachi and the fellow who called his name, but they don't seem to see us at all. The other man is a midget and very old. He wears the long black vest of a priest. If we saw him from the top of a valley we might think him a child, for we couldn't see his wrinkled face. Or we might think he was a full-sized warrior-monk, for perspective is that way sometimes. Close up, he is an old midget. We must crouch down a bit to be sure, to see under his hat (it is as big a hat as Kohachi's, though the wearer is much smaller). "Kohachi! I heard a story about you lately! Is it true?"

"It's true, Priest Genzaburo," says Kohachi. Does he mean the encounter in the valley? If we eavesdrop, maybe we can find out.

"Your mother must be happy!" says Genzaburo. That would seem to suggest the priest is *not* talking about the encounter in the valley. Being as small as he is, it isn't likely he could have heard about the duel and then caught up with Kohachi later, so we were foolish to think he was talking about that.

"She is happy, Priest Genzaburo."

"Who was your go-between?" asks Genzaburo.

"It was the girl's Aunt Oko. She made the meeting very pleasant."

Probably they are talking about Kohachi getting married.

"I met Oko one time," says Genzaburo the midget priest. "She can be very insistent."

"She wasn't insistent at all," says Kohachi.

"No? Maybe she didn't like you!"

"She seemed to like me very much," says Kohachi.

"Well, anyway, it isn't Aunt Oko who has to like you, it's the girl. Her name is Uneme? A very pretty girl!"

Definitely they are talking about Kohachi's marriage.

"Yes, very pretty, and talented. Have you heard her play the koto? My mother made a good choice for me. I am going now to visit my father's grave in Seki and let him know about everything. I think he will be happy for me."

"All the way to Seki? You could have told him at the household shrine!"



“It’s too important for that,” says Kohachi. “I will visit him at his grave.”

“A very pious son!” says Genzaburo, and bows deeply to Kohachi.

As we cannot understand the religious significance of this conversation without studying the beliefs of the time and place, it is perhaps best that we once more skip ahead in time.

Genzaburo is sitting on a rock on the side of the road and he is by himself. We seem to have lost Kohachi while traveling forward in time. This happens in fiction very often. There is a scene-break and suddenly some of the characters are gone. Or there are different characters altogether. One wonders why this is not more disorienting when it happens, but it is somehow taken for granted. Genzaburo looks even older than he did before. Perhaps we skipped too far ahead in time. No, he is just tired. It is late and his little feet have not taken him as far as an inn. Did Kohachi take long strides and leave his friend behind? That wouldn’t have been very nice! But we don’t know that Kohachi did such a thing. Probably Kohachi had to take a different road, and Priest Genzaburo this one. It is better to think this happened, or else we won’t like Kohachi so much. We may not understand the protagonist of a story (and that means *any* story, not just this one) but we should at least like him a little bit or else we won’t be able to pretend we are having an adventure with him.

Genzaburo begins to sing a folksong about a medicine god who is a dwarf. We could make psychological guesses why Genzaburo likes that song so much, but we might be wrong. The song could be the most popular song of any in the place where Genzaburo was born, so it would be perfectly natural that anyone from that place would sing about the dwarf god. It has nothing to do with Genzaburo being a midget. On the other hand the song might be quite obscure and Genzaburo remembers it better than anyone just for the psychological reasons we had suspicions about. We’ll never know if our guesses are right or wrong; but we can guess about ourselves, and guess we are terribly rude to make judgements based on someone’s stature.

The priest sings the song for a long time. Then he gets up and continues on his way, coming to an inn before the sun is completely down. He is given a room like the rooms in most inns, like the one we saw Kohachi in earlier, a small room with rice paper windows. There is a narrow slit in one section of a rice paper window. There seems to be writing on the other side of that section, like a book’s page. Eyes, like stars, are looking through the slit. The other sections of the rice paper windows are quite ordinary.

A maid brings Genzaburo a yakata to relax in, but it is too big for him. He wears it anyway. He sits on his knees beside a little table (which looks larger beside him). After he has eaten a nice meal, the maid begins to pour him sake.

He gets a bit tipsy and makes a pass at the maid. This may

not be proper for a priest, but we really do not know anything about his religion. Perhaps it is quite an ordinary thing for a priest to do. Girls at inns sometimes don’t mind that guests do this; they make a little extra money. Sometimes the proprietors demand that maids respond. The girl may respond because of the proprietor’s regulations, or it may be for the extra money. There is also the possibility that she thinks Genzaburo is cute. Unlike the dwarf-god, Genzaburo is perfectly formed, merely small. If the maid thinks he is a cute old man, like a doll set out on Girl’s Day Festival, it cannot be that she is entirely incorrect.

She lays out a very thick futon for them both and they make exquisite love all night long. Genzaburo chants sutras part of the time and both of them laugh a lot. Genzaburo is usually on top for otherwise he would be squashed (that, perhaps, is a mean joke).

* * *

Kohachi comes to his father’s grave in Seki and talks to him for a long time. Several days may have passed or just one; time-travel is unpredictable and we don’t really know. He has arrived at the grave late at night and, before he knows it, it is the Hour of the Ox. The Hour of the Ox is a haunted hour, and Kohachi’s father suddenly appears sitting in front of the tombstone. Kohachi is not afraid, for his father had been a kind man in life, and Kohachi does not imagine kindness is lost in death. “Why, I’ve been talking to you a long time, father, but did not expect to see you so clearly.”

“Clearly, you say! Why, a paper window stops more light than I do!” Kohachi’s father laughs. “See, the moon shines right through me! Isn’t it interesting?”

“Yes, it is,” says Kohachi. “But I must say your appearance here is quite an unusual thing. I’ve heard of it happening to other people, but usually there is an important reason. Do you have one?”

“Why, I don’t think I do,” says Kohachi’s ghost-father. “I was off somewhere and heard you talking to me about getting married, and I thought, ‘Why, isn’t that fine,’ and suddenly here I was. Oh, yes! I met a young man a day or so ago and he said if I heard from you soon, to say he held you no animosity, that you fought well, and anyway Tosiki makes inferior armor.”

“I’m glad he holds no grudge,” says Kohachi. “It was a good duel and a close call for me.”

“I remember my last duel!” says Kohachi’s father, sighing and looking nostalgic. “A good way to die!”

“Did you know I avenged you?” asks Kohachi.

“It was excellently done!” says the ghost. “Ah! That reminds me! You must be careful, Kohachi. The man you killed in the valley also has a son. He is young, but in a couple of years he will come after you.”

“I don’t mind,” says Kohachi. “A good way to die.”

“Oh! Do you hear that?” The ghost claps hands to ears



and looks irritated.

“It’s a bell,” says Kohachi. “There is a Buddhist temple nearby and the monks are slamming the boss of the bell right this moment.”

“Oh! It’s too loud for me! I would like to stay and talk longer, but the Priests won’t have it! That’s why they ring that bell during the Hour of the Ox! Be good to your mother, Kohachi! Be good to your new wife!”

Kohachi’s father disappears.

A few days later (we are time traveling again) Kohachi is home with his mother. There is much ado about the marriage preparations and the invitations which must be sent out. A servant is replacing the torn windows in the rice paper screens and doors, so everything will be spiffy for the

celebration. We won’t be able to see through the time-slit much longer. What will happen to Kohachi after we are gone? Perhaps he has a good life with his bride, winning a few more duels in his life. Perhaps there is a war and he goes off to that and dies, or else is a success and becomes a wealthy warlord. Possibly the son of someone he killed comes and duels with him and wins. It is difficult to know what occurs in the life of the people in a story after the story ends. If we have any hearts at all, we must suffer thinking about it. That’s why stories sometimes say “happily ever after” or else kill all the characters off, so that we won’t have to worry about it. As for Kohachi, we have no idea what happens to him after this. We can always hope for the best. □



Have you ever noticed that **Amazing...**

...isn't?

LAST WAVE'S first three issues have featured works by Steve Rasnic Tem, Avram Davidson, Thomas M. Disch, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Philip K. Dick, John Sladek, Ian Watson, Ronald Anthony Cross, Carter Sholz, Parke Godwin, Felix Gotschalk and others. Isn't it time you started subscribing?

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**LAST
WAVE**

FOURTH REICH

by Mark Williams

Patrick Zamyatin was genuinely surprised when his hair-dryer bit him, as most people would be. It was not just tangled in his hair; he could feel teeth, and lips pressing into his head. Blood trickled down his forehead and, before he could shut it, into his right eye; he howled, and released the dryer, trying to wipe away the blood. The dryer hung there for a moment, attached to Patrick, then wriggled and flipped like a drowning perch, screaming; pulling and tearing more of his scalp and ripping a patch loose before Patrick could grab the dryer again.

The sight — through one eye — of his hair dryer floating, with blood-dripping flesh and hair clenched between teeth that should not have been there, replaced Patrick's pain, overwhelming though it was, with astonishment, confusion. The dryer bobbed in the air with an aura of indecision. Then, making a hint of a pucker, the lips spat out the mass into Patrick's face, and the teeth formed a bloody, grisly grin like the teeth of a skull. Scales of fear coated Patrick like a raspy womb, immobilizing him.

"Guten morgen," said the lips in a friendly, female voice. "Iz you goingk someplace, ja? To der offices for der vork?" The voice was a parody of the German stereotype, such as one would hear from Sid Caesar or Mel Brooks. "Iz goot; iz goot for der youngk man not to be idle. You iz likingk you job, ja? Das is goot, iz important." The dryer paused for a moment, smiling motherly. Then the dryer's power cord unplugged itself and wrapped its length around Patrick's shoulders like a loving snake. "Vell, you had better to leaf, now." The lips puckered again, and pecked Patrick a kiss on the nose. "Haff der nice day, dearie."

The dryer exploded, eradicating four acres of Sacramento, California.

* * *

Through it all, Peter Asher kept telling himself: forty dollars and a few pinpricks isn't so big a deal, if it'll turn Pamela on. A small red rose imprinted forever into his back; he realized that he'd probably never get to see it, except maybe in a House of Mirrors. But Pamela had been a knockout, and his friend Dennis had told him that she had a thing for tattoos, so...

He felt another needle pinch, much like the many others

he had felt since he had lain down on the table, his cheek pressed against the fake-leather head-rest. "Hey," said the voice above him, "you hear about the new ovens they're makin' in Auschwitz?" More needle pinches.

"No," answered Peter Asher, simply.

"They seat forty," said the voice, and it chuckled at its joke.

Hilarious, thought Peter. What's next, Vietnam jokes? Beirut? How many Grenadians does it take to change a light bulb? One, but only with help from fourteen Cuban soldiers and at least one Soviet advisor.

"Heh heh, yeah," said the voice, "one Nazi says to the other, 'It's cold, Fritz; throw another Jew on the fire.' Heh heh." Another needle pinch. "OK, that's it. Wanna have a look?" Peter sat up and saw the owner of the voice, a balding-blond man, wisp of a moustache, wisp of a body, short, thick fingers like gherkins that had no business using delicate instruments. The man gave Peter a hand-held mirror, then angled Peter so that the tattoo faced a larger mirror and reflected into the one Peter held. The rose was crude and did not impress Peter at all; he said nothing, though, paying the money he owed and leaving. He wouldn't wait; he would test what Dennis had told him right away. Pamela lived within walking distance from the tattoo parlor, and in no time he was up her front steps, ringing her doorbell.

The Transformation had waited long enough to take place, and it swooped in.

* * *

I don't know where I am.

I don't know what's going on.

It was the middle of the day, and then suddenly it became night. It is as if someone has thrust me into outer space, and taken away the stars. My home has vanished, except for the floor, and even it is different; the carpet is gone, and the floor itself feels like concrete, with a lot of powder covering it, maybe dust. I am naked; I can feel the powder between my toes. I am afraid to let any get into my mouth; I must be careful not to touch it with my hands.

All I can do now is grope around for something in this blackness, something familiar; maybe I will find something that will tell me where I am.



* * *

“You see, Mr. Clarke,” advised the veterinarian, “your dog is acting badly *because* you punish it. It craves attention, even unkind attention, because it shows you care at least a little. Bumpy would rather have what he undoubtedly feels is a cruel, unkind master, *with* him, rather than feel alienated from even the most generous of masters.

* * *

my name is hermann. you knew
me many years ago. i was a
poet then but you did not
see me as a poet you saw me
as a madman. but i was a
poet only i was not a poet
of words but of life. blood
was my pen guns and missiles
my paper my scroll. my
editor was the cyanide and
fire with which i took the
mistakes out of life.
my name is not archy but i
am much the same i have been
transmigrated into some small
vermin maybe a cockroach
maybe whatever gregor samsa
became. it is part of the
new way of things you may
have noticed that things are
different now it is a new
scheme that the favored ones
of the new lord may work
their ways up the ladder of
life.
you who are reading this are
probably thinking to yourself
that this is a trick a joke
that the transmigration of
poets into cockroaches is
not possible in reality well
i have news for you there is
a new reality now so expect
the worst and you will not
be very wrong.

* * *

I have found a wall; it is much like the floor, concrete, but
no dust. I will feel along the wall now.

* * *

“Father, why doesn’t God speak to us anymore?”

“He speaks to us through the Word, my son.”

“Does God still love us, Father?”

“Of course He does! What a horrible thing to ask.”

“But, if He still loves us, why does He let all the bad things
in the world keep happening? Why do people starve, and kill
each other and die of cancer, and why do tornadoes and
earthquakes destroy the people you say he loves, and what
they have worked for all their lives? Father, would you let
someone you loved suffer without at least telling them *why* you
weren’t doing anything to help them?”

“It would not be good to do so.”

“Then why does God do it?”

“The Lord works in mysterious ways, my son.”

* * *

“Ms. Bauer, I’m not sure that you can classify this as
harassment,” said the policeman. “Looks to me to be more
the act of a secret admirer.”

“It *is* harassment,” said Pamela Bauer. “I don’t want
these creepy lamps, and I want whoever it is that’s leaving
them to stop.” She pointed to the latest gift, a lamp very
much like the others she had received; the base was a bland,
dried-blood red, and the shade was made of some
unrecognizable material like thin leather, only barely touch-
ed by decoration: a small red rose by the upper rim.

* * *

A massive wall of uranium appeared along the border of
Israel, stretching a mile into the sky. It was then flooded with
water, until it resembled nothing more than a titanic swim-
ming pool of no definable shape, kidney or otherwise.

* * *

Phil Donahue faced the camera. “Today our guest is Dr.
Joyce Brothers, and the topic is child abuse.” He looked to
the floor. “Is the caller there?”

“Yes,” answered the voice, a female.

“Go right ahead,” approved Phil.

“Yes, I have a question for Dr. Brothers. Until I was fif-
teen years old I lived with my father, who was...just...con-
stantly drunk. You know? He was my only parent; my
mother left us not long after I was born. My father abused
me, physically, sexually...and I was finally taken away from
him by social workers, through the courts.

“But what I can’t understand is, I didn’t want to leave my
father, and even now I’d find him if I could. I feel like I love
my father, but I know that I have every reason to hate him.
Can you help me?”

Dr. Joyce Brothers’ response was automatic and rote, as if
read from a teleprompt. “Yes, I think I can...what’s your
first name, dear?”

“Uh...Joanie.”



“All right, Joanie, your problem is not an uncommon one. It all comes down to a basic human need for attention from our parental figures. Sometimes children will misbehave so that they will be punished, because they crave attention from their parents, even if it has to be negative attention. You did much the same thing, not by creating a situation where you would be punished, but by staying in an already-present situation where you *knew* you’d be punished.” At this moment Dr. Brothers realized that the people in the audience, including Phil, had their gazes locked on her breasts, which were slowly inflating like helium balloons. Rattled only momentarily, she kept her composure and continued.

“Your situation was complicated, obviously, by your mother leaving you. In any child’s mind, rejection means that the child has erred in some way, and the child feels guilt.” Her left breast speeded its growth slightly. “You were afraid that, if you were to complain about how your father treated you, your father would leave you, as did your —” Her blouse burst open, revealing two absurd spheres, the left one now sprouting rapidly to the size of a desk-top globe and its partner not far behind. There were giggles and cries of astonishment and wolf whistles and an occasional uhf! of indignance all throughout the studio. Dr. Brothers had absolutely no idea what to do, and the camera steadily preserved for history her glassy-eyed wonder, her gasps, and of course her breasts, both of which blossomed happily until

POP! POP!

* * *

a message to those of you
who keep asking and who
have asked for years where
is god question mark
is god dead question mark
the answer is no god is
not dead
but he was not appreciated
enough it is the nature

of living animals to need
attention from those who
are superior to them this
is a democratic universe
the will of the masses has
been served.

* * *

I have found a knob, here in the wall. I can only pray to God that it is the knob to a door.

I am scalded! Water, burning me! I have turned the knob back; the water has stopped, but there is a violence at my feet, a churning. I can feel, smell, fumes, gas, rising from the floor. I can’t keep from brea

* * *

the god of the jews the
filthy jews yahweh he is
called he has been replaced
a more efficient one has
been given the throne of the
old one whose ways you
denied because you could
not understand them.
many of you will not like
the new lord of all but he
is not one to be liked
that is not his purpose.
what he is to you is a
god who can fulfill a long
ignored need of yours what
you are to him is what all
inferior beings are
rightfully in regards
to their superiors playtoys pets
you are to be used to bide
his time and to make his
eternity more endurable
hermann

□

THE DAY IT RAINED VAGINAS

by Steve Rasnic Tem

Prelude. Last night Walter sat up late rubbing pimple medicine into his knees. Today he gathered all the dirty magazines he had hidden about the house and piled them onto the living room rug. There he built a great bonfire for decency, and even though the carpet and drapes were a bit singed he knew his mother would be happy. It was an awe-inspiring sight, bringing tears almost instantly to his eyes, to be just as quickly brushed away by young masculine hands soon-to-be-suitable — Walter swore — for a firm handshake. His mother had always suspected; he was sure of it. Walter now felt that quality of “sadder but wiser” one might experience upon the loss of an old and dear friend.

The embers scattered about the rug flickered on and off like distress signals from some microcosmic world; it made Walter wonder. It frightened him a bit. The fire was dying out. What had started this chain of events was Walter’s confusion when he opened that little door that gave the plumber access to the bathroom pipes from his bedroom. There was the tiniest crack around the tub faucet, between the pipe and the wall, and he saw what he’d never seen before, some part of his mother’s body submerged in water. It stared at him in admonishment; he slammed the little door and ran from the house. If his mother ever knew. He couldn’t understand how he could even remember it now, without shrieking or crying, something similarly dramatic, something appropriate to his sin.

A face was forming in the glowing embers, and Walter could see that it resembled his own face, dark bangs over one eye, that blue eye seeming larger than the other. His same, thin-lipped non-smile stretched into a sly grin, and the tiny figure rose from the embers, paper-thin and warping from the heat, like one of the dolls Walter sometimes cut from the dirty magazines — for decoration, rearrangement, and companionship. And Walter saw that the creature bore a phallus as tall as itself. Priapus, god of gardens and lust, as Walter knew from Miss Lennox’s Latin class. Miss Lennox had always passed over quickly any lessons involving this lusty deity, as if he were some awful secret accidentally slipped into the class materials. If his mother only knew. The creature cackled, and waving his giant organ like a magic wand, he intoned in a deep basso, “Get out there and live, boy. Be honest. I want to see you with fire in your eyes, hair

slicked back, shredded underwear between your teeth!”

And so blessed, Walter felt contented, only his knees shining in the dwindling illumination, like two half-moons in the darkness.

* * *

The day it rained vaginas started out the same as any other day. People walked around pretending not to notice one another, and when they bumped against someone it might as well have been an obtruding door they said “excuse me” to. Everyone knew that taxes were too high, and the weather refused to please anyone. With the exception of these two issues, however, Total Agreement was a mythical beast, best caught when one had several drinks under the belt in company with one’s fellow hunters.

The day it rained vaginas a gardener was tending his roses when several of the ignorant beasts fell into his flowers. This might have startled and confused a normal man, but this — after all — was a *gardener*, used to the unexpected when dealing with blights, rusts, and miscellaneous pests. He decided the small, mustachioed sacks were some exotic variety of beetle, and promptly smothered them in his pesticide.

The dog catcher loaded a half-dozen into his truck. He’d hesitated at first, not sure what they were, but they appeared innocent enough and easily-handled. And when he slipped them past the bars their spines rose and the hair stood out like on any self-respecting cat’s. And the dogs barked and howled and chased their tails as they variously did when confronted by pussies, of exotic variety or not. The lone goat he’d captured in the laundry room of a swank downtown apartment building didn’t seem to care much, and comported himself in praiseworthy manner.

The papers received numerous, often hysterical, reports of flying eye lids, handbags, Russian hats, and all manner of bird, beast, or aquatic denizen. They’d seen nothing quite the like since the flying Mohawk scare of ’58, so the very volume of sightings made them take the phenomenon seriously, if not the specific complaints. Editors assigned special reporting teams, each anxious to uncover the source of the hysteria before the rival papers. If nothing else, they figured there’d be an “Aren’t People Just Ridiculous?”



piece for the Sunday edition.

Postal carriers arrived at homes only to find the boxes already filled with the downy messages from the sky. An outrageous federal offense, several were heard to cry. Postal inspectors launched investigations which quickly led nowhere, since a careful perusal of regulations revealed no classification for the vaguely familiar objects. Valuable hours were spent consulting biologists to determine if a penalty could be levied for transporting live animals through the mails without permit. The results were inconclusive.

A traffic cop on the east side gave a ticket for illegal parking to an enormous vehicle "in a fur cover," while noting the traffic snarls caused by the inclement weather.

As the sprinkle became a cloudburst and then a downpour the city officials realized they had quite a problem on their hands.

One of the mayor's assistants determined they were vaginas (complete with attached external genitalia and body hair) at one o'clock, but that information was not released until three to avoid a panic, by which time almost all who could allow themselves to know, did know. A special task force was formed, various recommendations were studied for cost-effectiveness, and the city's vast fleet of snow plows was readied.

The police had their hands full with traffic accidents and middle-aged men who insisted on taking off their clothes and sunning themselves on downtown sidewalks.

Concerned women's groups accused the mayor of outrageous sexism in his handling of the crisis. Would he have called in off-duty police in the event of a stormfront of cocks and balls? The president of the P.T.A. alluded vaguely to the "dark imaginings" of the city's chief officials. Why vaginas? she asked from podiums in school auditoriums in almost every neighborhood in the city. Why indeed! her supporters chorused with rising anger. The mayor just shrugged his shoulders. Must be a natural phenomenon, he was overheard to say. Must be an act of God.

Vaginas filled the parks and schoolyards. When several hundred perched on gym equipment behind one of the elementary schools, the administration evacuated the building, wary of possible attack.

Vaginas crowded the alleys, brightening the lives of

derelicts. Vaginas covered the rooftops, ponds, parking lots, all the nooks and crannies of the city.

Societies were formed for their preservation.

Vaginas filled the city reservoir and the engineers raced against time to prevent the probable flooding. One of the officials proposed that the crisis had been exaggerated. "The basic nature of these creatures is one of submissiveness," he declared, "with a propensity to absorb all objects around them. They will soak up the water like the sponges they are."

In a less enlightened age he might have been taken more seriously.

Hysterical women crowded hospital corridors, claiming they'd recognized one of the creatures and how they were sorry, oh so sorry.

Marriages were strained, families broken, domestic, public, and psychiatric institutions crazed into inefficiency.

Big vaginas, small vaginas, fat vaginas, and bony vaginas. Vaginas like little powderpuffs. Vaginas like clutch purses. Vaginas like Mack trucks.

Meek men became meeker and stayed indoors. Brave men got drunk and suspicious. Older men were just grateful.

One distinguished elderly gentleman bent over a small vagina, prodding it with a pale, arthritic finger. He thought it was his long lost daughter hiding in there. "Come out, little darling," he repeated for hours.

When Walter's mother walked home from her job as church secretary, she stumbled into a pile of one of the smaller varieties of the mysterious meteorological phenomenon. She was startled; they seemed so familiar. There was a scar...but that couldn't be. It was a strange...sea creature. That's what it was. Sometimes they got these freak storms in the city, the eggs would get caught up in the precipitation cycle, the mist would condense. Yes, a sea creature. Er, with a toupee.

It occurred to her that one would make a nice pet for Walter, so she picked up the cutest one and rapidly stuffed it into her purse, hoping no one was looking. He should love that, she thought. She'd have to pick up a fish bowl at the five and ten. The little thing would be even cuter when it was wet.

And she'd have to pick up an umbrella as well, looked like more rain coming on. □

COLD JOURNEY IN THE DARK

a play for two voices and ideas

by Parke Godwin

performance time: 25 minutes

**Characters: Jesus of Nazareth
Judas Iscariot**

The first performance of *Cold Journey in The Dark* was presented on April 15, 1973 at the Universalist Church of New York City, 76th Street and Central Park West, New York, N.Y. The cast for that performance was:

Jesus — Joseph White
Judas — Parke Godwin

This is a play not so much about the two men involved as the two clear types they represent. The follower who must at all costs find an icon to follow and worship, and the farther the god above his comprehension, the more justified his adoration. And the born visionary leader who attracts such people, so suffused by his vision that he never looks back to see if his worshippers are able to understand or even keep up with him. To assume they can is a common failing of such leaders, just as proclaiming messiahs is an inherent weakness among born followers who would rather bow than think.

George Bernard Shaw said that such visionaries must either conquer the world or be crucified by it. A number have tried the former, always with an enthusiastic following, and many more have suffered the latter. This will continue until you get tired of it.

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((The time is now, the scene a church...any church. Pick one; it might be yours. A youngish man wanders in. He notes the congregation, but being invisible doesn't worry about their reaction. Rather, he is intrigued by a picture of the Last Supper over the altar. It may be the Last Supper or any other representation of the Apostles, done in that limp pseudo-Venetian style that makes Jesus and his followers look like thirteen interior decorators in a steam bath. JESUS is amused by the picture, then ultimately saddened by it.))

Jesus

That can't be *me*?

Judas

Cleaned you up a bit, didn't they?

Jesus

Yes, I was never that — who's there? I can't see you.

Judas

(Coming closer, indicates audience) Neither can they, at least I don't think so. We're ghosts with no one to haunt but each other. I've been looking for you — here and there, up one century and down the next, but you'd always just gone. Hello.

Jesus

Should I remember you? (Then he does. His cordial smile freezes) Oh, yes. It's been a long time.

Judas

How've you been?

Jesus

Fine...yourself?

Judas

Always the same. (a strained pause) How's Mary Magdalene? Have you seen her?

Jesus

Yes. You've been looking for me? Why?

Judas

I thought it would be good to talk...finally. I mean our differences. Why things happened the way they did.

Jesus

I don't think we have much to say.

Judas

We have a lot to say. We owe it to each other. (Looks at audience) I wonder if they *can* hear us.

Jesus

They haven't heard me for two thousand years. Why should today be different?

Judas

Are you bitter?

Jesus

No, just tired. (To himself) Remarkable: the possible side effects of a primary cause. All this...

Judas

(Indicates picture) That's us, isn't it? I've never liked the Venetian school. We look anaemic.

Jesus

Two thousand years — ridiculous, bloody and thoroughly holy wars...

Judas

(Pointing to picture) I suppose that's me down at the end looking properly guilty.

Jesus

...ecstatic agonies of architecture, persecution, centuries of cadenced Latin...

Judas

My God, they've made you a blond!

Jesus

...Poetry and music: requiems, te deums, masses, glorias — but not an awful lot you could recognize as mine.

Judas

What did you expect?

Jesus

(Quiet desperation) Dear God...

Judas

(A nasty edge) I said, what did you expect? (Silence; No reaction) I never could talk to you. (Starts to go)

Jesus

Why did you sell me! (His voice freezes Judas) Thirty lousy pieces of silver, you didn't even get what I was worth. Why?

Judas

I believed in you.

Jesus

What?

Judas

I believed you were the Messiah.

Jesus

I never said that.

Judas

What does that matter? We wanted to believe it. I was so tired of the Pharisees haggling over the Torah, tired of my own pathetic attempts to understand the nature of God; tired of the failures, the despairing flights from thought to liquor or women — tired of hangovers and irrelevant beds. I wanted simply to hold out my hand like any other beggar panhandling salvation. The women like Mary — God knows she didn't have much to believe in before you came, but afterwards — who would have guessed at all that devotion.

Jesus

She was love.

Judas

And a lifetime of pentup piety. Do you think she wanted or even needed to understand?

Jesus

Probably not. Good as she was, I always preferred Mary Magdalene before she retired; there was more bite to her then. (Picks up Bible from lectern, pages idly as he speaks) Adoration was a novelty to that dogged soul of hers. I would tell her in the simplest terms what I was getting at: what God was, what Self was, the meaning of rebirth, how these things had somehow fallen out of the Ark on its way to Jerusalem; that I wanted to put God back into Man or Man

back into God — it was so clear — but that iron-spined earth-mother would only say "You are the Lord, my master." (His eye is caught by a phrase in the Gospels) I never said *that*, either. Never a question, never a doubt. Never that cold wind of reason blowing through my arguments, saying, *if that's true, what about this, what about that?* Nothing but that crippling adoration. (Turns on Judas) Why didn't you challenge me? Yes, you! Peter had the guts, but you had the mind. You could have grappled with it, thought out the *whys* of it!

Judas

What for?

Jesus

I was a *teacher*. I wanted to teach. I needed minds that could grasp the elusive simplicity of what I saw. You ran away from it.

Judas

I was tired of thinking. I wanted to believe.

Jesus

In a Messiah.

Judas

Yes.

Jesus

A magical, mystical creature walking on water or turning it into wine.

Judas

Yes.

Jesus

You wanted what Mary and all the others thought I was.

Judas

Yes!

Jesus

Then what makes you better than Mary? If she was a whore before I came, what were you? A spiritual streetwalker waiting to be picked up by the first miracle to come down the pike. What makes you better?

Judas

I — never said I was. (Pause) You said you'd seen her? Where?

Jesus

In a church on Fifth Avenue. (Judas reacts, sardonic) Oh yes, I go now and then to see if someone somewhere is getting the hang of it. It was Christmas. They had a pretty service. Latin is a handsome language. I wish I knew it.

Judas

Mary was there?

Jesus

She was glad for the company, I suppose. Said she came there quite often, it's her favorite church. They have a statue of her that looks like an asparagus in mourning, but she thinks it flatters her. She still has that marvellous smile.

Judas

I remember. She was a lot of woman.

Jesus

How she talked! Rhapsodized like an excited girl telling a stranger on a bus about the most thrilling day of her life. How it was in Galilee — that day on the mountain — in the cities. How she almost died of grief that Friday, how she wept at the tomb and waited —

Judas

And waited...

Jesus

How, in such a little while, her whole life — then, now and through all eternity would be different because *He* came.

Judas

He?

Jesus

Then she asked me who *I* was.

Judas

She didn't know you?

Jesus

Not a clue.

Judas

Didn't you tell her?

Jesus

It — would have been cruel. I said my name was Smith, just in from the Falklands*. Close enough, I've spent a lot of time that way.

Judas

(Wondering) Didn't even — she was in love with you.

Jesus

No.

Judas

Aw, come on...

Jesus

Not with me, with what she wanted me to be. Like all the rest of you. I became so...*heavy* with other people's hopes. (Pause) Do you remember that night in the garden?

Judas

(He remembers too well). Yes.

Jesus

The night you sold me.

Judas

I said I remember.

(*Production note: this place reference should be updated in performance to wherever our charming species is practicing its grasp of those sterling sentiments, "peace on earth" and "goodwill to men".)

Jesus

That's when I realized what I'd done, started —

Judas

Unlocked...

Jesus

It was too big to stop. I prayed, I said to God: no, this is not what I meant at all. I could see what they'd do to my words when I was dead, haggling the life out of them, making rules and pronouncements out of ideas — formalized, removed, for fear they might be too close, too real; that the love of godhead could be used as a club to stamp out anything with the smell of earth about it; that if I died now, I'd never have the chance to finish. I said: no, God, don't put this on me, not *now*. Then you came with the soldiers, and whatever I thought between then and Friday was...irrelevant. (Pause) I was scared, too. There was always the chance I might die. But not yet, I thought. And not from one of my own.

Judas

It will always be one of your own.

Jesus

I thought you were bigger.

Judas

It's always a little man: Cassius, John Wilkes Booth, Lee Harvey Oswald, Sirhan Sirhan, John Hinckley — me. We're always little.

Jesus

(Almost pleading. He needs to know) Why did you sell me?

Judas

Because you betrayed me.

Jesus

What?

Judas

Yes.

Jesus

How? Didn't you understand anything?

Judas

What's the use, we can't talk, we never could...

Jesus

You never understood me at all!

Judas

I didn't want to understand, I wanted to *believe*, to sink into comfortable, unquestioning faith like a warm bath after a cold journey. I needed God the way men need women — to wallow for one sweet moment in the release from self. Not to be alone. I thought that if such a God came, clearly and irrefutably labled *God*, I could adore and wallow and never have to think again. It seemed you were he. I was sure that any day you'd announce yourself and sit with kings at your feet —

Jesus

And you at my right hand?

Judas

Why not? But kings weren't your style, were they? No, no. Tramps, cripples, rejects, the women like Mary that men used like handkerchiefs — all the losers. COME UNTO ME. And they came. And Jesus, I knew them better than you ever could, because they wanted what I wanted; not to be taught but to believe, to be dazzled with godhead, to lose that scabby *self* in Glory. And when I realized you didn't know this, when I saw you day after day, not reigning like the king I wanted, but trying to teach — I saw no Messiah: not as my fever dreams painted him, in blood and triumph, but just another man with an idea. But still part of me said no, this *is* the Messiah, because I needed to believe. And as time passed, I had to scream it louder and louder to hear my belief.

Jesus

(Quietly, sadly) And we came to Jerusalem.

Judas

By the time we reached the city, I would have no disappointment. You weren't going to cheat me out of my God. I told you: it's always a little man who bears the knife, squeezes a trigger, betrays, informs — has *his* hand for one moment closest to the lever and the fleeting courage to pull it. Who becomes a catalyst. Becomes a martyr. I forced your hand. You were going to show me godhead, show me my God rising out of his own ashes. Mine! You think it was a cynic sold you? Good God, the cynic saw you growing old and insignificant in Galilee. It was the believer who wanted that morning they call Easter. Alive, you were nothing but a troublesome ethic. Dead, you're a god.

Jesus

And yet you hanged yourself.

Judas

(This stops him a little) Sentiment. You were a friend.

Jesus

And I thought it was because you didn't believe.

Judas

If that were so, I could just have walked away.

Jesus

I think I see now.

Judas

Don't pity me.

Jesus

How is it...where you are?

Judas

The same as ever — nothing lurid or medieval, if that's what you mean. It's worse than that. I'm alone, you see...with myself...and all those questions. I've always been terrified of freedom.

Jesus

Judas...

Judas

I said don't pity me.

Jesus

How can I help it?

Judas

Let it go, will you!

Jesus

If it matters. I forgive you.

Judas

Oh crap! Don't you ever stop? I don't want your God-damned forgiveness. I want *you* to understand for once! You never knew *me*, Jesus, because — ironically — you have never understood the religious mind. Like every other visionary, you thought you only had to sing your eternal truths in pellucid parables, and the waiting world from Tiberius to Mary would light up and say Ye Gods! Of course, I see! Well, they *don't* see, Jesus! And perhaps they never will. (Pause...Judas desperately tries to make his friend understand) From the beginning until now, there have only been two places: the warm cave and the cold dark. And the cave is bright. Like the temple, like the church, it's known and safe. The charms, the Hebrew, the Latin, the hymns can be pattered over without thinking, the do's and don'ts are clear cut and written down. Then *you* come — to take away their magic and their priests, to throw their souls back into their own grubby hands like a packet of incriminating love letters or an overdue bill; to make them *think* — God help them — and worse than that, decide!

Jesus

They have to decide!

Judas

They don't want to.

Jesus

Not for heaven or the fear of hell, but for now, life, each minute!

Judas

They don't want to! (Points to the picture) That's why you're up there. Reverently done in bad Venetian and conveniently out of the way like an embarrassing relative. You said they had to think — how did you put it?

Jesus

Not peace but a sword...

Judas

That's right. And that sword is themselves, Jesus. The one pain they can't take, the worse-than-death, the dark room you dare not thrust them into: the Self. And because you began by calling them into that lonely place — you failed, and always will fail. Maybe not always. I think...I hope you might be right for sometime, someday. But not then. And not yet.

((Judas has seared at Jesus with undeniable truths. In defense he digs inside himself to find his own. Looks at Judas and the too-pretty picture. He begins to speak quietly but with simple and growing conviction))

Jesus

I think men are better than that. (Points to picture) No. I don't belong up there. You do, but I don't. I've learned a thing or two since Calvary. There were times when I doubted, but I was *right*. It's true...the cave and the dark, and the choice between them are always. A fish in the shallows chose to breathe, but the price was those nice comfortable gills and the loss of the safe, warm sea. But as soon as he made a cave of the land, the land dried up. So he went out into the dark again and grew scales and claws and teeth and fur and invented a better way to stay alive. He found a tree and made a cave out of that. And when he came to the open places, the dangerous places, most of his kind remembered the trees and went back — but not *this* little monkey. He learned to walk on his hind legs, but the price was the loss of the cave again — the nice, safe trees. And one day came the most terrible loss of all, when he lost the warmth of the herd — the anonymous, mindless pack, and said — painfully — *I. I am*. There was no going back. He was aware, he *knew*, and it left him more naked than ever. Everything around his pitiful loneliness had a destructive spirit — fire, lightning, volcanoes, the stronger animals. Spirit was hungry like the tiger, but he remembered how the tiger left him alone when it was fed. So they began to leave things for Spirit and give him names and carve images of him out of their fear. It worked. He pleased the gods and they left him alone. He'd found another cave. (Hands to his temples) But something was wrong. This unruly appendage, this mad-dreaming monster that had always produced for him regardless of the price, this *brain*...was beginning to play. It looked around for toys and invented philosophy, and the price was doubt. "If God is Spirit, does he live in the statue we made? Does he die every year like the leaves? Is he eternal, like Pharoah? Pharoah is a god — no...no, Pharoah is only a man. I've seen him sweat and cough and bleed. And therefore if he is eternal...*I am eternal. Then where is God? What is God?*" The idols, the fire-gods, the Dagon and vindictive Yahwehs weren't enough any more. The brain — the soul — whispered: "Did God create me...or have I created God, or..."

((Suddenly, in his torrent of reasons, something clicks into place for the first time, the one last step that always eluded Jesus before. It galvanizes him))

Or are we both *halves* of something, in which case—

Judas

No!

Jesus

(Nothing can stop him now, he's inexorable) In which case, the brain said — *Man!* With a capital M, more than just men — *this* may be what I have always meant by God.

Judas

(Tormented) No!

Jesus

Yes, Judas! Can't you see, even now? This is what I meant when I said the Kingdom of God is within you. It's the next logical step. It was logical then, but they weren't ready for it. Maybe I wasn't either. They have to be ready now. My God, they're on the moon, the shovel they carved in the Stone Age has dug into Mars, the probing missiles from their first primitive sling are past Pluto, reaching for Alpha Centauri — down into the atom, out past the stars. Out into the cold dark again, away from the cave, light years past where they thought God lived. You can't take communion in a space suit. That eternal part of them they call God has to be as adaptable as evolution itself. Not blind believing, not a surrender, but a challenge and a fight between what is Man and what are merely men.

((Judas has listened to all this with sad resignation. His needs will never change, nor will this dangerous man he once thought would fill them. The unlooked-for thing of it was that they were friends and still are))

Judas

And the price? That self tied around our necks like a millstone?

Jesus

We paid that price when we discovered that each of our fingers could touch the thumb.

* Judas

I didn't have to sell you, they'd have done you in anyway. They still would. You will never learn. Accept you as a teacher, a thinker, an innovator? Most of them can't admit you were even human, let alone Jewish on your mother's side.

Jesus

You're kidding.

Judas

Would I kid you?

Jesus

Well, if I'm not I sure ate a hell of a lot of unleavened bread.

Judas

Some of them have no end of trouble with it. I can see the problem. It's confusing to hate Jews and scream Halleluiah in the same breath. Jesus, don't tell us we're alone. We know it too well. It's the one silence we can't scream away. Don't pack us up that cold dark road to the stars with nothing but self and mind for a blanket roll, it's not enough.

Jesus

They may never understand, but they'll go.

Judas

What's to understand? You tell me I'm alone, you take away my salvation, my escape, my *ending*, and I'll damn well sell you again the first chance I get. We all will.

Jesus

You want to be the lamb of God, Judas? Well cared for, herded with other sheep, never alone?

Judas

(The distillation of his agony) *What can I do alone? What can I be?*

Jesus

I wonder how Beethoven would answer that?

Judas

Beethoven had music. What have I got?

Jesus

Stubborn German...he fights me all the way. But I think he understands.

Judas

Well, that makes one of us. Two thousand years, you haven't changed. You're still insufferable. (pause) Good to see you again, though. It was worth the trip.

Jesus

Are we any closer?

Judas

No. (But he takes his friend's hand) Still...shalom.

Jesus

Shalom.

Judas

(Starting to go) You know, I've often wondered how it would have turned out if you died of old age.

Jesus

I should have. There was a lot to teach.

Judas

Men don't build churches on ethics, Jesus. They use martyrs for that. Don't ask me why. Maybe it's the blood. Take care. (Judas goes)

Jesus

There would have been someone else. They'll never let you go back again. We grow toward God as surely as spring toward summer. (He starts to go, looks up at the insipid picture) You *are* anaemic. You'd never have made it, never stood up to that bunch in the temple like I did.

((Something, an instinct, makes Jesus turn toward the audience. He makes a last attempt to speak to them))

Jesus

(Urgently) I feel... I think perhaps you *can* hear me now, for a moment at least. Try. Listen. Not long ago a man came to me, a film director. He said he'd spent his whole life telling the story of mine. It was embarrassing, he kept wanting to kneel. Well, we talked. I told him how it really happened. He became more and more disturbed. I could see it, and finally he burst out at me: *you're not Him! You are not the Christ!* In tears. Then a friend of mine, a French girl named Joan spoke up and said I sure enough was, and he ought to have the guts to hear it like it was or go home...he made lousy movies anyway. He went away. He avoids me now. Like Judas, I've disappointed him. (Points to picture) That's not what I meant at all, that's not me. I was full of life, and the idea was so simple, it had to be right. The idea, the way I saw it —

((But they are fading, unable to see him or hear him any more now than before. Jesus gives up. He turns back to the picture in ironic defeat, stares at it for a long moment, then walks out of the church. Small consolation, but he at least knows the road to the future.))

the play ends

□



February 28, 1984

Dear Mr. Edelman:

The attitudes expressed in this letter of yours — which I enclose to avoid any possibility of ambiguity — may be laudable but at 2¢ a word on or slightly before publication you are in no position to talk of “the precise story that both of us will be in love with”...not in this market. (And literary editors should learn not to end a sentence a preposition with.) Your attitude reeks a little of the pretentious but we can resolve this disagreement very nicely: I will not attempt to publish in the magazine.

Since you admit to having read me for fifteen years (actually I’ve been around now selling in this field for seventeen) you can appreciate the fact that I’ve survived a hundred fanzines and semi-fanzines such as yours and will survive a hundred more.

Regretfully,
Barry N. Malzberg

March 3, 1984

Dear Barry:

I was appalled by your recent extremely bitter response to my complimentary letter of February 25th. I sense a note of shock in your letter, as if my failure to hail “The Song of Solomon” as one of the best stories of the twentieth century was unbelievable to you.

I would bet that the three stories you submitted to me had been rejected many times elsewhere, and that you thought, ah well, let’s send them to *Last Wave*, they’re just a “fanzine,” they’ll take anything, they’d publish my laundry lists just to bask in the reflected glory of my name. And when I failed to accept on sight the three flawed stories you had deigned to send me, you went into shock. *Nobody* rejected Barry Malzberg, least of all a “fanzine.”

Do you honestly feel that the stories you sent to me were up to your best work? And if they were, and if the money is such a priority in how you choose your markets as your letter seems to indicate, why didn’t *Omni* publish them, or *F&SF*?

You seem to feel that since I only pay 2¢ per word, that I should have no standards, and be willing to publish any halfway competent short story by a name author. That is a fallacious argument. Just because my payrates are lower than the supposedly “professional” s.f. markets doesn’t mean that my standards are lower as well. My standards happen to be *higher* than any other magazine in the field; I am sorry that this confuses you.

Let me close with a quote from Jessica Amanda Salmonson’s article in the latest issue of the SFWA bulletin, which I’m sure you’ve already read, as you are that organization’s Eastern Region Director:

“The f/sf small press, within our community at least and perhaps by interconnecting with major literary publications, could become important to the best authors in an ongoing way, rather than remaining stepping stones, or the last hope for the much-rejected piece of tripe.”

I would hope that you will dispense with your decidedly parochial views. You are an excellent writer when you want to be. But it is wrong of you to expect me to publish you when you’re only coasting.

Scott Edelman

March 6, 1984

Dear Mr. Edelson:

I shouldn’t respond to this because after a long time in the wilderness I have gone back to work and am trying to juggle a fulltime job, a professional output and all the other obligations of a middle-aged American (yes, I know this is all irrelevant) but I’m going to briefly because you don’t get the point and a New Wave editor in the cutting edge of speculative fiction ought to at least be exposed to the truth (if he doesn’t assimilate it, it becomes his problem).

I don’t mind my stories being bounced; I’ve taken *thousands* of rejections through a 20 year career, many of them quite ugly. Nor do I think that “Song of Solomon” is “one of the best stories of the 20th century,” as you in an old, cheap debater’s trick ascribe to me as belief. (I think it’s very competent; the other two stories less so.) I do dislike being patronized by the editor of a 2¢ a word fanazine, told that “I want a story we can both love.” This is not professionalism, it is self-delusive and it is condescending. I find it particularly so when I know some of what you’re buying (articles about Phil Dick’s cat) and publishing. I took this kind of thing from literary editors back in the 1960’s, smarm and condescension, and finally fled to the genres in self-defense where at least I could do my work and be dealt with practically. The kind of peculiar mixture of arrogance and injured innocence which you indicate in your letter is common among the small press, the quarterlies, the university subsidized reviews, what some would call the mandarin outlets. I don’t think science fiction needs this (historically it has repudiated every such incursion into the field) and if you go on this way you have no future.

“Then, if you feel this way, why did you bother with *Last Wave* in the first place?” you might ask. Well, I didn’t know you were this way (although your advertisements that were sufficiently offensive to some writers should have given me a clue; I didn’t pay sufficient attention). And now that I do I won’t.

I’ve got to be loved as much as “Phil’s Cat”?

No way, boss.

Respectfully,
Barry N. Malzberg

THE NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS

by Felix C. Gotschalk

I

It was by far the keenest sacral paroxysm I had ever known, an obliteratingly parasympathetic peristalsis; heralded by a sharp-edge sense of exquisite imminence, velvet buzz saw cannonades, two distinct, clearly etched plateaus, sustained tumescence, and then, the deepest, infusive purple sleep. It was as if my very life-force diffused and escaped my body, through my shaft and eyes and mouth and pores, and I was soaring in deep space, with a rare body-awareness of being gaseous.

It is perhaps good to be somesthetically aware of one's osteal kingposts and spars and girders and ribs and slats, and to know that these frameworks support assorted bladders and tubes and ducts, and to know that these are buttressed by muscle slabs, and that we are mercifully cosmetized by skin and hair; but, for the moment, I was all liquified, condensed, evaporated, emulsified, gloriously deliquesced. The feeling was oceanic, and I knew in my sacral girdle that I was God. But, Gods come and go, and, as I began to come out of the delicious sleep, I heard a dream-voice (a noted English playwright-misogynist) mocking me, intoning that, in sex, "...the position is ludicrous, the joy is momentary, and the price is monstrous..."

The girl asleep beside me did not have a name as such, though her forehead template read:

MUNICIPAL COPULATRESS #42681 BIG SUR VOLCANIC ARCHIPELAGO CALIFORNIA FISCAL YEAR 2507-2508
--

I kissed her on the temple, and she stirred in her sleep. She rolled to face me, and her pupils were dilated, so that I wanted to disappear down into them, like a cliff diver plunging into an open silo filled with indigo mists and pitchblende gelatine.

"That felt most wonderfully well," she said, and I took it as a compliment to my heroically sustained tumescence.

"You were just perfectly splendid," I whispered, though my deeper sub-vocal engrams were talking Negroid crude: (Is it good, baby? You want to be mah ole lady?)

"I think I would like some liqueur, my dear," she said,

and the subtleties of her vocal nuance connoted that she would enjoy the liqueur only if I personally selected, poured, and shared it with her. Leave a kiss within the cup, I thought, and I'll not ask for wine. Perhaps liqueur was really the pearlescent seminal essence, the Bartholin dew, or the salivary elixir of the lovers. In any case, I saw her request as intensely personal, and I was moved by it. I vaulted down onto the cool polyester deck and headed for the liquor cache. The freon air was a mite cold on my withered detumescent shaft, and my epididymal coils hung low in their scrotal sacks. Archibald, my android valet, lay on the deck, like a collapsed puppet. I had dialed off his power cell while the girl was in my billet. I bent over him and rheostated his umbicular bezel back to centile 70. I could feel him come functional again, and he promptly resumed his programming; viz: he began to vacuum the deck with suction vents telescoped from his digital webs.

The lovely municipal copulatress and I lay supine on the chaise and voyeured at the video angles of us on the screens. We drank fiery orange liqueur and exchanged citric-saturated kisses.

"Relationships," she said, "they are the most difficult of all." Detumescence in men is very sobering, even depressing, so I didn't want to do any heavy talk. I was surprised at her comment.

"Hookers have such problems?" I said, trying not to sound callous, "God, you must be called upon to fashion relationships every day."

"I'm no estrogenic bimbo with my brains between my legs, Mister Holcomb," she said, "I have needs just the same as anyone else."

"The concept of *needs* puzzles me," I replied, deciding to probe her thinking a bit, "the ancient taxonomy allowed for primary and secondary needs. What kinds of needs do you feel?" We snuggled together in ventral over dorsal spoon fashion, but my shaft was still quite holistically flaccid.

"My needs are totally secondary under that old system, and yet they assume primary status." Damn, I thought, now she's sounding like a Ph.D. candidate in sociology. "I have more than enough property as such," she continued, "but in another sense, I have none. I am, myself, a public property, a municipal copulatress. I am sampled, tasted, entered, frictionated, exploited, and then abandoned by endless suc-



cessions of men.”

“You bring great joy to us, though.”

“But I need an advocate, a true male friend, a monogamous mate.”

“You sure don’t sound like a stock hooker,” I said, and the comment came over as a casual discount.

“I am primarily a human female, sir — no, primarily a human *being* — and only secondarily what you call a hooker. By tabbing me with a derogative title, you discredit me as a distinct and worthy organism.”

“But you make big loot,” I said, and again I came across as discounting her, “your product, your service, is of the highest order of excellence.”

“Then why am I denigrated?” I didn’t know what denigrated meant, but I supposed it meant put down.

“I think because you are, ah, *successful*. When people see an objectively successful person, it immediately offends their sense of unsuccessfulness. Most women, my dear expensive copulatress, pale mightily in any comparison with you. You exude excellence, and people dislike excellence.”

“Heavens, but we are hypocritical creatures!”

“Yes, we are cognitive of our dissonances, yet we gravitate toward the acceptance of them.”

“Do you want to try any more screwing?” she asked. Now she sounds like a stock hooker, I thought. She spider-clawed my barrel and kegs, but the apparatus was still in the refractory phase.

“My head says yay but my shaft says nay. Let’s sleep some more.”

“It’s costing you plenty, Mister Holcomb.”

“Call me cucumber, my lovely velvet vault.” Once again we slept.

II

Next day, I was able to think entirely with my head, for at least one full revolution of the planet; then, spermatogenesis began to feed back the early vital cues of my being re-loaded and ready for firing again. Of all people, Maxine XIV bounded into my billet, unannounced, unexpected, but not entirely unwelcome. She was seven feet tall, a real carbon-black Watusi, 180 pounds of leopard-like grace, and given to loud, brassy talk.

“Hey stud,” she snarled softly through her deviated septum, “how’s you hammah hangin’?”

“Right where you left it, Jello,” I said, in the rhythm of the game.

“Why you callin’ me Jello?”

“Cawz you so easy to make,” I teased.

“Awright for you, oatmeal,” she responded, knowing the libretto.

“Why you call me oatmeal?” I did a Flip Wilson voice.

“Cawz you’s done in three minutes!” We both cut loose with strange, grating, very loud laughs, the sort of raw autonomic release that only strong stimuli engenders; or, as

in this case, totally ritualized-regressive stimuli. Maxine moved easily in her privacy bubble and easily in the Ardreyan territory of most anyone else. Lewinian topologic life-space was no big deal for her. Territoriality was for the elephant seals on the beach at Laguna. She sashayed past me, flicking my codpiece on the way, and headed for the liquor cache. She irised the port to the cache as if it were the lid to her very own lingerie chest and brought out a fat little flask of cranberry tincture.

“Want anything to drink, cucumber?” she asked.

“No thanks, cream-puff, it’s too early in the day.” Maxine sat down on the deck in front of me, kissed my codpiece, and then looked up at me as if she wanted the warm fuzzies more than anything else.

“You look supra-good,” I said, examining her as a gourmet would a crêpe, “what’s been happening with you?”

“Too many people are drawing strength from me, man,” she sighed, “I need a re-fueling blast of private identity, say, about 600 quick milligrams of infantile omnipotence.”

“You’ve got it baby,” I said, and I vectored in a slab of charismatic warmth. She stirred, like a cat being petted. I had annointed her with a little balm, and she felt better already.

“The sense of discrete identity is precious,” she purred, “who said no man is an island unto himself? To be an island is what we all yearn for. To be private, self-sufficient, protected —”

“But then we turn to each other for validation of self-worth,” I said, “we are each others’ mirrors, we mirror strength and weakness, we see in each others’ eyes the sum total of our triumphs and losses —”

“Yes, the eyes are indeed the mirror of the soul.”

“And when I look into your eyes, I see only beauty, my dear.”

“That’s because you see and talk through your dick.”

“Well, if penile vision and speech be the communicative modes of love, then I say *see and speak on!* Once again we broke into autonomic laughter.

“Do you suppose that the visual gestalt of another person is the cue that validates our own somesthetic awareness?” she asked, incredibly enough.

“Well, hell, yes!” I answered, much quicker than the complexity of the question called for, “we are fair isomorphic projections of each other. We can’t know how it feels to be inside somebody else’s head, but we can easily identify with the sameness of our bodies.”

“Though you will never know how it feels to have all orifices and no protuberances, Tarzan.”

“And you, Jane, succulent dove of the cosmos, will never have to wear a jockstrap or a codpiece, and you will never have to wince in pain if you sit down hard on your left nut.”

“I would so much prefer a relationship with a man that is based primarily on adoration of personality.”



“Hey, a fake mutual admiration society!”

“Strokes come hard, discounts are easy.”

“Strokes are difficult to formulate, discounts are congruent with the basal rhythms in all of us.” Maxine had now downed three quick vials of cranberry liqueur, and her ears were starting to glow red.

“I love the scent of you,” she said, declaratively, and the sentence meant that she wanted to do something sexual.

“And you give off a good rich aura of musky molecular clusters,” I teased, wondering if I could last with her. She was a true copulatory challenge: an active, thrusting, caesthenic competitor for the sexual cookies. It was obvious that she paid attention to the feelings sex germinated in her body, and to this extent, she was libertine and sensual and egocentric, and this was fine with me, except that I always ended up feeling like some glorified vibrator, some dildo-head. I was the instrument of her satiation, and she tended to rank me on a 1-5 scale, according to the intensity of the orgasm I induced in her, maybe I flattered myself. She seemed quietly proud of her reliability in attaining orgasm, and at times I felt have actually lowered the quality of her pure animal spasms. Surely there were oddly egalitarian forces operating here. I was no lustily engorged stud, brutally violating labial depths: I was some sort of plug, some electrical jack, some prong, a piece of intromissive hardware. I didn’t feel enough in control of Maxine. She listened to her own intra-sacral rumblings, she was marching to the beat of a different pelvic-nest drummer. And, curiously enough, I never got *erectus supremas* in her. But then maybe that’s not so curious. I decided to intellectualize with her.

“Total relationships are tenuous, you know,” I said, broadly patriarchal, “there are vectors of stuff that defy categorization, that hover in the periphery of our awareness, that cue us in, on time, or way off. There are things that repel us right away, and things that draw us, inexorably, into the depths of each other —”

“Yeah, baby, yeah,” Maxine breathed, and she rocked and scuttled close to me, maintaining her modified yoga sitting position. Her face was level with my codpiece as I sat there in by throne-chaise, and it obvious to me that she wanted to do a *fellatio capricioso*. Oh well, so much for intellectualization.

There is nothing outstandingly *sexual* about *fellatio capricioso*. Mind you, I don’t put it *down*, hah hah hah, but it has to be undertaken very carefully if it is to measure up to the joys of genital sex. Given too cool a room temperature, for example, it can be oddly disquieting, depending on the skill of the fellationeer. Maxine saw the penile shaft as some sort of pet animal to be coaxed out of its detumescent burrow, to be stroked and nuzzled and kissed and toyed with. Given its most stalwart flame-red erectile stance, she saw it as a chained animal to be further teased, and then eaten alive. She had mastered all the Kama Sutra and Ananga Ranga steps, and was a consummate master of the penile staff.

She knew that it could not separate from the pubic wall, but she devoured it as if it were a separate morsel. She was a worshipper of that life-staff, a spider-clawer, a rimmer and cupper, a lapper and circler, a hummer and a gobbler. The analogy of noisy Bacchanalian eating was impossible to ignore.

Oragenitalism still remained something of a taboo, but Maxine did her level and oral best to liberate me from any inhibitions I may have felt. Sooner or later, all of us must succumb to that focalized itching deep in the labyrinthine coils, the inexorable building of diliquescent critical mass, the point — the *point* — the timeless point of rapture that suspends us at cosmic asymptote for one hovering second, and then transports us in pearlescent cascades through fleshy grottoes, clinging, snagging, warm bracelets of clinging musculature; and then the silent howitzer shots that convulse us, drawing from us the truest animal cries of joy. As I salved again and again, Maxine affixed her mouth to the shaft as if she were a part of me, as if I were an androgyne, and her head was a natural and permanent topographical adjunct. The pleasure was all too brief, but absolutely *sui generis*, an easy 99th centile blast. How blood gets diverted into the spongy penile shaft may still be something of a vascular mystery, and how it so swooningly, drowningly leaves it still another; but just as the giant bellows in the organ towers of Notre Dame collapse like deflating whales, so did my fierce pike staff now grow soft at the root and lower its uncapped preputial crown onto the fleshy carpet of Maxine’s tongue. And still she kept me encapsulated. When she released me, I felt ashamed of my size: it looked cleaner than boiled veal, but was wrinkled and shrunken. I fluxed a boldly emblazoned codpiece back on, and I had difficulty sensing that I had a genital apparatus at all. Maxine had eaten it down to ¼ scale. She drank yet another cranberry tincture and stood up to leave. She wasn’t angry, but there was adamance in her voice: “That was for *you*, baby. Fun enough for me, but all for *you*. Next go-round, I expect you to go one better for me.”

“I am your servant, madam,” I said, sheepish and yet intent, “I’ll have you begging for mercy.”

“I await that event with fluttering composure,” she quipped, and left.

III

Who among us can plumb the depths of intra-psychic bonds? Who gives a shit, anyway? Like it or not, we move and have our being in relationships with others. True, we must live with *ourselves*, and not feel that any one facet of our being is cut loose to attack other facets, as when the super-ego head looks down at the libidinal cock and says “You are evil and must be controlled.”

Sonya Pie-R Cubed was a barrister, of all things — an institutionalized symbol of authority — a *judge*; but her snatch was one of the most independently libidinal boxes in history. It was like a permanent live mink living inside her,



trying to get out, constantly nuzzling, sniffing, moving, burrowing, swelling, fecundating. She had a strong scent, a murky, syrupy spoor that clung to you like paint, and took a few days to wear off. Sonya was moderately kinky in her sexual wiles. She took estrus depressants, because otherwise she would have been a pathognomic fucking block. Once a week, though, usually on the archaic sabbath day, she would ease up on the depressants and order up a stud to plow her judicial furrow. She was no great shakes on either physiog or stature, but she had a snapper in her, and she paid high stud fees. I was docketed for her jurisprudential ass on the first Sunday of October 2510. The manifest instructed me to be in the carillon room of a famous church right at 11 AM, and to wear academic robes. The manifest further specified that I should be five days continent. I was, and I felt the horniness of the ancient vesicular pressure.

I requisitioned an antique LL.D. doctoral gown, all pithy black and funereal, with gold colors splayed down the cowl. I set the mortarboard at a severe angle and had Archibald drive me to the church in the Daimler reprod. The church had been abandoned for years, but no one bothered to vandalize it. It was built on a grand scale, with Doric columns of huge diameter, a ponderous pediment, and a tower that seemed too tall and too heavy. Some obscure alumnus had donated a set of carillon bells to the church, and I now began to climb the steps to the tower for the \$7500 stud-fee tryst. Beneath the heavy folds of the academic gown, I wore a crested codpiece and a mesh tank-shirt. There was a dry, tomb-like atmosphere in the church. Even the simplest levels of life seemed to have moved out. A brightly banded poliste wasp skittered across a deep-set window, but it was not nest-building. It seemed to want to escape, to be among ivy or calendula or moist rotting logs or incubative warm compost piles. I cranked the yellowed window open and the wasp flew out. The steps beneath my feet were of smooth heavy stone, dusted with whitish particles, as fine as the stuff of cobwebs or moon-ash. If certain atmospheres could be said to be pregnant and humid, surely the air here was barren and dry-as-dust. It was certainly no incentive for matters sexual. For a time, I found myself trying to nudge up to the potency feelings five continent days should engender.

As I topped the stairs and stopped, I saw an incredible sight. Sonya had brought (or requisitioned, dialed, or expropriated) a large amniotic shell with her, and she was inside it, nude, weightless, breathing the massively oxygenated fluid with nasal and oral filters. The shell was about eight feet tall, egg-shaped, fluxed to the floor on a flexible stanchion, and it resembled a giant elliptical soap-bubble. Around this pure, clear, marvelous looking shell, the room itself was strangely contrasting: the carillon clavier suggested a crude wooden loom of some sort, faded choir robes hung on nails, and the steel beams and 12 x 12 wooden trusses of the tower made for an odd combination of newness and oldness.

Judge Sonya was short and fat, but her extremities were not, so that she was like a cheese ball with toothpicks in it. All the more remarkable was her *good* self-image, this in spite of her marginal marketability. Just as a banty-rooster man is overcompensatory, so was Sonya. She irised the amnio shell and stepped out, gourd-like breasts amply resilient, like those of nursing mothers. She removed the filters from her nose and mouth.

“Ah, you are Holcomb, of the nine inch phallus?” she sounded like a consular agent asking me to present my credentials.

“Haven’t put a measure to it lately,” I said, “you’re Judge Sonya Pie-R Cubed of the fourth circuit?” I had a visual-pun picture of me making the fourth cunninlincual circuit of her, but it was not a turn-on.

“Take off your robes slowly. I want to watch your body. Do exactly as I tell you.” She put on her black robes and sat down on a little dais before me. I had a centile 90 Apollo-body and commensurate body narcissism, so it was no big deal for me to pose for her. I removed the mortarboard and tossed it aside, snapping my head casually, and luxuriating my 19” corded neck (a nicely homologic penile staff in itself). I flexed my traps and delts and trips, and pulled the robe off, like a wrestler removing his jacket. I pumped up my lats and pecs and ceps and took off my tank shirt. Judge Sonya came up to me and bit me gently on the nipples, as if she were testing faucets, an overly businesslike, appraising move, I thought, but then she was the customer. She palmed my codpiece, as if she were searching under a bed for a lost shoe, defluxed the latch, and sniffed at it, like it was a nutrient source of oxygen or musk or ambergris. Then, she moved close behind me, parted her robes, and moved onto me, ventral over dorsal, as we stood there. It felt damned unnatural, as if she wanted to enter me from behind. I thought of Wonder Woman and Myra Breckenridge, and my anal sphincter tightened a notch. Then, good old Judge Sonya reached around my starboard hip and took my flaccid shaft in hand, in full grip, like the grasp of a cop on his billy-club, and began to jack it back and forth. Her other hand went to my scrotal powder kegs and squeezed at them with the gentlest pressures, synching it with the jacking motions. She bit and kissed my back in accompaniment.

It may seem paradoxical, but concerted, disinterested, motorically egocentric masturbation is one hell of a lot better than most of us are willing to admit. In response to Sonya’s strokes, my rested pikestaff now grew quickly stiff as a fat candle. She shifted her grip along the length of the swollen pipe, now close to the mushroom-crown glans, now midway along the corded fleshy mast, now at the base of the trunk. It didn’t last too long: the writhing coccygeal cilia cued in their keen-edged message, the prostate wrenched and knotted into itself, the springy-cartelaginous butterfly valves tensed and snapped open, and the pressurized rush was on.



“Fire it right out on the deck,” Judge Sonya said, “I’ll aim it for you, stand still as you can.” I knew that the key to orgasmic pleasure was generalized body relaxation, so I tried to relax, but I needed something to hold on to. I sagged into an instinctual gunfighter stance, curled my bare feet against the wooden floor, and covered my face with my hands. There was nothing to hold onto and I felt out of control. Sonya held me as if embracing a tree trunk, as a comet of viscous seminal epoxy fired from me, arcing through the bright, dead, Sabbath air of the tower room, drowning the air in impenetrable streamers of life-cement. Sonya knew all about parasympathetic refractory times, and after aiming the first three salvos, she again jacked the howitzer barrel skillfully, slower, so that the second sharp-edged blooming of orgasmic seed-pods crowded into the sequence.

“Good, good, good,” she said, pointing my barrel more directly down at the deck, “shoot it again, shoot it right onto the deck.” I quivered, flexed, and fired yet again, and knew that my cannisters were empty. In front of me, the crude oak floor was stained with my fusillades.

“Into the bubble,” Sonya said, as if we had a deadline to meet. She let her judicial attire fall heavily to the floor, and then she spread it over the area of my shot. I could not escape the analogy of Sir Walter Raleigh spreading his cloak over the gutter. Spent and sagging, I felt a little like a boy being marched to the woodshed, but the somesthetic awareness of my muscular body helped allay that.

I had never been inside an amniotic shell. It was a luxurious indulgence, available to relatively few consumers, and was supposed to apotheosize the return to the womb. My first thought was that the fluid would spill out, like a split gladbag full of water, but, whatever the stasis-control, this did not happen. I walked right into the bubble, the surface parted and closed around and behind us, as if we had simply walked through a waterfall. Inside, we lay side by side on a wonderfully resilient-supportive surface. The silence was eerie and marvelously insulative. I could hear the cushioned thumping of my aortic valves, and the soft peristaltic sluicings of my vascular raceways. The amniotic fluid was in vapor phase, then gelatinous, then high-pressurized, then vacuumed, chilled, steamy, creamy, an incredibly sensual spectrum of temperatures and humidities. The very molecules of that eminently enclosed space seemed to change form, to grow pseudopods, to glow warm and fade cool, to insinuate and undulate, to embalm and infuse, permeate and bond, lubricate and nourish.

Sonya now began to explore my body with her fingers, tracing masseur-patterns slowly, and biting, nuzzling, and kissing the areas. She rubbed the sides of her face on my chest, like a dog rolling in scented grass. She did a manual round-the-world on me and asked me to do one on her. Then, she changed her mind, and did an oral round-the-world on me. We moved like underwater lovers, and the silent, dream-like amniotic haze gave us just enough unreality to generate cues like egocentric sadism. We were

working to be taken out of ourselves, to build levels of erogenous engorgement, itching vascular maelstroms, to ignite neural fuses, to set strategic fires in secret cubicles of richly enervated tissue-slabs.

“Now, do it, do it, do it!” Sonya rasped, spread-eagling herself, and baring the mark, the mouth of the wolverine, the hirsute furnace-cleft, the topographic trench. I got an authoritative hand on my capstan and found it in good tensile states. I lay the sceptre-head tight in the labial folds, regarded the sabre on the velvet pillow briefly, and then entered, quickly and deeply, sheathing in hard up to the guard. Sonya cried out and I could feel the vibration of her cry through the uterine folds that encased me. I elevated her thighs and drew my knees up, so that I was the ultimate erect hammer, and Sonya lay pinned, skewered, impaled, a filet pierced by a fat iron stake, a gluteal globe rammed by a soldering iron, the springy-stiff piston filling and ex-coriating the mossy folds.

Now came the basal calisthenics: the push-ups, the piston strokes, the stuffing and reaming of the cylinder, the pile-driving, the combat of the pelvic battlements, the plunging and rearing, the lubricoid slidings. After some minutes, Sonya began to blotch red and her sacral girdle took on a life of its own, unhinging and pumping like a machine. Deep in that alien jurisprudential tunnel, soft-lipped clams nibbled at me, jellied pennants fluttered and whipped about, and an incredible pair of intra-uterine lips closed over the sheep’s heart penile glans that was the ultimate extension of me.

It was almost a panicky feeling, that second major orgasm, and it forced strange laryngeal grunts from my lungs. I throbbed, high on a grass-tufted precipice, breathlessly suspended in amniotic space, and then a rash of olfactory cues cut in: epithelial waxes, lightly salted mucosal blastula, pungent axillary spumes, civet musk and fecal snails, estrogen, smegma, bacterial glue, and — BLAM! — I fired off a muffled, thunderous shot that convulsed me in the throes of that sweet death. Wild itchings flared and were drenched, new conduits flushed and reamed, my eyes rattled in their slick bony sockets, and yet again my penile sceptre blasted its thick gossamer-milt into Sonya’s resonating depths. She gave a death-throe cry and her eyes rolled completely white. Beneath me, her pelvic floor spasmed like a dying animal. Once again, we had primed each others’ fuses, and set each other off. I got half my money the next day. The other half would come if and when she was declared with child.

IV

My life is significantly sensual, but it is an ancient truism that life must go beyond the pleasures of the flesh. Relationships are capricious, cruel, convenient, nihilistic, symbiotic, incest-resolving, and occasionally reinforcing or buttressing. Whatever we proclaim, we are all selfish, and the joy of giving is a cruel reverse hoax that reinforces the



egocentrism of those receivers who know full well that to give is more accursed than to receive.

The societal ground-rules tend to keep order, and that is at least the proximal goal, since anarchy is unnatural, at least in the sense of chaos or disorder generating dissonance in those impacted by it. My life as an itinerant stud is far better than most. My societal stature grew from my ability to fertilize fecund women, and that ability, in almost any society of people or animals, tends to define me as a dominant male. Dominant males are the bulwark of any group, since they keep order and perpetuate dominance in progeny. There is a eugenic factor here that is often overshadowed because of such controlling and cruelly misleading terms as equity, fair play, give and take, compassion, rights of the oppressed, et al.

The simple facts are that relationships among humans are ruined by the cognitive egalitarianism of the brain. In our muddled complexity, we superimpose all manner of verbal models onto our basal instincts, so that any spindly weakling comes to whiningly protest his natural submissiveness and demand judicial review; so that maladaptive drones of all sorts protest their handicaps, the advantaged flaunt themselves, the dull are exploited by the clever (and why the hell not!), women resent their vaginal-receptive role, and men may come to resent their penile-intromissive role.

The nature of relationships is a simple matter of free marketplace supply and demand. The geriatric lechers will pay big for nubile nymphets, the masochists will seek out their curious expiatory needs in flagellations and denigrations, and the cruel sadists will sodomize those beneath them in a perfect analogic example of dominant control of the herd or pack or pride or pod. Everybody is somebody's fool, somebody's foil. There are ploys and gambits, there are hammers and nails, punches and counterpunches, the targeter and the targeted, the peregrine and the pigeon. The kiva gull will forever rout the puffin and eat its eggs, the wildebeest is for the lion, and the bird for the tree boa. The meek are disinherited and disenfranchised, while the bold and dominant control, however briefly or tumultuously.

Relationships are inevitable, they are electric, sodden, bad smelling, tolerative, stand-offish, combative, reconiterative and circling, direct, explosive, mousy, drenched in ritualism, senseless, short-lived. They are the exchanges of personality *scant*, the avoidance of territorial of-fage, stepping around the droppings of others, sniffing the air for the olfactory cues to dominance or submission.

My relationships are primarily penile. I relate with my genital extensor. I provide a service (and help produce a product) that has high marketplace priority. I do not prey on the guilt feelings of others, as do the morticians and death insurance peddlers. I do not separate people from their fluid assets as do the bankers, stock brokers, and usurers; nor do I bray denominational trash about saviors and gods and spirits and messiahs. I do not carve or stitch or abraid peoples' bodies, like the physicians do. It is honorable enough to be a potter or a painter, a minstrel or a dancer or a whore, for there we see the tangible products, the trinkets, and the body-states that people demand most vigorously.

I am a purveyor of the miracle of *life*. I am a sanctioned agent of the Eros force, the ultimate creative power, the architect of the slender bridge of conception, a spermatogenic god. Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow, there will be fecund women awaiting my vital seed. The waiting list is long and my earning power is assured. The country lies devastated by cobalt rockets, and the air has been safe now for only a few months; but our spaceship earth will ride on as long as our sun survives and propitiates photosynthesis and nitrogen cycles. In the entire country, there are about 2000 people left alive, and only six of these are children. It is in the nature of relationships to propagate the species. Perhaps that is the singular function of relationships. I will this document to whoever may discover it.

(MANUSCRIPT FOUND IN THE RUINS OF THE
CARNEGIE LIBRARY, HARVARD COLLEGE, CAM-
BRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS, JANUARY 47, 2642).

PHIL'S CAT

by K.W. Jeter

In 1977 Phil Dick made several trips from his home in Santa Ana to visit friends in Northern California. At that time I had an apartment a few blocks away, and I offered to walk over once a day to look after Phil's two cats, Mrs. Tubbs and Harvey, while he was away.

As the weather was quite warm, Phil had placed the cats' litter box out on the balcony of his third-floor apartment, leaving the sliding glass door open for them. Harvey, an elegant but paranoid black cat, seemed to take his main pleasure in jumping to the top of the balcony's wooden railing and watching the traffic in the street — that was another reason Phil always left the door open. He couldn't bear to see the cat gazing wistfully through the glass at his favorite perch.

Several days after Phil had left, I entered his apartment and found only Mrs. Tubbs waiting to be fed. I searched the apartment and didn't find Harvey. Finally I surmised that the cat had jumped to the balcony rail, overshot his balance, and fallen outside. A search of the streets surrounding the apartment building, and a later visit to the county animal shelter, turned up nothing — Harvey had probably been so freaked out by the fall that he'd hit the ground running, disappearing God knew where or perhaps being run over by the street traffic.

I called Phil up at the friends' house where he was staying, and told him. He had seen so many living things die in his time that his sadness was tinged with a certain fatalistic attitude. The cat would have been unhappy if he hadn't been allowed free access to the balcony; in this universe the thing one most loves can be fatal.

Phil was delayed in his return by a science fiction convention he had promised to attend. Five days later, I picked him up at the Orange County airport and drove him home. After we parked in the underground garage below the building, Phil grabbed my arm and said, "Listen — do you

hear something?" In all honesty, I didn't; there was nothing down there but bare concrete pillars and cars lined up in their oil-stained spaces. We went on up to Phil's apartment and talked until late.

Phil told me the next day that after I'd left, he'd gone back down to the underground garage. In the middle of the night, with an opened can of cat food in his hand, he had searched among the cars for hours, trying to locate the tiny sound he thought he could hear. He had found Harvey crouched on top of the tire in a wheel well; the car was one that hadn't been moved in several days. By that time Harvey was just two big yellow eyes, scared out of his mind, unable to move when called. Phil told me he'd had to wrap the cat in a towel to keep him from clawing out of his arms as he carried him home.

The car where Phil found Harvey, I pointed out to him, was directly beneath Phil's apartment three stories above. The cat, his small mind not comprehending the vertical dimension that placed his home so far away, had come as close to home as he possibly could. His spatial co-ordinates had been right on target; it was the world itself that had been altered in the fall. Then all Harvey could do was wait.

Phil died in the early days of March 1982. I came across my copy of the poem Phil wrote about the cat and gave it to his friends. At the time of his death, many of his friends were able to speak of their grief. Some had memories of him from earlier, unhappier times in his life; it's unfortunate that they weren't able to know him as I, and others in his last circle of friends, did, when his self-destructive urges had been transcended by his love for his writing.

My own powers to say anything failed me, and they fail me again.

In my mind I see Phil methodically combing the aisles of cars parked in the underground garage, searching with an open can of cat food in his hand through the dead silent metal and concrete, all surrounded by night, for the little scrap of warmth he wished to shelter. Ludicrous hope, his and the cat's. A faith that believed in faithfulness.

ON A CAT WHICH FELL THREE STORIES AND SURVIVED (1977)

by Philip K. Dick

Boldness is no virtue
If it causes the surprised organism
To fall a thousand years,
Wondering as he plunges
How he went wrong
And where the error lay.
Little bodies coast on wind:
Spiders, for example, sail on strands
And cats (they say) align themselves according to tides.
But humans and their like drop as iron would drop:
Crushing and crushed, amazed in ruin.
God seems to harbor on inverse ratio to size.

There was no path back, even had he lived.
And yet he found it, crouched in basement darkness,
Frightened by cars and groaning noise,
First one day, then a next, then other days,
On and on: Infinitudes of time within a little mind,
But Mind devoted to remembered safeness:
Once a spot to eat and lie,
Once human friends,
Once peace;
Now torn away and only roarings left
And knowledge of the doom of living things.

We humans have been told to wait, always alert,
Upon a magic kingdom still to come.
Five days for animals,
Eternities for men, but nonetheless the same:
The wait, the fear, the promise and the hope.
We larger ones, we none of us, not one,
Have faith that strong, ability that pure.
He was entitled to return, and did so.
But I ask, What of us?
We lack the stamina, and wander off.

□

BAGGED BY THE *DEAD* *BRIGADE*

by David J. Sheskin

Last Thursday night when I got home I found Albert Einstein and Maureen Connolly (who, if you don't know, won three consecutive Wimbledon singles titles in the 1950s) having sexual intercourse in my bed. When I came into the bedroom the two of them got real shook up — blushing, covering up their private parts with hands, sheets, and anything else they could find lying around my pad. Heck, it was just like they had no idea that someone besides themselves might happen to have the key to the place. Anyway, I said, "Be cool kids, what you're doing is beautiful and I'm gonna go back outside and hustle down to the local *Seven-Eleven* to get us a few things to nibble on, so that when I get back the three of us can have a nice little chat." But before I could leave, Old Albert pulls some sort of laser gun from out under the bed and with one blast the things knocks me unconscious.

When I came to, which according to the clock on my night table was a good hour and a half later, Ms. Connolly was standing over me holding a tennis racket in her right hand. Since I'd read lots of sporting books, as well as seen most every one of them old-time newsreels, I damn well knew the lady could handle a racket. Anyway, it didn't take me long to realize that by then more than a few additional bodies were abusing my hospitality. For starters, my stereo was on full blast, and none other than Isadora Duncan was perched on top of my kitchen table doing the third act of *Swan Lake*. The lady was bare from the waist up and I was starting to get kind of worried because squatting on the floor drooling over her bobbing boobies were Woodrow Wilson and Babe Ruth. I figured that it was time for me to speak up. So, I said to Ms. Connolly, "Look it's cool with me if you and your crew want to crash here for a few days, but I'd sure appreciate it if the bunch of you kept things down as my landlord don't take too kindly to people partying past midnight." The lady just looked at me with a sneer.

Meanwhile, Dr. Einstein pulled a watch from his vest pocket and informed me that the group would be taking a trip, and that before we left I'd better go to the bathroom because there weren't any rest stops scheduled along the way. But just as he was telling me this I heard a commotion in the kitchen, and turned around to see that Woodrow Wilson was making everybody sandwiches with yesterday's left over chicken salad. As he was doing this, Peewee, my

little shorthair cat who's always been partial to chicken, was pulling on Woodrow's shoelaces with his sharp little teeth. I'll be damned if that old pacifist from Princeton didn't lose his temper and swat my kittycat with a 1920's edition of the *New York Times*. Now, pushing me around was one thing, but hitting a helpless pussycat was something else. So, President or no President, I began to cuss out Mr. Wilson and walked over to him with a clenched fist. But before I could get my hands on him the Babe got me in some humongous bear hug, and I must have passed out because the next thing I knew it was two and a half hours later, and the whole group was stuffed into my 1972 Volkswagen Beetle tearassing down the New Jersey Turnpike heading for God knows where. As for me, I was sandwiched in the back seat between the two ladies. Up front were President Wilson, the Babe and Einstein. And if that wasn't enough, the driver of the vehicle happened to be Sally Ann Ochan-sky, an old girlfriend of mine who'd been deceased for fourteen years. In 1968 Sally Ann, along with three other teenie boppers, cashed in her chips on that same turnpike when she rammed her Pontiac Firebird into a bridge abutment somewhere between Jersey City and Bayonne. I was the only body to come out of that little gig alive, and to this day I still have a gimpy knee and a bad bite to prove that behind the wheel of a car Sally Ann has no peer. Because the lady was driving like a bat out of Hell, and because I knew that no amount of cajoling on my part would persuade her to slow down, I just took a few deep breaths and hoped that what was happening to me was just one extra bad, extra long dream, or acid trip, or something else that goes on when a person isn't fully conscious.

About the time we hit Maryland Babe Ruth decided he wanted to play *twenty questions*. With a big shit-eating grin on his face he turned around and in a raspy voice asked everybody, "What do W.C. Fields, Lajos Kossuth, and Carl Sandburg have in common?"

After a few minutes, during which time most of the group snickered but didn't say a damn thing, I figured I might as well give it a stab. So, I told the Babe, "Seeing that everyone else is stumped I'm gonna give it a crack. How about all three of them having their faces on U.S. commemorative stamps?"



I'll be damned if the man's lower jaw didn't drop all the way down to his balls. No way he'd figured that a mortal like me would come up with the right answer. But being the competitor he was he came back right away with, "Okay Mr. know-it-all, tell me the only foreigner who's not from England or France who has his face on two U.S. stamps."

I said, "What's in it for me if I tell you?"

Grinning he said, "It's more like what happens if you don't tell me. Come up with the wrong answer and we have your cat for supper."

Now that he'd brought it up I could hear the little bugger meowing up a storm somewhere up front. As near as I could figure they had Peewee stashed away in the trunk. So, here was this big burly guy who could hit a baseball a ton. This big fat softie who supposedly was a sucker for every kid who ever pulled on his pinstripes. And if I didn't answer his friggin' question he was going to make sure everybody had my cat for supper.

I looked at him and said, "You may be in the *Hall of Fame* Mr. Ruth, but as far as I'm concerned the only hall you're fit to be in is the *Hall of Shame*. And by the way, the answer to your question is Sun Yat-sen."

At two A.M. we passed through Baltimore. Everybody was getting a little shut-eye except for me and, of course Peewee who was making all sorts of awful noises in the trunk. Naturally, Sally Ann was awake too, and was driving me positively nuts clicking on a piece of gum that she'd been chewing on ever since we'd left New York. Those last couple of hours with everything quiet had set me to thinking real hard about exactly what was going on. All in all, it had the makings of a kidnapping. And why not? After all, I was Bug Tar Pilkington, the hottest rock star on this side of the sun. So what if I gave most of my money to charity and lived the simple life with the common folk in the Bronx. My record company had me insured for a million big ones and according to *Rolling Stone Magazine* I was a national treasure.

So, when we pulled into Washington, D.C. at three A.M., and the bunch of us signed into connecting suites at a *Holiday Inn* that just happened to have Will Rogers working behind the front desk and Charles Lindbergh as the chief bellhop, I laid my cards on the table.

"Okay," I said to Einstein, who seemed to be the leader of the pack, "how much ransom you gonna ask for to set me free?"

Old Albert didn't say a word. All he did was to snap his arthritic old fingers, and in a flash the rest of the crew set up a pup tent in the middle of one of the rooms and stuffed me and my cat inside it. The only one who said anything to me was the Babe who tossed me the latest edition of *Scott's Catalogue of American Postage Stamps* and suggested, "Study up real hard, music man, because about supertime I'm gonna ask you the \$64,000 question."

As it was, I could pretty much see and hear what was go-

ing on outside the tent. Miss Isadora Duncan, in her fine English, was making a bunch of phone calls, informing the parties at the other end of the line that yours truly was being held for ransom and that in the near future conditions for his release would be published. As for the rest of the group, they were seated on the floor in the lotus position chanting mantras and making ransom notes by cutting up newsprint.

"Jesus," I thought, "I really am in one hell of a fix. Hol- ed up with a pussycat inside of an army surplus tent in some godforsaken *Holiday Inn* run by the *Dead Brigade*." To make matters worse, in a little more than forty-eight hours I was due at the Cow Palace in Frisco for a concert, and in the eleven years I'd been in the business I'd never missed, let alone ever been late for, a gig.

Just as I was getting real depressed, the Babe poked his oversized body in the tent and said, "It's time for the \$64,000 question. What American songbird is about to be memorialized on a twenty-five cent green commemorative stamp? I'll even give you a hint. It ain't a mockingbird or a thrush."

Of course, I knew the answer to his question, but, all in all, I'd had my fill of his silly little game. So, I just looked at him and said, "Tell me Mr. Sultan of Swat, how does this little gig compare with that homer you hit against the Cubbies in 1932? You know, the one you pointed to the bleachers just before you hit it."

From the look the man gave me you could tell he wasn't used to any backtalk. But all he did was to give me the finger and then rejoin the rest of the group, who by then were debating the merits of cutting off one of my ears or maybe a finger or two or maybe even my pecker, and mailing it to the *New York Times* in order to convince everybody that they meant business. Old Woodrow was the most vocal of the group. Perched on a coffee table, just like it was one of them soapboxes he used during his campaign days, he screamed that I was nothing more than a wise assed pothead, and that it didn't matter much what they did with me so long as they got their point across.

As it was, the Babe's last question had finally put things in perspective, and I'd pretty well figured out why I was being held hostage. For starters, the group wasn't exactly thrilled that a dude like me was making a million-plus buckaroos a year, and that certain people saw fit to write books about me as well as putting me in a movie of my own life story, when, according to them, the only thing I'd accomplished during my thirty aimless years of existence was to get high a lot and screw every able bodied filly who had blond hair and big boobs. The thing though that really bugged them was that the day had come when the likes of me was about to be immortalized on postage stamps and dollar bills. The Babe bellowed that God knew the bunch of them, and lots of other lesser known souls like them, had paid their dues, and for the most part, by modern day standards, had lived a clean and decent life. Yet, with all that, it wasn't



until thirty-five years after he'd met his Maker that *he* finally made the postage stamp scene. Of course, Maureen Connolly and a lot of other good people still hadn't gotten that far, and except for President Wilson (who sure as hell had paid his dues and because of it deserved having his face plastered on three American stamps as well as on a \$100,000 bill and a \$500 savings bond), not a one of them had made the currency scene. And it was common knowledge that the Postmaster General had just announced that the government was coming out with a commemorative set on contemporary music, and that among those who were going to be immortalized on stamps were Janis Joplin (who just happened to be that American songbird who was going to be on a twenty-five cent green), Jimi Hendrix, and yours truly Bug Tar Pilkington. So far as he was concerned, it was sick enough to put dead scum like Joplin and Hendrix on postage stamps, let alone break with tradition, and stick on someone like me who was alive and kicking. Then Einstein got up and declared that he'd never been one to go off the deep end, but as far as he was concerned the straw that had broken the camel's back was the announcement by the Secretary of the Treasury the week before that, come springtime, they'd be coming out with an Elvis Presley half dollar and a Mama Cass three dollar bill! So, what it all came down to was that I was going to be the fall guy — just because I could carry a tune and every once in a while a body liked to get a little high.

Anyway, the Babe finally got around to telling everybody that I'd gotten snappy with him a few minutes before, and in his opinion it was time to teach me a lesson. The bunch of them, except Albert, who definitely was the moderate of the group, gave the go-ahead sign, and since the majority ruled, the Babe and Woodrow dragged me out of the tent and laid my head on the coffee table just like it was a chopping block. The Babe told Isadora Duncan to remove her sweater and do the *Dance of the Seven Veils*. Then, he said to me, "If you stay real still and keep your eyes on her titties the lady will make a clean cut."

The lady was Ms. Maureen Connolly who was standing over me holding a sword above her head just like she was about to serve for championship point at Wimbledon. From where my head rested it appeared that she was intent on cutting off my right ear. So, saying a few Hail Marys, I

closed my eyes and waited for the guillotine to fall. But all of a sudden I heard a loud blast of music — the sort one hears in all those old movies when the cavalry is making their charge — and opening my eyes I saw Sally Ann Ochansky, Peewee, and a bunch of awful familiar looking faces storming into the room. Leading the pack, my kittycat torpedoed Ms. Connolly from behind, digging his sharp little teeth into her calves. Unfortunately, before the lady dropped to her knees her sword came down grazing my head and snipping off most of my nose. The next thing I knew I was all bloody, in a daze, flat on my back witnessing the most God-awful rumble I'd ever seen.

Janis Joplin was stomping on Woodrow Wilson's glasses with one foot and kicking him in the groin with the other. Elvis Presley and Jimi Hendrix were pounding on the Babe's head and belly with oversized electric guitars. Jim Croce had Einstein in a headlock, and Mama Cass, Harry Chapin and good ole Sally Ann Ochansky were mopping up the rest of the crew with their fists or whatever furniture they could lay their hands on.

Needless to say, the *Dead Brigade* got theirs. It seems that Sally Ann Ochansky turned out to be one of the great cat lovers of the Western world. She hadn't minded all that much what the *Dead Brigade* was doing to me, but the fact they were abusing my cat and threatening to do worse had finally gotten to her. The clincher came when she was listening to the radio and happened to hear a medley of Bug Tar Pilkington's greatest hits, and among other things, had heard me sing a cute little ditty I'd written back in 1970 called *Sally Ann's Bloody Slumber Party on the New Jersey Turnpike*. It kind of made her all teary eyed and think back to the old days before she'd gone and racked up that car and spoiled the sweet thing we'd had going between us. Anyway, she figured it took a special kind of person to write a ballad about a broad who broke just about every bone in his body, and because of it, Sally Ann did an about face and dragged her ass back to the hereafter to fetch the cavalry. Now that it's all over, all I can say is if you're one of them people who's never heard of me and wants to know what Bug Tar Pilkington looked like once upon a time when he had himself a nose, just go down to your post office and buy a fifteen cent chocolate stamp that has my likeness printed on it. □