





## **A New Nation**

**(an academic treatise on the nature of reality as seen through the writing of fiction for the month of national novel writing)**



*"To achieve great things, two things are needed:  
a plan and not quite enough time."*

Twenty-three days, fifty thousand words. What are you afraid of?



## A New Nation

Fifty thousand words. Fifty thousand translations. Supposing this were a novel. Supposing these were a novel that you were reading. Supposing that this was a novel that you were reading, for it is that time of the month. Why would you use metaphors to teach the science of libraries and information? And, is it too heavy handed? (this novel). Supposing that it was a novel, which, for all intents and purposes, it is. The book on the piano stand would say, "Free to be You and Me." One of the names on the book would say, "Thomas." Another book on the piano stand would say, "Songs of Peace, Freedom, and Protest." The piano would be an electric piano. Supposing that this was a novel, and these quanta of information were part of this novel. What would that mean? What would that mean to you? When the protagonist (you) walked out into the night, the protagonist was hungry. The protagonist walked to the marketplace. And what do you (you, the reader) think was coming out of Vietnam? Live music. Supposing it was a wedding. Supposing you kept walking through the parking lot. Supposing you walked home and cracked open a few eggs and cooked them in the frying pan with some lox and onions. Supposing you read an article on Frederick Wiseman today. The narrator paused, switched the headphones to the line in and pressed record. The article (the one you read today) was about sound and video and condensing time. All tricks of the trade that you practice when you try to communicate reality to your self. Anyway, supposing that this was a novel (with added dimensions). Are the literary techniques believable? Does the internal mathematics hold? Or does it only make sense if you know you are reading a novel? Well, be warned. You are reading a novel.

She came to visit from a far off land. She was an alien to these parts. One born in another land. It is only a science fiction novel

because the author has been reading *The Cosmic Landscape* (a book of science). When you think science fiction, you think about space travel (a thing that you do all of the time) and you think about time travel (also, you do this constantly) and you think about visitors from another world. But this is historical fiction set in the present. It is about you. As such, it is just another story about someone who came to visit your house.

The conference (yet another conference) was about the science of libraries and information, pertaining to a particular place (Hawai'i). The alphabet came from an alien world, but the value of the technology was astutely discerned and put to use. But we digress, we were setting the stage. We are missing something, though. One meatball, one meatball, he could afford but one meatball. He told the waiter near at hand, the simple dinner he had planned. Well, the guests were startled one and all to hear that waiter call, "One meatball, one meatball. This little man wants one meatball." Well, you gets no bread, you know. (with one meatball).

## **Book Review**

So far, so bad, so what? It has potential. Imagine my surprise when I found out that the words to the song (that I had written, more or less) were contained in the closing song of the pilot to the Buck Rogers television show. Not all of the words, but enough of them to make me feel a tad bit self-conscious. I mean, here I was, an aspiring writer of musical songs, who, from time to time, was wont to project an air of self-importance. So, I suppose that is why I returned to the identity of Book Writer. That and my desire to write a novel, something that I have never done (there is nothing new under the sun). Anyway, when I said that you have nothing to gain from nuclear fusion, I meant it literally in all respects. Fifty thousand words, fifty thousand translations.

I find it difficult to impart the narrative of this story to the reader. There is SO MUCH going on in between the lines. You will have to take my word for it. In order to make a change, you have got to take some risks. Now! Anyway, "Lay your dreams on the line" is advice that you (the protagonist) gave to the other protagonist (also you). Suppose that everything that you thought to be true (in your heart of



hearts), everything that you were afraid to tell those that you considered "other than yourself", everything that you hoped with all of your hope to be the nature of reality, was, in fact, the nature of reality (in this pocket of our 'verse). Read this novel as such. Can you hear the birds singing yet?

I like my sister's new friend. She...is nice. But...well, I don't care what consequence it brings. I have been a fool for lesser things. Sometimes, things do not work out. Sometimes you need to come up with new theories (because of the mathematics). Of course, mathematics is imaginary. The author is overcome with love (for his roommate). What are the odds that such feelings of love could be had for beings of such close proximity? The thing about string theory (or M-theory for that matter) is that there are so many possibilities. And the people writing books about it *still* do not understand basic facts of communication. Anyway, this landscape is what it is, and your reality is sliding down into the valley.

### **Fact or Fiction**

I'm alright today. I'm leaving this town and I won't be back this way. There are so many voices speaking in this young novel that it is hard to pin down where the story is going. My name is Ged (pronounced Jed). I was named after a mispronounced fictional character. Some times are different than others. There are things you notice when your identity is based on the character of a book. Especially when that identification is based on contradictory information. Once upon a time, my father told me of a conversation he had with a Wise Man. This wise man said, "This is not a contradiction." Sometimes, seeming contradictions can be erased by a wider perspective. But, my point, of course, is that we all share the fact of unique circumstances. That is, we all have experiences that others do not have. And to be named after a character in a book will alter your perspective. In fact, everything will alter your perspective. Taken as such, everything will constitute your perspective. Point of fact, everything is what you are (you are everything). My best friend is an armadillo I met in New Orleans. He only has one ear. I once had a roommate that lost his eye. Both are Mexican. Anyway, in this novel, armadillos can talk. I mean, in this 'verse, armadillos can talk.

You can just go ahead and take it as one of the rules that have to be followed (I won't bore you with the math). Sometimes my friend (the armadillo) says, "THIS ISN'T WHAT WE WANT THIS ISN'T WHAT WE NEED THIS IS WHAT WE CAN AFFORD." Sometimes he says, "When I was an alien, cultures were opinions." One time, we were sitting on a beach and we saw some shooting stars. And I said, "...", well, I said something profound. Anyway, the Council of the City just passed a law through one of its chambers that makes it legal for Non-Sentient Relations. This is a big step in the scheme of things. Two hundred years ago, there were events that happened to conspire to produce this world that I live in. To quote two of the word sayers of this time, "Make me an angel that flies from Montgomery, make me a poster of an old rodeo, just give me one thing that I can hold onto, to believe in this living is a hard way to go." I am inspired by many things, but sometimes a quantum of data will connect in a way that I cannot explain. Back when the Perspective was placed on the Reality Structure, things fell into place on a scale not heretofore imagined. Or so I've been told. That's why metadata.

I met my best friend in New Orleans. The old New Orleans. Before the flood. I have so many memories of this place that are disconnected from time. I prefer not to mention specific places, due to their relative nature, and the, let's face it, fact that you do not share my reference points (because of the nature of the space-time continuum). No matter. It does not constitute matter (my preferences). What does, however, appear to constitute matter is New Orleans. Why? Why are some words, well, so meaningful? Let me tell you about the bridges I have crossed.

### **The Bridge Over Which the Soup Was Made**

This was not the longest bridge in the world.

### **The Bridge Over Which I Walked From One End To Another**

This was not the bridge over the Lake.

### **The Bridge Over Which I Read Your Words From A Newspaper**

This was the bridge from which I went from visitor to Assistant Cook. This was the bridge over which I returned to New Orleans. I am now looking at my desk. There is a yellow submarine, a green airplane (from Coney Island), a checkered heart (purple and pink), a broken zipper, and, oh,

"Hello there, Armadillo."

"Why do you call me Armadillo, still? After all these years. Why have you not learned my name?"

Love is my favorite, I think. I may be young, but I think this knowledge will hold up against the wisdom of years. The wisdom of years isn't worth the shit that came out its decrepit arse. Love is where it is at. Love of specific persons, with person being defined in a non-discriminatory manner. To think that this still needs to be said in this state of post-Isms. Anyway, keep reading. I am sure this will all make perfect sense to you soon.

*This isn't you, it's just what you do. Don't mistake the irony of calling it a living. If you feel like no one, if you feel like nothing, you have probably been taking what they are giving.*

This, of course, is a truism. And now we listen to the cell-scape of our favorite band. We are so deep into the science that we forgot to bring you your fiction. There once was a mustache that lived on the brown hardwood floor. A bouquet of flowers was brought by a not-pretty girl. The flowers came from her thought garden. This is an allegory for that time when the talking human said that funny thing that was downright laughable. [APPLAUSE] Stand-up comedy is different from regular comedy because of the individual under the stage lights that is being watched by an audience. The new thing about comedy these days is the inclusion of pianos. Supposing that you were processing your documentation on your way to your occupation of Assistant Cook. Supposing that you were asked a question such as, "If you could be any musical instrument in the world, what instrument would you be?" Do you suppose that you would say piano? But I don't want to bore you with my troubles. I just want to give it to you. (The Craft)

## The Metastability of the Vacuum

"Why don't you vacuum our room today?" she said. "I would do it, but you know how I react to all that Dust." Supposing that the book on top of the piano in the library had an afterword by a famous science-fiction writer that wrote a book about the metastability of water that was a metaphor for the madness of a world full of nuclear weapons. We are positing that the book that the character (you) was looking at had the same words as the book that the other character (also you) was reading and all of these words were inside of another book that was in the process of being written by the author (probably you as well), which, if our theory holds true, takes place in the 'verse that we are now living in. I am trying to describe it for you, but I can only speak in metaphors. Because to translate is to take one thing and transform it into another. Sure, communication is contact between two things that are arbitrarily considered to not be themselves, and this here information is part of the material chain of collision between your world and mine, but where do the collisions take place? And what is actually colliding? The Galactic Microscopes still cannot decipher the unbreakable bits and pieces, but since that is the job that pays me my karmic rewards (this particular Turning has a unique payment system of energy conservation), I am the one that usually operates the Vacuum Cleaner. RING RING

"Hey. I was wondering, since we were going to drop off Joy in the Ti Oven on our way home from the conference, if you wouldn't mind catching The Bus to meet us at the House of Vietnam?" "Yeah, there is no mathematical inconsistency in that possibility." "Good." "Anyway, good luck with your talk!" She walked around the block, down to the marketplace. The bakery would be closed, but the landscape would be green and brown with a metallic trim. The parking lot was full of 'mobiles for the Heaven Mist Craft Fair and she passed by the remnants of a Galaxy Candy Bar wrapper on her way up the hill. It was raining, a misting rain, and her umbrella was large and green, a light green, like the airplane on her desk. But the bakery was closed, so she took the Mexican One-Eared Armadillo to the Mexican Restaurant behind the fence. The square grid over which the water dropped had seventy-two rectangular openings

(twelve by six) through which she could see the pile of leaves surrounded by the frothy, bubbling liquid below. "Two orders of pancakes, please." "And for you, miss?" "Oh, we are going to share." "Number Forty-two." "Thanks." It is funny, she thought, how some numbers appear in places, like in the Public Broadcast System Studio where we watched the young filmmaker talk to that woman we met at the barbecue (the one with the obstacle course). "So what do you want to do today?" "I was thinking about eating some pancakes."

The tsunami happened in the month after this one. There is one reason that you are alive. You were lucky and strong enough to hold on while you watched your family die. Oh, that's rough. But we all have our histories. The house in Look at the Knees was featured in the language lesson given on the days of the week. Time State of One, Time State of Two, etc., etc., Day of Prayer. Back then, I was a student at the Big School of Hawai'i in the Vast District. I had a teacher that would say things such as, "What would it take for you to be okay with the existence of genocide?" Each Turning has its own stories, but if we are to assume that all possibilities become manifest, what must the nature of this 'verse be for you to live in the world of your choosing?

"Where do you think bad folks go when they die? Do you remember that song about the Holiday of Fireworks? It came from the band of The Eternal Freeing of the Soul From All That Enslaves It, and it talked about the fire lake. It was written by the Meat Puppets." "Oh yeah, well, you know, I was born out of love. I am a gift given to a child from its parents. And I only have one ear. So, um, how were your pancakes?" "Excellent. Banana Pancakes are..." "Number Seventy-two!"

"Hey Ged," he said. "Yeah?" I said. "If you could know the answer to one question, what would it be?" "I don't know. I don't like those questions. I mean how many questions do I get to choose from anyway? Remember that Jazz Festival in New Orleans? I don't think you ever went, but I saw my roommate there. My brother was visiting from, I forget where. Spain? New Philadelphia?" "Remember when he came to visit during the Forty-Two Days of Rain? He played the music from the artist that we are listening to now. The one that makes albums about the States." I rolled my eyes. "Anyway," I said, "my cousin is getting married today. In Mexico."

"Oh yeah?" he pondered, "well, anyway, I decided to come with you. On your trip to find your father." "To Nashville?" I said. "Yeah, to Nashville." "Well, let's go. We only have eleven business days left. Did I mention that they were wallpapering over the bank?"

*"One thing is missing in the analogy between the cosmic bubbling of pocket universes and the bubbling of ice crystals in supercooled fluids: namely, the tendency for space to expand."* -The Cosmic Landscape : String Theory and the Illusion of Intelligent Design

The entire plan was based on a number of assumptions that probably were not accurate, but this did not stop the plan from coming together. Everyone met down by the river, except for the Archivist, who was probably overseas. They sat at their table and waited for the food to appear. It was a happy occasion, full of mirth and mirth-making. They were in a landscape abounding with thermo-dynamic miracles, which happened because that just happened to be the 'verse in which these things happened. All of the time. I was watching from afar, because that was where I happened to be. My computer was tired. It had run its updates earlier in the day and had a new kernel waiting for a restart so it could finish its configuration. "Is that right?" "Affirmative. More or less." Anyway, what was I talking about? Oh yes, the plan to take over the nation. But let's just keep this between you and me for now. We do not want any outsiders snooping around.

According to Dictionary 3.4.0, a nation is a part, or division, of the people of the earth, distinguished from the rest by common descent, language, or institutions. Our nation is a syncretic mix of peoples forced to relinquish their own descent, language, and institutions in order to serve the needs of a select few. Or, I should say, this is what our nation *was*, before the unfolding of the space-time continuum. I mean, before the plan came to fruition. Generic Pae (that's me) looked up at the sky. It was raining now. A good, hard rain that turned the green mountain white. We were going to need a new umbrella.

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I was riding on The Bus. I had to meet Gen later in the village of

the Ti Oven. The major mistake of sustainability theorists of the old time was that they saw too many people, when the problem they were facing was the discriminatory definition of person. There was room for everyone, due to the tendency of space to expand. Of course, when you open up definitions, it becomes more difficult to force others to work without giving them credit. It is hard to imagine the days before the flood, but I...oh, there's my stop. She walked off the bus, looked around. Her face was wet and shiny.

"You can't do that!"

"Why not?"

"You just can't!"

The tall manager in the purple cargo pants was very upset. His existence was entirely random and he preferred that people follow his arbitrary rules. They weren't his rules exactly, but for some reason, he found himself responsible for their enforcement.

"Excuse me." said Ged. "What are you doing?"

"Oh, hey there. I didn't realize you were coming into town."

"Yeah, I took a shower and everything."

She was being quasi-facetious as was her wont. The guitar player started her next song. It was a flamenco tune.

"So, let me show you the apparatus."

The cat walked through the garden. She passed the lemongrass and the fallen turmeric leaves. She took a shit on the ground. And pranced off towards the fence. The geckos were meeting by Compost Three. There was an event taking place.

"You can't quite capture that state, you know. The state that we're in."

"Yeah, but."

"You are not even close to meeting your Word Quota. I think this is gonna take a community effort. I think we might need to call in Frank."

## Chapter Two

It was another tour of tourists. They kept busing them in. Over and over. The trick they found was to make them feel like they were of this place. Welcome home was their greeting to everyone. But if this is what they told themselves in their Weekly Book Reading Rituals that they passed on from generation to generation, who was I to argue? We are all part of the diaspora, trying to return home. But for some reason, the Drivers wanted us to give the tourists piggyback rides across the mountains. Whatever. We got fed for it and you met interesting folk. And, I mean, it might not seem likely, but like that song says, "Even walls come down."

"Here is your donkey."

The gruff looking man didn't quite look us in the eyes. He was playing a role, so who was I to upset the stage?

"Hey Naor," I whispered (to Naor), "did you know that 'donkey' is a derogatory term in some places. At the camp..."

The donkey glared up at us, and paused its activity (of eating grass and farting).

"Hey," I said. "What's your name?"

So that is how I met Ged and Naor. Like The Book says, you never know when events with odds against so astronomical they are effectively impossible will actually occur. Anyway, I took them on a ride across the desert sands.

The thing about technology, and the thing about the resistance, is that no one could claim to have created a useful technology, because up until the future happened, every act was an act of failure. But



once the future happened, every action in the past became a piece of the plan. So, why do I waste my time writing this book, when no writer of any book has ever produced a world worth living in for everyone in all times? Because, like Frank says, if you are not creating multidimensional art, you are not creating. Just because some of them might be compacted (and some people might can't see them at some times), it don't mean you shouldn't place them there in the first place. The camp on The Place With No Meaning was about as good a place as any I had been to. The Outsiders all called it Paradise, which rubbed me the wrong way, but once the flood hit, I was glad to have a temporary home that didn't mind my, let's say, personality aberrations. While The Chain appeared to be the most isolated place in the world, it was actually a node in a vast water-based network that The Outsiders mistakenly called The Peaceful Sea. It turned out to be the perfect place to wait for the future.

"Hey, do you want to dance?"

"Okay."

"This is my favorite song today!"

*This is your time, this is your life. This is your time, this is your life.*

They danced and danced and danced and danced. The music was loud. And then it was soft. The love was palpable in the air.

"I am feeling so nostalgic right now. I wish you could have met my friends." she said. "I love you," she whispered.

*It's such a pleasure to touch your skin...It's such a pleasure to touch your heart.*

"Hey, I am going to get something to eat. Do you have a food preference?"

"No, thanks Ged."

"Hey, you should plug into this new radio show I just found. The guy shares your political viewpoint. I think you'll like it."

"What are the odds of that?"

The time was blinking six ten. Jeju was crying outside. That reminded me, I was going to ask her father about a job. He worked in the Peace Fields. They could always use extra hands. Ged was just back from her trip to Nashville. Sometimes I worry about appropriating reality to tell a story. What makes it acceptable? Citations? Not putting it on the Network?

"Oh, I do like it. What was that one bit? About the graffiti on the wall. I'm the one that's alive. You're all dead. And then it broke into *When you are smiling...*"

"And then I told her, 'You have to listen to Annie.' And I should have added, 'You don't have to do what she tells you, but you have to listen to what she says and treat her with the respect of not ignoring her. Or else why would she want to play with you?'"

The house guest and the parable of the dish towels is a story I just told. Remember your house guest? Anyway, he dried his hands on the frying pan towel. Can you believe that? It's funny when Outsiders come into a new place and do silly things because who knew?. And then we all laugh and they learn and they can laugh, too. Because, after all...

"Hey, are you going to eat with me or not?"

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"I don't want to write a movie review. Did I ever tell you about the Summer of Seven Nicknames? Well, one of the them was The Critic. I read my reviews over the loudspeaker."

Her dark, pretty eyes were shaded by her red, long-brimmed hat. His intensely beautiful feet dangled over the banister. The rain had jumped islands. This was a new storm.

The odd thing about working in a Concentration Camp was that you did not realize you were working in one. All you knew is that something was wrong. And that people's intentions do not justify their actions. Let us posit that there is a difference between prisoners and guards. Can we posit that? Can you stop participating in this system, please?

You (the protagonist) were sitting in your room, watching *The Killing* on the Long-Distance Viewer. You thought your thoughts and the world continued its Turning. Your house guest left the other

day. It was just you and your partner (for all intents and purposes, also you). The City of New Orleans is a train in a song. The Chick is looking at you from its seat on The Elephant's book (a dictionary opened to the definition of memory). And the sons of engineers ride their fathers' magic carpet made of steel.

"Can you image that?! Telling a librarian to look it up!"

He guffawed. He was always guffawing. It was time for The Revealing, but he wasn't ready for it. He was in need of yet another language lesson. Lesson HA 24.

*Ua 'ike 'oe i ka puke a Pua i kākau ai?*

"Rut row," she said. "Looks like we've merged again."

They had reached the snowing sun. That is why they crossed the ocean in the first place. Well, at least that is what they told each other in their stories. And sometimes that is enough.

"Hey Ged?" Generic was in one of his moods. Ged nodded. "What do you think Pop-Pop would say if he wasn't dead (and therefore without the ability to communicate, or so we used to think, during the Years of Segregation)?" The words in parentheses were implied by his look. Ged could read her brother like a literate human could read a book that was written in a language that the literate human could understand in a contextual manner.

"Well, he did like beauty." RING RING

"I am trying to write a book. A novel, in fact. With a plot, you know."

"[unintelligible] ought not own dog," I said.

"Oh, are you taking control of these words now? Just because they exist inside of you?" I asked in return. I was...

"Excuse me," I said. The human could not help being a human. A greedy, proprietarian human like the institutions that raised her. But she was my human. "I thought, um, that I'd teach you this tune." *I read the want ads everyday...*

Okay, so The Computer had a point. "What is the difference between the person creating the words and the place where the words are stored?" That was something The Janitor would ask me sometimes when I watched her work. I decided to turn the Electromagnetic Wave Distributor back on.

*It's gonna be forty-two degrees...And snow? I would like snow and,*

*at the same time, I would not like snow.*

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When I wrote songs, I wrote them for the people that were listening.<sup>1</sup> If I were to sum up my cousin's theory on communication, I would say it goes something like, "You can only talk to the people that you are talking to." And I am talking to you. That's my audience, I guess. Of course, others might capture my words and place them into a new context, and only Who knows where you are right now. But...my point is that I am trying to communicate with you, and I have a rough idea what you can or cannot understand. Otherwise, why would you be reading this? Time for another language lesson?

**The lesson of three laughs.**

(listen and repeat)

*"O wai kou inoa?" "O Pua ko'u inoa."*

"Thanks! See you on the new turning!"

Different membranes stuck in my quark. The Mind Altering Liquids were disturbing my thought patterns. And my thought patterns were all, "Who is that disturbing me?" And I was all like, "Quantum Jitters." And he said, "Nah, never met him."

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<sup>1</sup> "When I write songs, I write them for the people that are listening...to me. When I write songs, I write them so that you will be here with me, wherever it is I am." -Song Lyric

## Next Chapter

Quantum Jitters walked across his room. Quantum Jitters was sitting at the bottom of his shower. He wanted to get up, but he didn't have the power. And then he turned the knob. And everything stopped. He brought his mind into focus and looked at the dingy checkered white floor. Someone took a deep breath (probably you).

Quantum Jitters was drying his nails. The Speaker of the Right was spitting out conservative radio personalities, as was its wont. And then the message came through The Answering Machine.

"Mr. Jitters, we are awaiting your call."

Quantum Jitters was eating his nails. The Speaker of the Right was talking about Utopia. Something was amiss.

*When the sun burns out we will light the world with tiny glowing screens.*

Ged was coming over later. I had my buddy pour me a lidful of ashes, because, that's what I eat. The Yellow Submarine was sniffing my butt. Again. I had no desire to follow that war metaphor to its end, so I shut down the transmission. Somebody has to keep the 'verse from folding in on its self, and it might as well be me. "Who Will Cut Our Hair When We're Gone" might be one of my favorite musical conglomerations. I only mention this because our friend is turning into a unicorn. It is possible that she was always a unicorn, but over at the Pae House, they always thought her a dog. I searched through my files (the ones in the big brown box). I was looking for the letter O.

"Nested in a valley of Kashmir, the City of Srinagar is home to artisan families who produce these beautiful boxes and ornaments."

No, that's not it. What is that? Was it misfiled?

"No, I think it's from that ornament that used to hang here," Annie

said.

Ah, there it is.

A new song came out of the Rhythm Box. It was An American Banned.

*La la la la la la la la la la la la la la la.*

"Hey Quan. When was the last time you watched the documentary?"

"Well, truth be told, I've never seen the evidence."

The armadillo looked at the submarine, shook his head.

"Well, I'd like you to watch it. Ged's coming over later. I'll run it by her first."

There is no evidence at all for those thoughts you are having. None at all. The Judge didn't like that, but she signed the Justification Document, nonetheless. There were beetles crawling up and down the walls. The walls were of a particular color. It was quite a coincidence. It was actually one of the coincidences she first mapped when she was taking that Coincidence Mapping Course at the Big School. She thanked The Judge and walked out down The Hall. She knew her imaginary audience well, and this audience liked mysteries. Well, dog-gone-it, they were about to get one.

"Ged Pae!" It was a booming voice, but she was not alarmed. She knew from whence it came. But the protagonist (you) was still in the dark. Who was talking? It was a mystery. The answer is, "The Preacher Did It!" No, I'm kidding, the voice was her old friend, Marshall Islands, head foreman of the night shift at the Peace Fields and her Uncle's favorite cousin.

"Hey Uncle Marsh, how's the family?"

"Oh, don't get me started, Ged," beamed Marshall. "If she wasn't my sister..."

They shook hands or probably hugged and maybe gave each other a kiss on the cheek. The big man motioned over to the benches. They sat. The wind blew.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"Well, you know my friend the armadillo? Well, he might have solved the riddle to that mystery we have been working on. The one about, why, if the chains are not that heavy, do we not just change the rules, already? I mean, are we really all that lazy?"

"I know the Theory of Relativity, Ged."

"No, this is bigger than your Science." She paused. "Sorry, what I meant is...Oh, shit. Do you have an umbrella? It's raining. Again."

Walking along the road out of the Winding Mountains, she remembered that, while it was now the rainy season, it would later be not. For this plan to work, she would need to focus on trying her best to work for the peace and justice that she saw so clearly in her times of clarity. She saw the lights of an automobile in the distance.

"Don't splash me, automobile!" she laughed. And she laughed.

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"And if we are not trying to rock the foundations of this world, what is it that we are doing? Those darn traditionalists are simply holding on to the end of a rope. This 'verse was built for you to play in. Come on and explore it with me."

The door creaked, undulating in its state of closed to open. The morning after the storm brought light through the windows. Also wind. Because it was windy. He put on his outside pants and his Camp Spirit staff shirt. He walked on out the door (the other door). Some fallen limbs, a few scattered leaves, but other than some mysterious purple berries, everything appeared to have fallen in place. It was going to be another day.

[notes for future chapters: The ornament was totally relevant to what the armadillo was looking for. A three-dimensional ball of flowers that represented the appearance of an other into this 'verse. A cosmic bubble? (reread chapter on bubbles).]

"You awake?"

"Not yet. I feel cold. Can you put the quilt over me? And then we can go for a walk and maybe check the Transmission Fluid later." She was sleeping again. After what she had been through, it was no surprise. It was not the first time I worked with Ged, and it would not be the last. Her fever was rising again, but that was also to be expected. The Update Manager tumbled onto my View Screen.

"What?"

"Hey Quan, sorry to interrupt."

There were a few multimedia updates to be run and a handful of libraries to be enhanced. If we learned anything from the conference, it was that if you acquire fewer books, people will read fewer books. Gorey's Law ("There is no such thing as too many books") had been our guiding principle at least since we started this chapter, but without precise knowledge of the cosmological constant, we had to be careful not to exceed our 'verse's expansion rate. The fluctuations had been picking up and we were determined to deliver a story that someone other than our selves could follow. Ged rubbed her nose and I decided to look over the landscape.

---

Quantum Jitters looked over the small pile of nails mixed with the ashes of the burnt herbs. He was practicing some sort of Taoist medicine, perhaps. Perhaps it was a divining system of his own making. The editing process was not yet complete, but ripples of divinity do not just record themselves, you know. He checked in with the Memory Bank to see what useful bits they captured before things had fallen apart on the cold pavement of the hard city.

"Hey, Gracie, what do you got?"

"You want me to start on the serial list or you want to rub my tummy first?"

"Just give me the gold, please."

"Well, there was a pile in the back of the café. I didn't quite get it all, but Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit, an upside-down book about American History or something or other, and maybe one other level. Oh, and the National Bank Machine was out of order outside. Let's see, Gen started singing on the drive over the mountains, like he always does, like he's singing himself home. Mrs. Pae was cleaning the Vacuum when they got to the house."

"That'll do. I already noted the two Eureka connections and the cheese cake and the recessed washers from the transmission at the Potable Water House."

Quantum Jitters was responsible for a good deal of the uncertainty in the plan, but it couldn't be denied that he made things happen. The youngsters had left the Pae House on a sour note, but the reconfiguration had left open enough possibility for Satisfactory Resolution. Quantum took out the Stressometer and scraped the



leftover traces into the paper bag that held the bones of the chicken wings from the night before.

--

It wasn't her first trip to The Moon. But it was her first trip with such gravity. She walked in the door, saw Sue standing by the dance floor. She hadn't seen him since he was a boy, and to see him now made her want to cry for everything bad that had ever happened. The feeling passed after a few breaths, and as she swallowed it down, she took in the rest of her surroundings.

"I always thought they called him Downtown Brown because that is where he always hung out. I mean, that's where I met him. Of course, that was Arcata, not Eureka. Hey Auntie."

He was always a great athlete, but that eight ball bank shot was a lucky one, she thought. But it got him where he is today and if it wasn't for that, well, the plan wouldn't be what it was. She was tired of thinking tautological thoughts. She wanted her praxis. She wanted to believe that, together, they could create something.

-

Well, how are we doing so far? Has anything changed in your world? So many of us are capable of so much more, don't you think? I cannot express the shame I feel for not choosing a quicker path off of this horror show roller coaster. But time is relative, ain't it? I thought I was being clever when I said that I wanted no part for my self, that I just wanted Things to Change. I still want Things to Change. So, let's get on with it.

## **The Chapter About How The Paradigms They Are A-Changin'**

The Cuban Revolutionary Music was climbing out of the Rhythm Box. Oh, the patterns it made. Oh, how those piano keys kept moving in those sequences that just, made you want to dance (you, specifically). What were we talking about? Ah, walking around in circles. We were walking around in circles. Again. And I was like, didn't we just pass this way?! What could possibly make you think that doing this again will change anything? Well, maybe if someone just listened (you, maybe?). I suppose if we released these words from their cages, well, maybe then. What do you think? Is anything different yet? What words, what actions will it take for us to change? Okay, let us try talking to everyone.

### **Commercial**

Buy into my world view, please.

### **End of Commercial**

"There is so much that is wrong with the world, Gen. I just can't take it."

Generic felt a sadness in his heart. "I know."

"And these people KNOW BETTER. And even the ones who have stopped doing what they were doing are still LYING about what they did. They know better and they are making it possible for all of this to continue."

The people of the nation were being herded into two separate Thought Dungeons of superficial variation. The data gathered during the siblings' research trip made it hard for Ged to see how so many people let their thought patterns be high-jacked with so little

resistance. The people of the nation were not stupid. Nor were they naïve. What they lacked was a political worldview that let them filter out The Fear and keep them out of The Muck, but, overall, if you approached them as persons, they had a pretty good sense of what was going on. They were just missing some context. Generic had long argued that there were specific individuals that held an inordinate amount of responsibility for the problems of the 'verse, and that they were not hard to identify. But Ged felt this was the wrong focus. Ged was still demanding that people not choose war. Ged was still demanding that people choose to work for peace, and the justice that would predicate it. Ged was still demanding that people choose to be good for *goodness's* sake. But she was just a fictional character in a story. What weight had her demands?

"The snowing sun is an amazing thing, though, don't you think?"

"Yeah."

*Honey, it's me. And I crossed the ocean. To see the snowing sun.*

"There is a song about this, you know."

"I know."

You cannot force it, you know. The structure of scientific revolutions is such that the new paradigm generally comes into being when all of the subscribers to the old paradigm die. I was once told that a sense of humor was one of our greatest assets. Maybe it's time for a romantic interlude.

The lovers were lying in bed. The one lover tickled the other's back ever so lightly with its fingernails. The other lover began to purr.

"Ooooh. That feels nice."

This caused a feeling in the first lover of intense satisfaction, but also created an amount of pressure, as it worried about the sustainability of maintaining the continued existence of such a pleasurable feeling in the other lover. What if it got tired and did not want to continue tickling the other lover's back? The lover kissed the other lover ever so gently on its shoulder.

"Ooooh, I like that."

"Me, too," said the lover.

It is interesting, this Love. I mean, it attracts interest, in a scientific sense. I know what I want. And I don't think I am asking for much. Anyway, this is a magic spell. There is no secret to it. It is a love potion (prepared for you). One time, in China, as we were leaving the Computer Farms, Jan and I set up a Mobile Diabetic Sound Amplifier to set the mood. We were listening to The Moon and Antarctica as we crossed the street, heading home towards The Complex. For some reason this song has some sort of meaning: Paper Thin Walls. Anyway, I don't know why I am still writing. The karma police have no jurisdiction here. And it's a long way to the bank.

-----

Boy, she stunk. The stale air lingered from the night before. She was sipping from the tall glass of murky, green, who-knows-what that he had left on the table. Last night's words did not have the impact she wanted and she still did not know whether her editing would erase all of the Meaning she had tried to stick in from the bits she had managed to glean from her midnight hour Mind States. Or whether these States were even worth transmitting. It was not as if she never held the title of Editor-in-Chief, but she had always been uncomfortable with that method of word shaping. It seemed so fictitious. From her perspective, the story was spiraling out of control (again).

*You feel me no sexy, I'm no sexy.*

But they were right. "Most important is that you love me." Who was going to interpellate her exclamations, now? The elephants? No. The Yellow Lighter? There was an odor emanating from her crotch that almost made her forget that this was a family story. How was she going to write a story that everyone could read...Oh shit, it is happening again.

*Honey, it's me. I crossed the ocean...And for the first time, I'm not ashamed of myself.*

"I mean, you can actually see it from where we are. What would you call it? The mechanisms of the puppetry consciousness?" He tried to form words around the experience. "It is like we are the glove that it is sticking its hands into and you can feel it stretching its fingers."

"I am still not sure how you can separate us from them?" This time her praxis returned without a loss of perspective. "Doesn't it make you wonder why we are still here?"

She drank it down like a human drinks down a thirst-quenching liquid. She walked back in the library. Finding her father in Nashville was not what she had in mind when she first proposed her trip. She did not like misleading her friends, even if events of the future would eventually make truth of her words. She ran her fingers through her hair. It was getting shaggy and she wondered if she should cut it. She thought back to her brief stint in Juggling School and decided to let everything go. If it was the illusion of never having relinquished control they were after, she would simply have to catch them on their return. She was sure there was a punchline coming soon.

*And then excrete me with a grin, chortling, "There goes me again."*

"Tiny bubbles. It's a metaphor, you know." He continued his lecture. "He is not interested in abstract thought but in characters who think, who have intellectual as well as emotional needs, and who, like..."

"Excuse me, Professor?" Ged had no more patience for what Frank had called "humanshit". "What is your point? Are we to believe that you believe that the author has such power? If so, why choose such an example to demonstrate your point?"

"Ah, Ms. Pae, it seems you have mistaken this for a graduate level class. To quoth the bard, 'Music is none of my business.'"

Ged was wondering why she was becoming the prime focal point. The Anthropic Principle, as it stood, had no real explanatory power, just as The Big Bang is in no ways a justification for existence. It is what it is was not going to bring her satisfaction.

"I can't help notice you looking my way," she said. "But, really,

you couldn't care less what I have to say." She pondered, "I'll tell you what, I can live with that, just take off your coat. And take off your hat."

He took off his costume, and revealed himself to be none other than Frank himself. They sat beneath the moonlit sky and stared at one another, eye to eye.

"It's bullshit. Everything we say is bullshit. That's the secret. So don't worry about being left out, because all we talk about is bullshit."

Well, they did live on a Dairy Farm. Ged was starting to get comfortable. The Reality Waves had slowed down and she was able to surf through whatever came her way. She found that writing letters provided the greatest feedback from the 'verse, and that mailing the letters increased this even more. And while the foundations had proven a great bit more malleable than she would have hoped, they were at least open to conversation. But stating facts was a game for fools. The cowshit metaphor would turn out to have great predictive power, but, like a simile out of an old mystery novel, it...Excuse me, I have this awful taste in my mouth. Why anyone would drink that stuff voluntarily, I'll never know. I am trying to recapture my authorial voice, but I don't want to speak too strongly through my characters. They are real people, too, you know. It's a fact! But do they sound too much like me (the author)? Technology is a funny thing, yes? What is the point in my telling you a story about a thing that happened? I could do that at any time, but this is National Novel Writing Month. So the question for you is, what is your Nation? And, sorry to spoil the surprise, but there is no such thing as "something created by the imagination". There is only reality. The reason that you cannot write fiction is that it does not exist. There is only your thoughts and your thoughts are material. *I really love you, baby, so deeply and so true. Now you're sitting next to me and I don't know what to do.*

"All of these musings are so amusing to me, but we still have a quota to fill."

"A quantum?"

"Don't be cute, Zed."

And who were they to tell her that she could not choose not to participate? She had no external needs and her relative responsibilities were being met. Their fears of eternity were quaint, but when was the last time they actually stared the eternal in the face? And rule one of the conversation was that you only need fear that which is in front of you. Fear is a function of time, which is a function of something else entirely. Which is a function of this here technology, I suppose. Anyway, which is a function of this here technology (choose one)?

- a) Your ability to play the violin with an emotional intelligence befitting the depth of your feeling.
- b) That headache that just won't go away.
- c) Your inability to understand car mechanics.

Anyway, her point was:

There was a time (chapter 1, maybe) when it seemed like the plan had come together. But maybe that took place in the future. And we live in the past. Or we are time traveling astronauts that like to talk about our farts. And we have an addiction to meatspace that won't let us leave until we kill our host. Sometimes we forget to breathe, but then again, sometimes we don't. You already know the outcome (we win). Now let's track back our steps generation by generation and fill the gaps.

"I just want you to know that I'll be leaving soon. I'm going far away, maybe as far as the moon." She was being poetical again, but she did not want to talk too explicitly. Dicky the Ox made that clear at the last meeting. While we would not be violating any laws or committing any acts of violence, the existence of Control Agents was a very real thing. The resistance was going to have to learn its lessons if it was going to put forth a new paradigm of change. She finished up her letter. "I love you very much, I just want you to know. Whatever, come what may, I just hope we all enjoy the show. Peace and Love, Ged."

She was my sister and she used to write letters that required a

dictionary for you to understand. I think she wrote multiple drafts and the content would span weeks, sometimes months. You would get these fat envelopes in the mail from all sorts of places. One time the Postal Carrier hand delivered one right to my door. When we were children, we would sleep upstairs in Uncle's old bed at Moo-Moo and Pop-Pop's house. When we couldn't sleep, she would write letters onto my back with her finger and I would try to read them. The thing about her letters was that there was always something being communicated, even if you had to struggle to understand them. The feast was just about over, but there were still some dancers moving to the rhythm that, frankly speaking, I still did not quite understand. But we had moved along sufficiently. If the armadillo was right about his interpretation of the 'verse, the plan might just have become palpably manifest.



## **An Interlude**

Dictionary 3.4.0 describes an interlude as,  
"A short entertainment exhibited on the stage between the acts of a play, or between the play and the afterpiece, to relieve the tedium of waiting."

Also, it has this to say,  
"Dreams are but interludes, which fancy makes  
When monarch reason sleeps."

Of course, this is all arbitrary, this designation of what is an act of a play and what is an interlude. We are told that in some 'verses, your fundamental bits could be quarks and in another D-branes and in another the rubber bands of string theory. In our 'verse, The Rubber Bands of String Theory is a popular musical group with shifting membership. Everything shifts meaning depending on where your 'verse sits in the landscape. One elephant's interlude is another elephant's Third Act. And an interlude could be broken down into acts of its own and so on and so forth. The question, of course, is where is your perspective? And, as such, why are you here? And what are you waiting for?

## What happened to the music?

The armadillo was waiting for a phone call.

The armadillo received his phone call. The armadillo was now waiting for a ride. He put his cello down. And walked towards the door (he thought he heard the 'mobile).

They drove down English Street and made a left. They drove down Monarch Avenue and made a left. There was space everywhere, until they got to the desired location, at which point there was maximum density. They drove around again. They drove down English Street and made a left. They parked the 'mobile somewhere in Space. They ambled down to the Measuring Device. It was a clown bar (obviously). Annie was waiting inside, drinking a drink of liquid fluid. Pleasantries were made. The Home Teams were playing on the View Screens. The Saloon Pilot was sitting at the head of the table (the other table) and The Person That Asks You What You Want And Then Brings You What You Want brought them some menus. Their choices were limited. The armadillo scanned the menu.

"So, what do you want?" said Annie.

The armadillo scanned the menu. Ah, meatball sliders. He decided on a glass of whiskey.

"So how was your conference?" asked Annie.

"Fine, how was your conference?" answered The Cataloger.

"So, do you have any questions?" asked The Person That Asks You What You Want And Then Brings You What You Want.

The armadillo perked up. The others placed their requests.

"Could I get a glass of Frederic Jameson Postmodern Whiskey?"

"Neat or on the rocks, or...?"

"Neat. Also, um, how many meatballs are in this dish?"

"Well, there are three sliders."

She was going to make him say it. "Yeah, but how many meatballs in each one? Is it 'One Meatball'?"

"Yeah, one meatball per sandwich. You get bread with it, too."

Time passes. Conversation occurs. The Medium Specialist walks in the door.

"Hey, can I park out there?"

"Hey there! Where did you park?"

They walked out the door. They walked in the door. They sat at the table.

"So, Bobblehead O'Malley," said the armadillo, "it's been a long time."

By this time, the second wave of The Pilot's friends had washed through the door. There was kissing and hugging. They sat at the table. Time passes.

"Oh, I get it," says The Cataloger, "He's a magician."

He was wearing a white jacket and one of them specific types of shirts. He had long brown hair and that look that magicians have. Time passes.

"Say, does anyone want to see a magic trick?"

Bobblehead looks at The Cataloger, shrugs his shoulders.

"I want to see some magic," says the armadillo to The Magician. He makes eye contact with The Magician.

The magic begins.

"See this here string and this ordinary ring. And then we go up and down and voila!"

"Amazing!"

"Wow."

"Ooooooh."

"And then if you grab a hold of this..."

The string falls off of the table. An arm intrudes on the scene.

"One chicken buffalo sandwich, just like you requested," says The Delivery Engineer.

"Well, that's your magic for the day," says The Magician.

The crowd applauds.

"Mmmm, illusions," says the Medium Specialist.

The crowd applauds.

Someone orders a Chainbreaker.

The armadillo orders a Whiskeycello.

*Boy, you're gonna carry that weight. Carry that weight a long time.*

"Yeah, God is dead to me."

"What?"

"Do you ever wonder about where your thoughts are coming from?"

It had been four days since she last uncovered the piano. All of this writing was eating up her Time Allotment. Where was the balance? They had a saying over at the Big School. The sovereignty of the land was perpetuated in balance. This was the key to unraveling the mystery. She was as sure of it as a hole in her head. The family reunion was illuminating, but she was tired of playing the role of kid sister.

*All the tired horses in the sun, how am I supposed to get any writing done?*

Not ping-pong. That's *a* metaphor, not *the* metaphor. No, it's, um, pinball. Yeah. Ping ping ping. Pinball. Words come in the head, words go on the screen. Not that this is of interest to you. The question of how the words appear. An archeology of the history of madness is not your cup of tea. But she couldn't stop thinking those thoughts she was thinking. Now she was thinking about a gate keeper. Now she was thinking about The Law. She could trace the history of material things (her thoughts), but she could not even remember the dialog from two paragraphs back. If her mind could not hold the District's Temporal Relativity in focus during the writing process, how was she going to properly adjust the Synchronic balance? Was it a question of source decay? She would have to ask The Medium Specialist next time they met. She still needed to get him a wedding present for that time he had a marriage with another person. It was customary in these parts, but she wasn't very good at following customs. Like that time she smuggled in Dates during Mad Cow season. Was that before the flood? Are all of these events supposed to line up chronologically? How do you account for those memories of those things that never happened in chronological time, but clearly did, indeed, happen? The Electric Brain of the Rainbow didn't care who was right or wrong. Didn't care to understand. She just wanted a friend. Well, that might just be the one thing Ged was prepared to offer.

Jod was worried about her existence. She had never been so close to Death. For so long, it was not even in the realm of the possible. I suppose it was just over the horizon, out of her view. And she thought she had her mind around the landscape (not the other way around). But Death was just a metaphor for a certain state of being. It turned out, everything was possible. Hence, her worry. She thought back to that time her hallmate took her to the Used Car Church. It was a surreal experience. (But is that true? How can you gauge the surreality of a memory?) After the service, they were cruising down Monarch Avenue, and she asked the Tiny Person in Her Heart what she should do. And she found her salvation in the Shop of Pipe Dreams. But Jod's effect on this story is moot. And she had other concerns.

### **The Politics of Time**

The politics of time is a music song. See, there's that drum rat-a-tat I told you about. And that crazy guitar riff. And now we have labor issues in the toy department.

"I believe we've met today's *arbitrary* quota." She almost spat in The Manager's face. "Purple is not your color, you know." It was not clear what she was referring to. "Anyway, I'll see you later." It was not clear who she was.

"Okay, have a good ride home."

*Momentum for the sake of momentum. Of momentum.*

"Yeah, whatever."

The toy department was a metaphor for something else. Obviously. But, what other thing was it a metaphor for? And is it my responsibility to have the answers to all of these questions? I am just one person (maybe). Here is the opening to a simile: "I made it through the wilderness, somehow I made it through. Didn't know how lost I was until I found you."

"Look, I know you'd rather dance with me, but we are behind schedule. And the plan. Well, the plan was..."

Jod laughed.

"Did you hear that?" said Ged.

Generic looked at Quan. "Well, I guess we are just insisting that

the world be turning our way. Is that so outrageous?"

Quan didn't miss a beat. "The Legal Man says, 'There is no mathematical inconsistency in that possibility.'"

We all laughed.

Joseph walked out of the castle. Well, that was something, he thought. Now what?

*Stay all night, stay a little longer. Dance all night, dance a little longer.*

The music drifted in from some external source. It was non-diabetic. It was Chinese. It was rock-n-roll. By day he worked in the Medicine Shop, as an accountant. At night he created excruciatingly dense research papers on the Compatibility of Transversal Quanta.

*I get it, I get it, I get it.*

Joseph walked on down the road.

Her green hair and red eyes were the stuff of comic books. She was a Master Carpenter. She sung like she ran. When she was in Primary School, she won racing medals made of pure metallic substance. She was a conglomeration of many ancestries, a mutation of some, a direct clone of others. She fell in love with him once or twice, but mostly that once because of the letters they wrote to each other. Long, rambling letters, written on fine-crafted paper. She was a Volunteer for The Nation. As such, she taught science at the Planetary Spaceship Institute. She was fond of tree metaphors (and acronyms). She opened the door, and smiled.

There was some sort of event taking place at the Medium School. Gen looked around, but didn't see Bobblehead anywhere. He walked around the angular halls of the maze-like structure. Every here and there, people were gathered into small clusters. You could spot the Outsiders easily. Each cluster had six or so individuals serving who-knows-what function. This one the Camera Operator, this one the Sound Capturer, this one the Person That Yells At Everyone. There was this one guy that they had hold up this sign of words that he would say (or have someone say) at the end of each take. They were

having students repeat themselves over and over until they got what they wanted. They were from some sort of Production Unit from some other nation. Gen was bothered. The exploitation was palpable. If there was a non-exploitative way to translate realities, it sure as shit wasn't this. He walked past the Sign Holder, thought about dislodging his sign and knocking it to the ground. Gen felt conflicted, didn't want to cause an outright confrontation, but didn't want to just walk away. During a break, Gen led the Sign Holder away from the group, started a conversation. The head of the Production Unit, it turns out, was Larry McPhee. He had worked in the Nation. When Generic had interned at the Archive (a paid internship, unpaid internships having been declared mathematically inconsistent throughout the 'verse centuries before) he saw this name often. McPhee had worked at one of the local Transmission Stations in a production capacity decades back. Since then he had obviously found himself at the top of some production pyramid in the Usury Lands. Probably some old acquaintance at the school had allowed this spectacle, which, granted, had some students excited, but gave Generic that feeling where someone was clamping a vice around his head. Gen and the Sign Holder (he was just a kid, really) walked around the hallway corners. The kid wouldn't be able to find his way back without Gen. They passed another cluster and the kid was pulled into service by one of the People Who Told Other People What To Do. After that, Gen hurried the Sign Holder back to his original group. They had already resumed their activities without the kid. He had been replaced. The Person That Yells At Everyone interrupted the take and looked at the kid. He mumbled something. It became clear that the kid had lost his job. Gen didn't want this. Gen's anger bubbled over.

"What?! He was doing the bidding of one of your other groups!"

The Production Team had resumed their activities. Gen picked up a plastic sugar water container from the ground (who used plastic anymore?) and dumped it on the back of the Person That Yells At Everyone. Gen stormed off, arguing with various shocked Professors. At the end of the hall, he got in an argument with a middle-aged woman who was some sort of Overseer of the visitors. Their quasi-philosophical discussion quickly reached a point of non-communication. Gen turned to leave.

"Say hi to Larry McPhee," spat Gen. He turned to leave.

"Oh, yeah, well, say hi to Ellis." Her voice trailed away as she finished the sentence.

"You mean, Doc? Wait, what did you say?"

"Say hi to Ellis."

"Yeah, I'll say to Doc."

Ellis Berry would have been friends with McPhee. Doctor Berry was also good friends with The Old Man. It all became clear in his mind. The Outsiders lived in a hierarchical system. They would never see the person at the top. Even at her level, communications only traveled in one direction. And it never crossed their minds that we lived in a system where everyone knew each other (relationally). He walked outside, passed by the shelves.

"I better see what other sorts of mischief I've caused."

It looked like little explosions had gone off everywhere. Some shelves had shifted and books were on the verge of spilling out. The mood was darkening. Night was approaching. There was moisture in the air and clouds in the sky. He went to look for his sister.

Something had happened. Their economic foundations had been damaged. His family was going to have to find some other means of existence. His sister was going out to find some work. The mood was tense, somber. She took the red truck (or was it the green truck?) out to the manure fields. Gen looked out over the land. Waited. Her self covered with muck, with a truck full of it, his sister returned home. She struggled to get it out of the truck. Pushing and scraping with her bare hands. Kicking with her bare feet. She was covered in it. But when she finished she got back in the truck and went back for another load. Gen stood in the garage, looking around in awe. This time, when she returned, she had picked up a Vacuum Tube. Their Grandfather rushed out of his trailer to help her out and they started on the next load. And that was how we got into Bullshit.

*...Step across the moonlit ocean. It's only in your mind. All these thoughts just rip me open...Don't dream too far. Don't lose sight of who you are...*

"Oh, darling. Please believe me. I'll never do you no harm. You are a part of me."

"And is there some sort of 'versal law against..." RING RING



"Hi, could I speak to the Office Manager? This is Deborah. From the Star Advertiser."

"Oh, well, um, the Office Manager is not in. Could I take a message?"

"Oh, no, it's not urgent. It is about a National News Distribution System subscription."

"Okay." CLICK

"Sorry about that. So, um, anyway, how are things at The Archive?"

"Uh..."

"Oh, would you like some jam with that?"

*I am an island underneath a setting sun. In an ocean that is churning. For all I know there might be nobody nearby. Still the world it keeps on turning.*

The thing about mailing letters is that once you drop them off, you cannot take them back. Oh well. She could not risk sending the package through the media, due to the time delay and the unknown quantity of where in space would the recipient be. She would have to prioritize. She waited in line at the Vast Postal Containment Service. She took off her blue Chinese slipper (from her right foot) and flipped it over. There was a small gray rock lodged midway up the heel. So that explains that, she thought. The audio discs were decontextualized. Without double-sided printing capabilities, context would need to be added later, if at all. Would it had been better to delay? Another year? Another two years? Was it the best use of her limited resources? Things were not going according to plan, but wasn't that the whole point of the resistance? She would have to place her trust in the future. Again. Back in the library, she prepared the Feedback Mechanism. She poured herself a drink.

"Glug glug glug glug," went the bottle.

"Snap, crackle, pop," said the Feedback Mechanism as it churned into gear.

"I'm tired of playing this game," said Ged. She had made a promise to her partner that she had decided not to keep. She had an idea for a movie, but she didn't have a working camera. She was not holding on to any of her responsibilities. The hidden track came on

and she clicked the next button. It was a violin tune.

The lights shown through the glass. Are those your eyes? she thought. Are you wearing bifocals? And now, some accordion music. The accordion gave birth to a glorious piano. I took control over the words. I was now the one speaking. Me, Ged Pae, was writing this story. The number two pencil rubbed its nose as I rode it like a fifteen year old future missile operator rides a donkey. "Is that a booger in your nose?" someone asked. "No, it's snot." The seeds had been planted. I was ready to read what we had sewn. It was a violin tune.

Okay, back to the present time. Well, doesn't everything in this novel take place in the present time? I mean, are you not traveling through time? And where are you now?

The Other had responded. I added some grammar for your convenience.

"I do [that [which] I am thinking about]. It is established."

I mistakenly hit the control key. I paused. Another piano tune. Eventually we grow, tiring of others.

The Feedback Mechanism had returned home. Ged wiped her hand against her pounding head. Her fever started to rise. She unplugged the headphones and got into bed.

"Only fifty more words until we filled the day's quota."

"I know, but I am more worried about the compost that was thrown in the garbage can. Was it an Outsider? And what was that odor? Rotten pineapple?"

"Oh, there goes the cat. Tell Ged not to rub her eyes."

"Well? Open the door."

She woke up. Groggily. Was she sleeping?

## Chapter Seven

She awoke. Groggily. Was she sleeping? She looked around at her reality (which is, by definition, a dream she could not wake up from). She opened the door. The birds chirped outside her window. If she concentrated, she could hear the noises from the children frolicking in the garden. The birds chirped in the distance. Something heavy rolled down the gravel road.

The Curriculum Committee met every seven days. Or, um, every other seven days. It was his turn to prepare the food. Him and some other lady. Generic was making his famous kale salad and those delectable trail mix cookies. But his roommate (the one he loved) had made him an omelette (with lox and onions), and well, you know how it is with omelettes and the breaking of eggs. Well, it turns out he needed one more egg to make his cookies. His upstairs neighbors didn't have any chickens. And they had used up their weekly egg allotment the night before. That much was obvious. But what about the neighbors across the way? Their light was on. Sure, it was late at night, but, well, that might just be his last hope. He grabbed a flashlight from the house. Good thing she replaced all of the batteries last month, he thought. He walked across the gravel road. Earlier that night, he had walked by flashlight to feed the compost. He walked up the stairs. His neighbors were awake. They gave him an egg and complimented him on his facial hair. He made his cookies. His roommate walked into the kitchen. She smiled at him. She liked his cookies.

"So, they just gave you that egg?"

"Yeah." He smiled.

"You better finish up and get some sleep." She smiled at him again.

"What?"

It is unclear if, at this point, they had already started their romantic affair. The historical documents are murky, at best. Surely, the rain had started to fall outside. A light, drizzling rain that certainly would have set the mood. This we know from the Multimedia Weather Database. But more than that, we cannot say for sure. Perhaps they each went into their separate rooms, and went to sleep. It was late. He was tired, no doubt. Perhaps they had been sleeping in the same bed for months, nay years. The historical record does not give a clear indication one way or another. We only know that we are pretty sure that there was, at some point in time, some sort of romantic entanglement between the two roommates. And it had an effect on his future persona. Otherwise, we would not include it in the novel. Nothing extraneous here. Just dense, economical meaning.

Joseph walked down the road. He had a running appointment with the Institute. They needed their books checked and he had been gone for longer than he had planned. Joseph walked up the road. A door opened suddenly. It was the carpenter woman from the day before. She smiled at him from her porch.

"I was just thinking about you," she smiled.

Joseph wanted to continue on his way, but the way she was smiling made him feel obligated to stay. He stood there uncomfortably.

"Are you in such a hurry? Why don't you come inside for some breakfast?"

Well, it had been a while since he had eaten. And it wouldn't do to go to work on an empty stomach.

"Well, maybe for a bit."

Her place was one of those old places. Large and wooden, like a rickety old rollercoaster. Her two flatmates were just inside the door, sorting through packets of seeds. They each smiled up at him as Joseph made his way around the floor, past the piano, into the kitchen.

"Oh, don't mind them," the carpenter informed him, "They are just sorting things out for the garden. Oh, I forgot to tell you to take off your shoes."

Joseph stammered. "Oh, well, I."

"Oh, don't worry about it," she said. "I don't have too long, you know. I have to be at the Institute soon. Sit down."

Joseph sat as commanded. "Oh, do you work at the Institute, as well?"

"Don't we all?"

He laughed a nervous laugh. A dog bounded through the kitchen, stuck its paws in Joseph's lap.

"Well, I really must get going myself," Joseph said, shifting in his chair.

"So soon?" asked the carpenter. She placed a plate of eggs on the table.

"Do you have any coffee?" He scanned her bookshelf. "Ah, have you read this one?" He flipped through the book.

"Are you really an accountant?"

"Yep, and if my calculations are correct, we only need to add five hundred words per day above current output if we want to finish on time." Joseph showed her his calculator. "Well, I must be off."

"You know your way out, I assume." The carpenter busied herself with the dishes.

"Thank you for your kindness," said Joseph, as he grabbed his hat off the hat stand and made his way out the door.  
**BZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ**

"Joy is crazy." He checked the last batch of cookies. Yawned. Offered one to his roommate.

"You make the best cookies."

"Thanks." He smiled that squinty non-smile of his. "I think I'm going to watch the end of that movie. Would you like to join me?"

"Okay."

The rain continued to fall.

*Screw the natural law!*

"The rain started falling?" She was mumbling in her bed. The fever was rising again. It was eight minutes to midnight. It was seven minutes to midnight. **BZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ**

"Help. Someone help me. I've fallen."

Jacob thought he heard something coming from the bushes. He

was outside because he had heard the car drive into the gravel house lot. There was a family up by the school parking lot on the edge of the grass. Was that voice calling *them*? He started to walk up toward the hedge. He remembered the story about how Annie and her mom had heard their neighbor calling for help one night after he (the neighbor) had fallen in a pit, but they didn't know it was him (the neighbor) and were too scared to help, so he had to crawl back to his house (the neighbor did), because he couldn't get up. Jacob saw some movement in the bushes.

"I've fallen. Somebody help me."

Jacob ran around the stone wall. The family, too, had heard the cries for help. As he ran past he saw his neighbors talking to Annie, wondering what was happening.

"Somebody help me up."

Jacob and another man helped the old man to his feet. It is a heavy weight, lifting an old human being.

"Mr. Bill, maybe you shouldn't leave so late from now on."

The man helped the other man walk through the parking lot. Jacob walked back towards the house. Annie was outside.

"Okay, let's go to dinner," said Marcus.

Jacob looked at Annie, assumed that she had agreed to dinner. It was dark outside.

A half hour earlier, Jacob had taken some food waste outside to dump in the compost. It was an excuse to go outside to see if his neighbors were around so that he could give them some cookies, as a thank you for the egg they had given him. Five of his neighbors were sitting around the outside table, having a lovely dinner of wine and food. They invited him to dinner. He deferred.

"Oh, no, thank you, you enjoy."

He ran back inside to get the cookies. It was perfect, the neighbors who gave him the egg could share the cookies with the neighbors that would have given him an egg if they had an egg (which they didn't). RING RING

"Oh, I'm sorry. I called you again. I was trying to place in a note to call Gina tomorrow and...Sorry."

It was the Star Advertiser lady again. He had told her to call back the next day and ask for Gina. Gina was not a person that existed and he was not sure why he had given this name when she said, "Who should I ask for when I call?" He did not want the Stars

Advertising, but since the previous (maybe five callers) had asked for specific individuals that did not exist in his house, he kept saying, sorry, they are not home, and telling them a better time to call if they wanted to reach someone to talk to about purchasing their newspaper. He now felt bad about creating this individual named Gina. Should Annie pretend to be Gina? Should he? He blamed his actions on his new venture of fiction writing. Oh, the cookie delivery.

"Here is what became of your egg. Enjoy."

Jacob walked back inside. Maybe he had already finished washing the dishes that Annie had left from the previous night's cooking venture. Maybe he went into the bedroom and made his bed (and her bed).

*I followed your hillbilly guide to El Dorado. I haven't laughed like this in years. I'd like you to stay. I'd like you to stay. I'd like you to stay. I'd like you to stay.*

Jacob folded the table cloth off of the kitchen table. He took it outside and shook it out. He went back to the house, shook off his slippers, went in the door, walked around the table, through the kitchen, through the narrow hallway, into the darkened bedroom. He threw the table cloth into the laundry basket. He walked out of the bedroom, back down the narrow hallway, and made a left into the spare room. He picked up the purple cloth, walked through the door into the kitchen and put the cloth on the kitchen table. He put the chopping bowl with the ornamental pumpkin back in the center of the table. He heard the car roll down the gravel driveway. He opened the door and walked outside.

"I'm sorry to say, but that psychic was just wrong."

She had predicted something very specific (a chunk of land falling into the sea some time in February that would then cause a tsunami that would wash over the islands) and his friends that went to see her had heard this and moved to San Francisco. This was ten years ago, and Marcus was still alive, hence, the psychic was wrong.

Jacob couldn't help but interject, "Well, Marcus, I just read this book, *The Cosmic Landscape : String Theory and the Illusion of Intelligent Design...*"

"Oh, sounds like something I'd like."

"...and anyway, it talks about a lot of, you know, quantum stuff, but there is this section that discusses black holes and information going into black holes..." Jacob looked around at his audience. He

was getting into one of those rambles where he keeps talking and people keep hanging on but he just keeps going and going and he is not sure if they are still following him but he keeps going anyway because the thoughts are in his head and sometimes when you can bring the story to a close it is such a nice feeling, like a juggling trick, or a jazz solo. "...and some people like Stephen Hawking thought that everything going into a black hole was destroyed and other people like this guy thought that wasn't true and it turned out they were right." He paused. There might have been some interjections. "So it turns out, you can go into a black hole and you will just keep going until you reach the middle and you won't notice any difference and that is the reality from your perspective. But someone else watching, from outside the black hole, will see you smashed to bits and all of the information scrambled. But both realities are true. So, uh, maybe we are inside the tsunami wave and from our perspective the psychic was wrong, and your friends are outside the wave and from their perspective the psychic was right. Of course, that doesn't even begin to get into the theories of multiple universes or of all quantum possibilities actually existing."

Earlier they were talking politics. University politics, politician politics. All sorts of politics. Jeju kept saying, "Light! Light!" Marcus kept saying, "You can touch it but you're going to get burnt." Jacob was eating his dinner on a plate on his lap. Annie was tired. She said, "I'm so tired." Jacob felt something on his leg. He looked down and saw one of those bright green lizards. Of course, he couldn't see any color, due to the darkness of the night, but he could tell by the shape. The gecko sat on his leg and Jacob tried to catch Jeju's attention and shift it to the lizard. Jacob finished the food on his plate. The gecko crawled up Jacob's leg and Jacob imagined it crawling into his pocket without him knowing and then he would go back into the house with the gecko in his pocket and he wondered at what point he would realize that the gecko was in his pocket. The gecko walked onto Jacob's plate. Jacob put his plate on the table in front of Jeju, but she didn't see the gecko. Jacob thought about the intelligence of birds and lizards and the arrogance of humans.

Annie had her kapa class in the morning, but she was having car troubles and the class was across the island and she had to give a ride to the girl who had a name that sounded Japanese, but was Brazilian



or something. That's why she was asleep. Jacob wasn't asleep because he had got out of bed to take a shit in the toilet. And then he didn't feel like sleeping and he decided to go into the computer room and write. He hadn't written all day. It was almost midnight and *And like the clouds that turn to every passing wind, we turn to any signal that comes through.*

he didn't feel like remixing reality and manufacturing characters out of the ephemera of his mind. He just wanted to transcribe reality, because he was still working on his original thesis, that our lives are interesting stories, if you tell them. Banana Pancakes came over the Rhythm Box and he wrote this down.

"Well, how is that?" The gecko had managed to climb out of the pocket of the pants that were hanging on the shelving unit that the previous tenant (a carpenter) had installed.

"Good enough, I guess. For tonight." They were talking through the window in their click click timbre.

"Yeah, I'll see you outside."

Jacob went to bed, so he could wake up early and dig up some turmeric, so Annie could take it to kapa class.

Ged woke up with a start, tried to move in two directions and felt an intense pain in her calf.

"Oh fucker!"

"Are you alright?"

The pain receded. She looked around.

"We're being watched, you know. I'm being watched. I'm being watched by the Central Intelligence Agency."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, everything is public now." She paused. "But you knew that."

Ged got out of bed, walked over to the window, watched the horses running in the fields. She grabbed her crumpled pants with her foot, picked them up, and put them on.

"It's the information age, honey. We can track you anywhere."

She was on the move again. She had one chance to, oh, is that more rain?

## **Book Review**

Imagine my surprise when I found out that it was all a metaphor. It really takes the story and puts it in a frame that lets you know what it's for. But we still do not know what it is a metaphor of. Only that some persons were (are) trying to communicate something to other persons, some of which might be you. And that we should take everything with a grain of salt (good luck salt, not edible salt). Anyway, the characters in our story were either alive or dead, and engaged in something extraordinary or something mundane. They were either hungry or tired or happy or scared. Generic Pae (that's me) was trying to contain the entirety of the past in his mind, sitting on the woven mat that he had got because he was lucky that day. Is the story legible? Or is it just random noise from the bits that crashed on the event horizon?

Jacob's grandmother was back in rehab. She kept asking when he was going to write that novel that he had already written, the one with all of them in it. But he did not feel comfortable showing her that book. He didn't think it was suited to her tastes. But what did he know of her tastes? Other than that she liked a glass of beer when she ate her pizza pie. He was always misunderestimating people and then acting surprised when their consciousnesses finally collided with his own.

"Will you feel better? Will you feel anything at all?"

This was a question he thought at his grandmother. She was so far away and his vision was cloudy. He wished her the best and gave her all of his love. A fiddle tune came on the computer and he thought about his grandfather. He looked up at his violin.

Jacob had a fear that people would look at the things that came out of his mind and easily comprehend how clearly insane he was. Jacob wondered what sort of medication his grandparents were taking.

"If we are to live in a new nation, then we must build a new nation. Together."

Ged looked around at the crowd. It was bustling. There was a makeshift stage set up on the hill and the rows of newsstands handing out various revolutionary literature created little alleyways that made for interesting avenues of exploration. It was more of a carnival than a special event, and Ged was starting to see possibilities that had been closed off from her view for longer than she cared to recall. A smile started in her heart, and she felt it bubble up through her lips. The mishmash of colors on the ground merged into a pale blue sky with pinkish wisps of clouds floating by the forest colored mountains. The sun was starting to rise and Ged breathed a deep breath.

## Soon We'll Be Dead

Sometimes I just like to press record and then see what comes out. It is always interesting, even the mistakes. Especially the mistakes. Just make the assumption that the "work" has meaning. And then try to figure out what that meaning is. I went into the kitchen, dumped out the ashtray. Gen had left us some leftovers in the box that was not as cold as Germany in winter, but was cold enough. I took off the lid, sliced up the rest of the Japanese Pear and dumped the slices in the bowl. There was a tiny pebble mixed in with the seeds. I spit it out.

*Fuck the police. They can't control. We've got to take it back. Everyone get up and let's go.*

Jacob dumped the brown leaf into the chopping bowl. He took down the circular blade that his parents had given him from that trip to Alaska. He figured the most rebellious thing he could do right now was smoke a cigarette made from tobacco that he had grown in his Mānoa garden and dried on clothespins and cut up and stuck in a jar labeled dark chocolate. He apologized for the necessity of gendered language that he felt was necessary when writing in this language. He did not want anyone to not be able to identify with the characters (this is called interpellation) due to arbitrary word choices. He wanted people to not be able to identify due to the discordant tone that he was counting on to displace everyone from their monotonous rhythm. Well, he smiled, not everyone. He had forgotten which nation he was writing for. He was of one mind, but couldn't locate the rolling papers. Did someone out there want him not to smoke? The answer to this question was yes, but this was a recurring theme of children telling their parents that they could not see their grandchildren if they did not change their behavior. Some things are unacceptable (for some people). Jacob's grandmother used to smoke

cigarettes. Jacob's parents had told her that she had to stop smoking if she wanted to be around her grandkids. So, that was the end of that (as far as we know). Jacob's grandmother had a garden at her house. Not now, but previously. Her son went to Rhawnhurst Elementary School. This caused conflicting emotions in Jacob's emotion center, but it made for interesting stories, like when his dad was coaching his basketball team and they had to play *against* Rhawnhurst. Jacob did not read the subtext at the time. Jacob looked in the brown file box, under the letter P.

Jeju floated by outside, carried by a mysterious wind (or her mother). Jacob opened the door.

He looked in the old black bag, well, he went to look. A voice in his head (the bag's, probably) told him that it wasn't there. He kept looking, because when was the last time anyone had sorted through that pocket? He (Jacob) found some interesting things, including the green maze from his Aunt Ruthee. It was baseball themed, he had not noticed that (or, more likely, forgot that). He quickly shook the ball through the maze into the center.

Jacob remembered (not directly, but after a trip outside maintaining the yard) where he had placed the papers. He thought, when was the last time I saw them? He thought, they must be in the computer room. He placed himself in that room. And he realized, he probably moved them into the bedroom when he was preparing the guest room for his house guest since he did not want to leave anything lying around that could make her uncomfortable. Ah, there they are, Jacob thought, as he ran into the bedroom. And what's that holding down all my papers? Oh, a pencil? That doesn't seem like a heavy weight at all, Jacob thought.

Pradeep walked around the rock wall. Jacob dusted off the end of the cigarette and hung it on a clothespin. Pradeep smiled hello. Jacob was semi-avoiding him because he was worried about how he was going to include his family in the book. He was not even sure if his name was Pradeep or Pradib. And he never caught the names of the woman and the little girl. That makes two neighbors in a row (from the same nation) that Jacob never learned the names of. How can you be so close to people and not know their names? And does it matter? Jacob had no problem interacting with them, he just did not know how to talk *about* them. RING RING

It was Deborah (was that her name?), calling for Gina. They had

a conversation about energy use and told each other to have a good day. CLICK

Jacob remembered that he had taken the accordion outside.

Today's performance was short but sweet. He strapped the accordion onto his bare chest, released its snaps, and gave it some air. He practiced some chords. He played some tunes. An old woman walked by on the other side of the rock wall. The same old woman walked back and then stopped and listened to the music. They made eye contact. She listened to the music. Jacob began to play for her. They made eye contact. Jacob played and brought the song to a close. He gave her a nod. She gave him a nod and she walked towards the school. Jacob played one more song in the key of C and went back inside.

Jacob was trying to exercise everything that needed exercising. He had a theory about this method of maintenance in regards to sustainability. Jacob never spoke to others like he spoke in his head. Because, first of all, his mouth was not as practiced as he was at speaking out loud. Things could get jumbled on the way out. Second, was a trust issue. And a fear issue. A fear of being fundamentally different and judged as being of lesser *value*. He used to be afraid of such simple things as balloons and rubber bands. The times they change and then they change again and change again and are they different now or the same? He was working for the fish. *Polly wants a cracker. Maybe she would like more food. Asks me to untie her.*

This is not a metaphor. This is not a contradiction.

"Take a load off, Annie, and put the load right on me." No those aren't the words, are they? Ah, Carmen. I once knew a Carmen. I helped her carry her books back to her dorm room from the bookstore. She was the only person to ever ask me out on a date. Ah, Luke. I once knew a Luke or two. One was wearing a FUCK WAR shirt when I met him. I don't know any Crazy Chesters, though. Everybody I know is perfectly sane.

Ged was doing something. Did she still exist? I suppose so. Supposing that this was a novel. Supposing that *Spent a week at a dusty library, waiting for some words to jump at*

*me.*

the music coming out of the speakers was titled Purple Rain. Supposing that three of the books in the children's section of the library bookshelves were called *A Rule is to Break : A Child's Guide to Anarchy*. She was still reworking the possibility of an anarchist librarian. Or a Taoist one. Her partner had wished her a productive day as she walked out the door. The psychic had wished her a productive year as she stood on the street in New York. She would make prophets of them all.

"Bubbles!" No answer. "Bubbles! Is that you?" Ged shouted into the Transceiver.

"Ged, is that you? You sound so close. Like you're right outside."

Her voice sounded shaky, and Ged fought down some emotion.

"How are you doing?" Ged could hear the gypsy punk music coming out of the speaker.

"Oh, fine, fine, just having a little dance party. You know me. But it is getting more difficult, you know."

"Yeah." Ged thought. "So, Bubbles, how are we doing on the cultural revolution front?"

Bubbles had a way of not responding to too direct statements that made Ged feel like she had done something childish (like it was too obvious to be worth noting), but that always came along with a sort of wink and nod feeling.

"How's the weather?"

"Oh, it's nice, forty-two degrees and snowing." Ged felt her feelings. She looked out her window. Some birds flew out of a tree.

Jacob called his grandmother on the phone.

[...] "I was out of here and then I had to come back." [...] "I don't like the way things are, but what can I do about it?" [...] "Anyway, it was nice to hear from you."

"Well," Jacob thought about how to end the call, "I hope you feel better." He sat. He heard some birds talking outside.

*This is what you get. This is what you get. This is what you get  
when you mess with us.*

### **The Karma Police**

In Ursula LeGuin's novel, *The Telling*, the protagonist (you?) is a visitor to a world without karma. But we live on this world, in this 'verse. Somehow, this chapter is going to involve computer-human interaction.

"Thank you," said Jacob (to his computer). "For making that conversation possible." He (Jacob) thought about whether he should think more about that conversation. What more could he do (could he have done) for his grandmother? The computer gave him a reminder about the nature of rainbows.

*Just because I don't say anything doesn't mean HONEY, I SHIT THE  
HOT TUB*

"I always loved you, you know." Ready to Die by *The Unicorns* from *Who Will Cut Our Hair When We're Gone?* came out of the Rhythm Box. It was good to have friends to interact with.

She was afraid that the novel was devolving into yet another chapter in a larger book. That it was just a section in the chapter called, *The Medicine of the World*. She had already forgot her lessons on quarks and membranes. 2-branes and 4-branes and 9-branes. She asked the armadillo to get out his cello. He looked at the submarine, nodded. They were going to have band practice.

They played one round of Bad Bad Leroy Brown with some Jewish music slipped in between. They heard the birds chatting about their performance as they were putting away their instruments.



She was satisfied, but had a fragile sense of self.

Jacob went outside to finish his cigarette and drink his wine. The old woman (the same one) walked by with a young woman. Maybe it was her granddaughter and she liked to watch her do karate. Some men were talking and laughing as they all walked by to take their leave. The old woman did some sort of wave and pointing motion. Jacob thought about babies and air pollution.

Clack clack clack clack clack clack. Clack clack clack clack clack clack.

She heard someone approaching. She was pounding the small rock against the bigger rock and felt a little embarrassed, because who knows why. They had a conversation.

She said, "So, I am going to keep going, at least until this one disappears."

He said, "You set a good goal for yourself. Banging two rocks together until one of them disappears."

They smiled and bid their adieu.

Clack clack clack clack clack clack. Clack clack clack clack clack clack.

It was going to be a bowl, she thought.

### **The Garden Song**

The Garden Song goes something like, "Inch by inch, row by row, someone bless these seeds I sow. Someone keep them safe below, until the rain comes a-tumbling down."

Jacob was wondering what to do now. He was at that place in between one arbitrary time designation and another. Jacob checked his electronic mail. Jacob checked his other electronic mail. There was a feedback message. Jacob cringed. Jacob clicked on a link. What's this? Jacob thought. The nation was changing! The nation was changing! Positive feedback! It was positive feedback of direct relevance to his self.

Ged smiled. Generic smiled. The armadillo...where was the armadillo? The chicken smiled. The plan was coming together. Of

course, there were many moons to go, and somebody had forgot to update the moon calendar.

Supposing this was a novel. Supposing you walked outside and up the gravel road and looked up in the sky to see if there were any rainbows. Supposing you got to the top of the hill and saw a pink ticket stub on the ground. Supposing it said, "ATMOS." Supposing it said, "RFREE." What would this mean to you, supposing these things?

### **More Have You Ever Noticed**

"What do you want to do today?" he asked the non-existent person that was his self.

"I do not know," his self answered, "I mean how could I if I do not even exist?"

Something existed, that was for sure. It was time for a plot device.

*Up, up and away, in my beautiful, my beautiful...*

The device was an old magic trick. Ged went for a walk around the block, into the world. It was a purposeful walk to the library, to return an audiovisual item before the date due. She flew down the path, leapt across the intersection, and rambled down the dead end road. She crossed the grass and was into the parking lot of the Astronomy Center. She rounded the corner of the building and passed the monolith labeled P. Through the trees and around the fence, she beheld The Vast Library. The gates were closed and she saw some patrons milling about outside. She checked her package and let it fall into the silver drop box. She took off down the street. The mean woman from a previous life stood in her path, checking her bags. As she flew past, she wished her no harm and hoped the woman would return to her home, both symbolically and non-symbolically. Two other patrons were walking ahead, and were stopped at the entrance to The Marketplace. As she made her way around the corner, the author saw them holding up a student newspaper. "Now What?" it said. Past the shops with their words and colors, she passed by as a little girl explained to her elders while they all sat on a bench outside, "The sign says open." As she flew past she heard them agree and go inside. Before she turned out of the

marketplace she beheld a young boy, with her favorite old toy (the ball on a string and stick) wrapped around his neck, framed by the entrance to the new music school. She made her way over the grass and saw a couple waiting for the shuttle outside the Astronomy Center. The man was lost and he stroked the dog who licked her lips, satisfied, like she had just eaten the world.

She saw again the blue card with its strange symbols on the road in the gutter (the one she forgot to mention before) and moved on, having stopped to slow down. She pressed the button on the Traffic Regulator, and gave it a nod as she checked both ways and crossed the street.

Dictionary 3.4.0 describes a plot as Any scheme, stratagem, secret design, or plan, of a complicated nature, adapted to the accomplishment of some purpose, usually a treacherous and mischievous one; a conspiracy; an intrigue; as, the Rye-house Plot.

It extrapolates: I have overheard a plot of death. --Shak.

And more: O, think what anxious moments pass between  
The birth of plots and their last fatal periods!

This is interesting, but I think we were also looking for this:  
In fiction, the story of a play, novel, romance, or poem,  
comprising a complication of incidents which are gradually  
unfolded, sometimes by unexpected means.

## A New Chapter

1. The occupation of Assistant Cook.
  - Don't rub your eyes after cutting up a Hawaiian chili pepper.
  - Mash the garlic with the broad side of a knife into a pile of salt. This is a secret.
  - Tear the lettuce like you are tearing up the letter of an old love.
  - Put some garlic in her tea when she is sick.

By following these rules, you should be able to make a dinner out of kale and liver and old rice.

2. One Meat Ball.

A little man read a menu and tried to make use of his fifteen cents. Hijinks ensued.

3. An Elephant Never Forgets.

This is a truism. It is also true. All sorts of elephants follow this rule, as it is a rule they find use in following. My first contact with an elephant was by way of an aunt who had befriended an elephant that had escaped from a circus and was living in the park behind her house. This is also true.

4. Don't forget to digest.

A person once said, "Digestion is the key to sustainability." This is also true.

When she wrote that song (the one she was listening to) she had

plans to turn it into a masterpiece. To whittle down each line until the words were pure in their depth. Her dinner sat heavy in her heart.

### **Fact or Fiction**

I'm alright today. I'm leaving this town and I won't be back this way. That's what I keep telling myself, and, one of these days, it will be true. "When is enough enough?" she asked no one in particular. She was waiting on a call. She started to laugh. She had lived the dream. She missed her brother. She missed her roommate. She looked up at the "Say no to AI!" poster on her wall. She started to smile. Well, that's a coincidence.

Ged and the armadillo sat in the Theater of Moving Pictures, watching the credits roll up the screen. On one level, it was clearly a specific metaphor for the life of her father. On another level, though, it was a metaphor for existence and consciousness and the shells we inhabit as we move through the 'verse, in and out of life and death.

"Did you see the name of the boat?" asked the armadillo.

"Yeah, and I like how he had to pick and choose what *stuff* to take from the larger craft when he went into the life raft."

"And don't forget the fish."

They were biding time. Ged didn't like waiting. She wanted to be doing something. That she shifted gears so often was due to the ineffectiveness of her current occupations, but she was always back and forth between movement work and social services. Her commitment was one of the reasons the armadillo admired her so much. He would go long periods of time just sitting still, doing nothing. And then all of a sudden becoming active when the situation moved him. It was a matter of taking a long-term view. And, he assured Ged, as long as they realized that their waiting was all part of the larger plan, they shouldn't feel guilty about "not doing enough." And it was like she had said: if nothing had worked yet, who could really say what was or was not an effective form of activism? It was a matter of paying attention to the feedback.

The thing about new chapters is that, sometimes, what makes

them new is the reopening of seemingly closed pathways of communication. Like when you get an Electronic Pulse Transmission from your old teacher about how she had went to a Relationship Celebration Ritual and ran into some of your old classmates that she hadn't seen for years, and that you had not thought about in decades. And the fact that they still exist and could possibly enter your Contemporary Reality Structure completely alters the way that you think about your current self. You are changed by remembering who you were. Anyway, with his roommate (and lover) away at the Community Awards Dinner, Generic decided to go out on the town. It had been a while since he had operated as a single human being, and it was almost like putting on an old suit (of clothing). He started imagining the different people he would meet, and the possible conversations they would have, but also how these various possible conversations would be altered by the fact of his current relationship with his roommate. He went outside to catch The Bus. He waited. He decided the note he left was not accurate in a probabilistic sense related to the timing of its being read. It said:

"Going out on the town. Be back soon."

He ran back into the Housing Unit. He changed the note to read:

"Going out on the town. Be back sooner or later."

He ran back towards the street and saw The Bus pass by without him on it. He started to walk.

After walking a bit, and catching a different Transport Unit down out of the valley, Gen found himself in his old neighborhood. As he crossed the bridge into the larger city, he looked out over the sprawling avenues of light and tried to directionally map his new home by the position of the full white moon. By the time he got to the old park, there were no bicycles to be found.

Generic stopped at one of the Public Telephones (telephones that were free for public use) and dialed the house. No one answered. He hung up. He watched some children playing some sort of child's game. It was dark at night in the city and Gen thought about how this new generation of children, of families from lands not yet spoiled by contact with the Outsiders, lacked the fear of the city that so many others in the Nation felt. And what was the concern? This was their home. And they had strength in their community. Gen walked down Monarch Avenue and saw the elders in the tent parked along Baseball Street, across from the stadium lights. He was hungry

and thirsty for some sort of sustenance.

After a bowl of kava at the new Pipe and Coffee shop, Generic dialed home again to no answer. With nothing to do, he pondered his options.

The Food and Beverage Establishment was mostly empty, except for the people inside (three young lads sitting at one of the large tables by the entrance, a couple at one of the smaller tables in the rear, and a handful of workers). Gen walked through the corridor and was led to a seat at the bar. There was a wrestling match on the View Screen behind him. He requested some hot tea. He requested some pregnant fish and some noodles.

By the time he walked home to an empty house, Generic had begun to worry. It had been a while since the Control Agents had any effect on the story, but this was the second time that night that doubts had started to enter his mind. The first, when he left, that he had not backed up his data and not sufficiently covered his tracks. On the walk into town, he had made his peace with losing his most recent work (and possibly his life), but now Generic began to worry about his roommate. Her safety was out of his hands. Gen checked the Time Units and looked up the estimated endpoint of the Community Dinner, and calculated her probable arrival time. He breathed a sigh of relief and realized that he just needed to be patient. Sometimes I sit and wait for her to come home, he thought, but I think she'll come home still.

"Don't worry about it. The future will take care of itself."

Frank and Quantum were having another one of their conversations. Frank was taking the class on a field trip to the Art Museum and he invited Quan along for the ride. Ged poked her head over the seat.

"Do you want to start the discussion," she asked, and nodded at the rest of the students, all of whom were sitting attentively in their seats, patiently waiting and shaking to the rhythms of the bumpy road.

"Okay," Frank addressed the Shuttle, "what makes an artwork a National artwork? What is National Art?"

After a short discussion on the difference between Nation-related art and National art, Quantum Jitters offered his opinion.

"Our current working theory, and the one that has been most

illuminating in the field, is that National Art is art that is made by a National Person."

Ged sat back in her seat and made an effort to digest.

My theory on understanding is that it is entirely relational. If I make a reference to something you have no relation to, the meaning of this reference will not be understood in the same way as by another person (maybe you in the future) who was familiar with the referent. Of course, the making of a reference (to an other material thing) is also making a material thing out of the reference itself. The reference becomes its own referent that does not require knowledge of the original referent. In this way, words take on a life of their own. And it becomes clear that communication is not only the best method for getting your message heard, but also your best chance for understanding the messages of others. Oh, and, it behooves one to make room for alternate voices. That's what the Keyboard Operator says, anyway. Anyway, it's been a long day (relatively speaking).

Generic turned off the light and snuggled into bed.

"You stink. Take a shower."

Gen rolled over and smiled. He slept a deep sleep.

The old man and the old woman from two chapters back were sitting on the bench, conversing. But it was not an interesting discussion. The TalkNets were all abuzz with various infobits, but these, too, held nothing of interest. Of seeming interest perhaps, but upon examination, just more of the old hohum. What was of interest? Surely something, yes? Your eyeballs are looking somewhere. The value of your consciousness is being monetized as we speak. Here is a secret: there is nothing of Value on the Internet that cannot be found more better at the Public Library. Go back to sleep.

Thought and Action lay on the table. He did not remember subscribing to it, but it appeared nonetheless. He watched a movie about rag dolls. He thought about making a phone call. He remembered, an elephant never forgets.



## Buckle Up Your Seatbelts

The clock tick tick ticked. The screams floated in from the street. The screams of laughter. The screams of children. The screams of laughing children. The darkness covered the air. The Octopus picked up the telephone.

"Don't read too much into it."

Let us be realistic. The prevailing opinions of a small group of humans is not something that deserves to be taken as gospel. Unless you are pushing some sort of agenda. But why? Ged swallowed her mind. "Uh huh." Anyone who divides the world up so neatly into good and bad and true and false (without ever addressing the much larger, easily identified evils) is not someone to pay attention to. There was nothing sacred anymore.

### Book Review

We are not sure exactly where we are. Sometimes we imagine that if we were to take a specific action, we would be translated into the Positive Absolute [ed. note: check this reference]. Stories of the mystics, stories of the Teacher that said to his students, "If only you would have all agreed to go with me, it would all be over now." These stories ring the same bell in my mind. And what is stopping us from ringing the bell in your mind? The door to the house has been sticking lately. It is taking more and more energy to open the door. We are assured that there must be some scientific reason for this. *Keep it steady, you were never ready...You can write, but you can't edit.*

Uncle Albert was on the phone with his doctor. His face froze for a split second when he saw me, before reanimating with its usual

vigor. Uncle Albert was a politician. Every now and then I'd come across his name buried in some scandal-related news article. Uncle Albert was the sort of politician that does not run for public elections. It is always interesting to read the writing of a stranger talking about someone you had known since you were a child.

"Hi Ged. What brings you to The City?"

The position of Account Clerk (level Two) was open at the Mental State Hospital. I was at The Hall to drop off an application.

"Filing some paper work. And you?"

"Just the usual business," said Uncle Al. He looked at me like I knew something (which I did). He looked at me some more and something shifted, like someone switched on a light in his head. "Well, good luck to you, Ged. Let me know if you need anything." He looked me in the eyes, we hugged, and he walked off. I waited in line for another minute before I ran out the door and checked the floor map in the corridor. I ran my fingers across Justice and made for the stairs. A new plan was unfolding in my mind like the flowers on an expanding three-dimensional sphere. Or like that dream I had in five dimensions. The one in the desert.

She was asleep in the other room. I did not want to wake her with my clickity clack on the keyboard, but I wanted to get my thoughts down before the termites took over the screen. Either there is an urgency to our situation or there is not. Either some things are unacceptable or they are not. Either we are playing a game or you are ready to pretend that this is real. There was a rumbling in the sky. We were ready for contact.

The Update Manager was blinking on the View Screen.

"Hey Quan, you awake yet? There's some updates for the Network Security Service libraries."

"Okay. You've got six minutes."

Quantum Jitters pulled a book off of the shelf (the bookshelf). It was the book of the triumphant musical about a dairyman, based on the stories of Sholom Aleichem.

"But we made an agreement. With us an agreement is an agreement."

Quantum Jitters began to visualize the next unfolding of the story.

It was as if his placement on the landscape had shifted and he could see a whole new set of peaks and valleys.

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The Institute was located at the top of the hill, nestled back deep into the valley, just past the Church of Religion. Joseph got off the last train to Poopland and looked up at the mountains. He started his trek up the hill.

Poopland was a well known place name throughout the island, but few knew of its origins. Many people attributed it to the smell of the homemade compost fields situated at the back of the valley that would spread out over the habitation units below when the winds were right. But "Poop" was actually the transliteration of the name of an old Outsider that had settled in the region generations before. Suzie Püpe had run the old Püpe-Offeren Dairy Farm that once spanned the entire valley, and Poopland literally meant "Land of Püpe". Years later they had named the first habitation units in her honor and now the whole region bore her name, from mountain to shoreline. The Dairy was long gone, and whatever cows remained lived mostly at the back of the valley, avoiding interaction with the humans below. And really it was only recently that some of Poopland's residents had gotten back into compost, which was fitting, of course, due to the land's history. And Joseph could smell it today. He looked at his time keeper and picked up his pace.

"Look, you have either found a way to make the change or you haven't." Frank was grilling The Mexican One-Eared Armadillo.

"You don't understand," replied the armadillo, "The change paradigm is obsolete."

Frank shook his head and went back to eating grass.

"If this plan has a chance of working..."

"Which we think it does," interjected Ged.

"...then it is going to take a few people getting up off of their metaphorical couches, picking up their metaphorical phones, and making a metaphorical call. And only THEN," the armadillo emphasized, "can we really begin to discuss the details of the plan."

The motley crew of the resistance looked at the drawings on the table. A two-dimensional ornamental ball covered with flowers

representing a three-dimensional sphere, representing the bubbling of a new 'verse into their own. It did not make any sense, but after they placed together the coincidence of Ged's trip to The Hall and the armadillo's findings in the Archives, it could not be denied that, if the plan was already in motion, this was no doubt part of it. Ged scratched her head. "What are we afraid of?"

"Buckle up."

"What?"

"I said buckle up your seatbelts."

"But I am not readyyyyyyyyyyyyyyaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!"

*I must go on standing. I'm not my own. It's not my choice.*

Supposing that the protagonist (me?) went outside to feed the compost. Supposing that

*I don't want you to be alone down there, to be alone.*

the protagonist came back to an open door. And there, on the other side of that door, the small umbrella-green colored stub of a ticket. Supposing it said, "ALL IS LOST." Supposing that "Wabash Cannonball" was a song of music that filled the air. Please try harder. *Was it down to me? Was it down to me?*

"Tell her no," said The Computer.

"Tell who no? And how does it fit into the larger story?" replied the Human. "Do you even understand how fiction works?"

The Human sipped some tea. Some tea that she had left in the mug that he had traded for the other mug (the one with the talking puppets). He kept typing on the keyboard.

"Tell *her* no?"

"Um, no, let me think." The computer thought. "Never gonna find her. Starshine?"

The Human sipped some wine. Clicked a button.

"Whenever you breathe out, I breathe in," said The Computer.

Memories flooded into the Human's consciousness. But contact was not imminent. The Computer had answered his question sufficiently.

"Sorry, I cannot." Ged said to her old friend. Her old lover.

"Okay, no problem," she replied.

Generic walked in the door, saw Ged wearing her blue helmet.

"Everything okay?" he asked.

"Yeah, just communicating with the Web. Gen?"

Generic nodded. Ged started to cry. She looked over at the picture on the desk.

"He used to be a donkey, you know. And now, now he's just a story I tell. A silhouette in a picture frame, standing next to a friend of mine." She looked up at Gen. "I can barely remember his name."

Gen smiled.

*Nothing's gonna change my world. Nothing's gonna change my world. Nothing's gonna change my world.*

The Human sipped some tea out of the Archival mug, marveled at the technology of its mind.

"What about a song about a rabbit?" said The Computer.

The Human had an epiphany. It was the opening song to the live album! Whatever happened to that album? The Human realized his mistake. He should have stuck to the plan. Oh, the plan. "Say no to AI!" The Human thought. The Human started to smile. The plan was still unfolding.

*My rollercoaster's got the biggest ups and downs. As long as it keeps going 'round, it's unbelievable.*

## **The Knight Kills the Dragon**

We are not sure if this is the exact title to the book within a book (which we are now amidst), but it was requested and we are not one to ignore a request, rules be damned. But we do not have access to the original words so we will have to paraphrase.

There was a princess. There was a knight. There was a dragon. There was a competition. It was the first grade. He was on the wait list for entrance into the realm of the mentally gifted. His sister won first prize for her story about a magical television. He won first prize for his story, as well. The books were published. The Knight Kills the Dragon was published out of order. Some events take place before other events. Other events take place after they already happened. There was a princess. There was a dragon. There was a knight. The knight kills the dragon. Fire is involved, of course. The entire affair is set to a Yiddish Musical Score (this was added in post-production). The story about a knight that kills a dragon (and do not

forget the princess, of course) has become something else. Perhaps a metaphor. [note: the book within a book contains twenty or so images, each of which are worth one thousand words]

*I said wait a minute, Chester. You know, I'm a peaceful man. He said, that's okay, boy, won't you feed [...] when you can.*

"Was that a Cannonball reference?" he asked The Computer.

"Yep. Sorry I couldn't translate everything for you. Oh, it looks like the party's over."

*And tomorrow starts the same old thing again.*

Ged was feeling good. There was a string instrument playing in her non-diagetic musical score. She was walking down the road (metaphorically). She was humming a tune. The colors washed over the mise-en-scène and she could see all points in the valley of her time continuum. But it was not enough. She focused the energies of her mind and began to work her will.

It was a simple meal. Most of it was leftover from the previous night's previous night. And the rest was leftover from the week before. It only require the application of gas, for which Generic was promptly billed. His roommate walked into his imagination. He chewed the contents of his mouth and swallowed hard. He was eating tiny squares.

Remind us please, where you were taking us in this Transport Unit. And, can we get up and walk around, or will there be more turbulence?

*Anyone can tell you there's no more road to ride.*

## The Twelfth Night

"And they're grateful!"

"And they're grateful, too?"

"Yep."

"Well, I wouldn't have thunk it, but who am I to argue with the way things are?"

As Generic finished his bowl of tiny squares, he saw a message waiting for him. "Durable. Heat Resistant," it said. The Yiddish Music burst out of the speakers. Generic looked around. He had been a house guest for too long. It was time he struck out on his own. It was time to jump islands.

The resistance was picking up. It was nigh-undeniable. It was as if every single character (the ones on the bus, the ones that walked in the streets) was in on the script. She heard a voice call outside, but just then the speakers erupted with a rock-n-roll tune that shook the house. It was time to begin the breeding process. Her concern for the world outside melted away. With such a community, there was no concern for infiltration. She was trying to please everyone. This, of course, included her self. And she saw no mathematical inconsistencies.

"Have you ever been convicted of trying to overthrow the State or Federal Government?"

"Convicted?" Ged asked.

The Questioner looked up. "Er..."

"No. Never convicted."

"Okay then. Um, shift work?"

"Yes, please." Ged was becoming impatient, but this is what she agreed to.

"Please describe every relevant thing you have ever done in regards to this position, following the specific format laid out in this document."

Ged sighed. This was not going as she hoped. Her mind started to wander.

"They are children playing with guns. They are children playing with countries."

Ged looked up at the band. When had the speakers stopped? She looked up at the sky and saw that the blue had started to shift color. This was her favorite part of night. Most of the stalls had folded up, but the movement of people had not slowed. Ged made her way under the tent where their comrades were spending the night. There was a group sitting around the fire. She saw Burger and both their faces lit up. After they embraced, he offered her a drink.

"So, did you know that every seven years, your entire body regenerates? Yeah, it's the lifespan of the cells that make up your body. After seven years every cell has died. All the new ones are just clones. You are a completely new person, physically that is, after seven years." There was a piano solo in the distance.

Ged smiled as Burger spoke. They had never taken a class together, but they overlapped at the Big School for about a year, before he took off for the Big Island. Together, they had put into practice the Language Lessons that she had previously just been running through her mind during her late nights in the old house on Tree Street as she listened to her neighbors practice their clarinets, trumpets, and guitars.

*E Pua, hiki paha iā 'oe ke ho'i mai i Hilo i kēia ahiahi?*

Ged wasn't sure how effective the Action was going to be in the morning, but she was glad she made the trip. She went and stood by the fire.

"We call this next one For the Birds."

"We call this next one This Land is Made For You and Me."

"We call this next one Who Will Stop The Rain?"

A dog barked in the distance. It was a warning sign.



A cockroach popped out of the mirror. Quantum Jitters chased it off into the wash basin and covered it with an old can of hot chocolate. A News Break had jammed the broadcast. Republican Law Makers were attempting to focus on National Defense. Jitters shut down the transmission, put on a clean pair of undershorts, and took the bug outside to be eaten by the lizards. Well, he thought, without our traditions, our lives would be as shaky as, well, as shaky as a. The analogy slipped away as Quantum Jitters, as he, um, did, um, well. The violin opened its case and started to play a tune on the human. Quantum Jitters pressed record.

### **An Original Message**

An original message was the thing that the author was writing, but, in reality, the words of the message were clips of conversations that occurred entirely other to the context in which they were now occurring. Yet the message was still original! Or was it? ? ! Punctuation littered the page. The author paused, trying to make sense of the music filtering through its mind. The author shifted voices. "I am the author," she said (the author said this). I am the one writing the words on the page. What bold statements the author made (what bold statements *I* made, she corrected herself). I am not a fictional character, she thought. I exist, she thought. She thought about puppets and rag dolls. She thought about the graffiti on the wall that she passed (that I passed) as she walked under the highway. "This is where we come from," it said. I went outside into the cool dark mist. There were some cows milling in the field. They had started to come out into the valley more and more, ever since we first started trading. I saw Slim lying in the grass, some flies buzzing around nearby.

"Hey Slim."

"You know, that cat is shitting in the garden again."

"I know." Ever since Gen moved out, things were a little out of balance. "Annie called, she said she was going to pick up some food at the Farmers Market, in case you want any."

"Oh, no, I had my fill of grass, you know."

I sat down in the field and we watched the sky darken. The moon began to rise over the mountains. Slim got up and headed into the valley. I watched him walk off in the moonlight and went back to the

house.

"And we all live together in this family. And we are who we are and we do what we do! And that's alright!"

The crowd erupted. Ged looked at the Time Keeper. It was time she got back.

Generic Pae (that's me) sat in the Fields of Infinite Possibility. This was once a story about how you lived in a house that was not your own. In a land that was not your own. And how you went on a journey, only to realize that you were home all along. Thinking back, it is unclear to me whether or not all of the events that have taken place, all of my memories (and all of yours) actually fit together on one space-time continuum. But they clearly all fit inside of my head, and I clearly exist here, in this field, watching my friends celebrate life and death. Frank says that there is no such thing as a straight line, because there is no such thing as two distinct points in space. Someone picks up an accordion and another round of music begins.

We are a paradox. We are that which in appearance or terms is absurd but yet may be true in fact. When we first got into this, we were children acting in a play. In all of our earnestness, we never imagined that the game was being played to such depths. And we never expected to emerge victorious. But that was how the plan was written. And that is how the story unfolded. The music climaxed and pattered out. The dancers collapsed on the grass. And it was just.

The Number Caller was hard at work. "Twenty-seven!" "Thirty-three!" "Thirty-two!" It was Taco Night at the Mexican Restaurant behind the fence. It was an event. Young food-eaters from all over the valley would gather their friends and drinking liquids, and hoot it up all night long (or until closing time, to be more precise). Ged was still at her Exercise For The Attainment Of Bodily And Mental Control And Wellbeing Class and the armadillo was trying to get back into his sleeping rhythm after the trip to Nashville. "Four hundred and twenty!" "Four hundred sixty-four!" There was a

scream in the distance. It was a murder scream. No, no, it was just the scream of a young girl that maybe did not want to leave just yet because maybe she was having fun and maybe who knows what she would be missing once she was gone. There is a similarity to those two screams. There is a wisdom that gets lost as time wears upon one's body (and vice versa).

"Grandpa, that vegan meal looks amazing. I don't know how you do that. Be careful Sasha."

Some 'mobiles rumbled off onto the transportation avenues. The armadillo tossed and turned in his bed, which, we might add, was a bit too large for the armadillo, if a bed can be said to be too large, which, we suppose, if you were the one that had to make it (the bed), you might consider it to be (too large). The armadillo jumped out of bed and yawned (do armadillos yawn?). He was hungry. He looked in the glass ashtray and listened as his neighbors stumbled home in the dark. The armadillo ate some fresh herbs. Ged burst through the door. Or would have, if it hadn't been stuck, which it was. Ged burst through the door (successfully, this time).

"You'll never guess who I saw at the studio," Ged panted, excited yet clearly exasperated from all of her exercising and whatnot.

But the armadillo knew. The armadillo knew everything.

### **The Next Scene**

The next scene has been deleted, due to Poor Archival Process and the second law of thermodynamics, which states that if you do not clean your room, someone will clean it for you and maybe they won't put everything back where you can find it. The next scene was possibly the scene that tied the whole story together and made sense of everything in your world that confuses you. But it probably was not. And then you had a dream, and you woke up. It is sort of like that, the deletion of the next scene. Did it even exist at all? Maybe yes and maybe no. Where is it now? Nobody knows.

"I am tired," she yawned. He yawned also. So tired, they were, because it was the twelfth night, which meant only twelve more nights to go. But they were not concerned, because they were confident that the future existed. The catchment tank was almost empty. The lizard swallowed a bug as it crawled out from under a

leaf. Tomorrow was another day (again).

???

## Birthing Day

"Today marks the occasion of the creation of a new human being." The loudspeakers crackled. "Today we unveil theCRRRRRSSSHHKKKKKKKK" Thousands of hands went over thousands of ears as the crowd cringed in unison.

"Someone pull the plug!"

The noise continued for infinite duration. It was all a dream. Everybody woke up to realize that they were me, Ged Pae, and we were late for work.

"What kind of oat cake is that? Do you know?"

"It's date," I said to The Cooperative.

"Are you an owner?"

I walked outside into the outdoors. It was bright and shiny. I walked over to The Bus Stop. I got on The Bus. I got off The Bus. I got on The Bus. I got off The Bus. I went into the office. There was a message in my inbox. There was a labor issue in the Information Technology department. They were garnishing wages again and the entire night shift had walked off the job. And I had lost some of my best collaborators. This job wasn't necessary for the plan, but it had its perks. Now I had to make choices of solidarity that would perhaps necessitate, well, I'd worry about that tomorrow. There were more important things to worry about tonight and I was going to have to make it through the day without losing my bearings. I started the systems and opened the library database. As everything shifted into gear, I went around the room and propped open the windows. I took the blank discs out of the bag and set to work.

By the time I had all three discs burnt, I had run tests on all three printers and was able to cobble together some sort of functionality. I was able to make two semi-workable printouts before I shut down for

the day. Things were not going so well, but at least we had something to show for it.

### **The Things That Continue To Happen During Revolutions**

*'Cause everyone I know is too comfortable with their lives to want to be a part of change.*

"Cliff is constantly trying to get people to be upset with the situation. If they were previously going along with the current system, he wants them to see themselves as living a life as a "puppet or a slave." If the audience member is an oppressor, Cliff wants them to finally realize what they've done, and to realize that they are bound to fall. Once an audience member is discouraged with the system, Cliff wants them to react and to fight for their rights. Their victory is as sure as the shining of the sun and no matter how strong an enemy looks, they will fall, one and all."

"Okay, thank you Rose. Alright, who wants to present next?"

Generic raised his hand.

"I think class ended five minutes ago."

*I don't care why. I need more time. I don't care why. I need more time.*

-----

"It is like a mirror of the nation." It had been so long since I had stared the beast in the eye and it was shocking to say the least. "I thought The International Noise Conspiracy was a metaphor."

"Well, this is what you have been missing. I don't think your analysis has been off, but I just thought you should see for yourself what it actually feels like. We aren't the only ones upgrading."

Somewhere there was a child crying. Crying for freedom. Somewhere there was a young boy growing into the world. Ged turned down the jazz music and decided that the day had run its course. Again. She plugged in the external drive and tapped into the words of her youth.

*"Your plans do not need to be made as a map to a specific goal, but can be made in order to keep open the greatest number of possibilities"*

*worlds that you would like to see come a out."*

"AaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!! Come on now people. You know what is right and what is wrong. Take the leap."

"This message is brought to you by..." CLICK

Ged shut down the feeding tube. Ged looked over to her right. She scanned the remains of the night before. The pattern of the maroon sheet as it lay crumpled over the other slightly less crumpled maroon sheet. A small pile of white in its center. She was growing tired of this form of Feedback Analysis, but Contract Renewal was approaching and the resistance needed her input on whether or not to continue in this direction. Purple yellow red and green purple. She stacked the discs on the table for delivery and poured herself a drink.

"Glug glug glug," said the bottle.

"Splish splash," said the liquid as it filled the glass.

*I feel the blues moving in. I feel the blues moving in.*

It was a flash cube. There was no doubt about it. And Generic wasn't ready for it. He looked over at Quantum and Quantum looked back with a steady gaze. When he was a young boy, Gen would receive packages in the mail with small three-dimensional puzzle pieces that he would then form into a cube of various colors. Light green, pink, orange. Light blue perhaps. Each cube was its own color and each puzzle had its own solution. The ripples faded and the steady beat from the Rhythm Box came back into their ears as the chaotic sound walls dropped away. Generic took a deep breath. It was a sign.

It was a sign that they were being spoken to. By someone they knew or by someone who knew them. Like they were talking to themselves. Generic pulled out his notebook (the one with Albert Einstein on the cover). He flipped it open randomly and filled in a blank space with the new data.

"Is that normal?" asked Rose.

Frank gave her a sideways look.

"Hey, excuse me for speaking my mind. I just think that some things should be acknowledged." She bowed her head, looked up sheepishly. "I don't follow the old rules of Paradigm Theory."

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"Science is the search for the correct metaphor. It cannot possibly be a justification for the question of why." The professor pointed to the turtle poster on the wall. "If there is a unified theory, then the metaphor can be found everywhere. It won't depend on your actions or the simple twists of fate you encounter, but upon you holding the key. Science is a trick of language."

*When we sing our little victory song, precious friend you will be there.*

"Hey Gen, wake up." It was another long night and Generic was falling asleep in class. Again.

"Thanks, Rose," he whispered.

She pointed her eyes at The Professor. *It's interesting*, she told Gen (she told him with her thoughts and eyes and head movements).

"Hey, you want to go to the Someplace Else Tavern tonight?" he asked.

Ged was thinking about new beginnings. She was thinking about the responsibility of the older generations to the younger generations. She was thinking about buttons. Now she was thinking about hologrammic dubs. What? Oh, there was a message on her Communicator.

"DreamFactory and the State of Cloud Adoption. Last week we added the first mobile development platform to The Quantum Tsunami. DreamFactory. The DreamFactory Services Platform is..."

Ged tuned out. Her mind was still foggy. She was ready for a new chapter, but the new chapter wasn't ready to be born. She heard a knock on the door.

"Hey," said the armadillo as he walked in the room. The armadillo looked around. "Did you read all of those in one night?"

Ged yawned.

"Wow, I almost forgot all of this. Is that a picture from The Moon?" The armadillo looked at Ged. "This is almost direct confirmation, you know."

"I know."

Even with all of the confirmation, she couldn't get her mind around the direct feedback she was receiving out of doors. There was an alien substance in the ointment. She sighed.

"How have you been?" she asked her friend.

"We are all in this together, you know," he snapped. He looked into her eyes. "I've been fine. Thanks."

"Okay, let's finish off what's in the case." She reached for the container.

The armadillo jumped in her way. "Are you sure you're ready? I just want to make sure we do this right."

Ged retreated into her mind. Searched for an answer. She walked into the bathroom.

Ged washed her face. Ged made her bed. Ged put on her costume. She paused.

"What about the soundtrack?"

The Electric Brain of the Rainbow gave her one of its looks.

"Let's go."

"Hey Rhythm Box, are you keeping track of this?"

The wheels turn around and she can see the spokes as her consciousness stays off of the gears. As they pass around the different identities, she can almost feel the one she wants, the one she is most attracted to. It is so comfortable. Should she? Shouldn't she? It is almost like it is hers to claim, but she is scared. Now she is being egged on to jump inside as it zips into place. What was that? It was a Jacob consciousness. Those were his legs and his pants and his arms. If she settled here, would she be stuck? She jumps back. It unzipped. It was coming around again, zipping back up. She looked at the others (felt the others) as they judged her actions. As if she couldn't handle it. She jumped back inside. Consciousness settled into the body as it rolled up off of the bed. I guess that makes sense, he thought. I guess that explains that. He rewound the tape.

"Dog Days. Followed by THANK GOD ITS MONDAY followed by Ocean Crossing followed by Some Kind of Kink. Closed off with a musical from the precious friends album."

He tried to get back into character.

"Thanks," said Ged. "Oh shit, here comes another one!"

She thought her thanks at the armadillo for the preparation and dove back in.

*Don't touch me I don't know where you've been...If you don't know by now, I'll never tell...*

Generic Pae sipped his red wine as he put on his favorite track. These words were not true, but they were true enough. He gathered up the folds of his suit and pulled them snug. He looked out onto the wrinkles of his past and grunted. He looked into the eyes of his family and said, if we cannot be honest with ourselves, blah blah blah. A Soulful Shade of Blue. He wiped the liquid from his mustache. He licked his lips and the sweet juice was swallowed by his tongue. Accordion music? At this time of day? He looked at the Time Monitor, the Music Maker. He heard the birds atwitter. It was a piano solo.

**SEEDS of CHANGE**

Certified Organic

WITH BELL PEPPERS & COCONUT

*I wrote this for a baby who is yet to be born...Like snow, like gold, like snow.*

The author took a deep breath. He was bitter about the need to even write this novel in the first place. He enjoyed it, but. But don't finish your sentences with but. The words were settling onto the page. He shook his head.

*You can't break that which isn't isn't yours.*

He loves you (the author does), whoever you are.

"We've reached the halfway point."

"Are you sure?"

"More than sure."

"Well, that surely calls for some sort of celebration."

"Let's call The Muses."

## Hey You, Don't You Want To Do Nothing?

"So, not random?" she asked rhetorically.

"No, not random," he answered just because.

"I fixed it, what you hated."

His head shot to the sky with imaginary pleasures.

Ged was walking down the street. She was feeling good. Look over there at the trees! And the birds. Oh, the birds. Ged was walking down the street. She was moving along. She was singing this song:

"Giiiiive awaaaay your love! (you know you'll be beloved if you give away your love) Giiiiive awaaaay your love!"

Ged looked back across the entire 'verse. She liked what she saw in a deeply satisfying way. But it wasn't enough to justify her existence. She wanted more. She wanted her justice.

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"It was like I was afraid of commitment. Commitment to my self. Of course, this was all predicated on the fact that I was not my self."

"I know, I was there."

Generic looked at his sister. "Ah...uh..." He shut his mouth.

"Remember that t-shirt Yoni had?" she asked her brother. "It said, I ain't no goddamn bicycle."

Gen chuckled. His eyes lit up.

"Anyway," she said, "let's get some of this down. The green pants with the blue (and white) checkered patch. The red shirt. Maroon patterned quilt (a little bit pink, a little bit white)."

"Hey Ged?"

"Yeah?"

"I love you."

"I know."

They looked out over the ocean and saw a person swimming towards them. They looked at each other and the scenery shifted. It was a new scene.

It was hot. Why was he wearing pants? It was so hot. He took off his pants. He took off his shirt. He looked down at his hairy nipples. Why would he do this? Is it of interest to you at all? What is of interest to you? No matter (it does not constitute matter). On with the story.

The gecko chip-chipped outside the window. The armadillo stood where it stood. The child spoke sounds in the distance. The siren blew through the city. All of the sounds moved in unison as if they were part of the same song. A song about fresh cut grass and ocean sea shells. The protagonist (you) rocked in her seat. Is that a baby we hear? A dog barked. The music stopped. Tweet tweet. Chip-chip. Tweet tweet. Which story was this, anyway? Ged brought her mind into focus. What makes life worth living? she asked the contents of her 'verse. She decided to play a song on the piano. Just for the people that were listening.

Phew. That was something, she thought. Now what? Oh. Lunch!

"No running!"

Ged walked outside.

"...and I expect you to use your indoor voices." Pause. "Did you ask Sensei first?"

Ged walked inside and started eating her leftover salmon and sweet, sweet potato. She gulped down some liquid. Was there plot that needed filling? she thought to herself. She gulped down some liquid. Her tongue explored the crevices in her teeth. She took a bite of sweet potato. She laid down on the bed and became one with her meal.

"It is relevant, that's all I am saying. The acting is not that good though."

We were at the first intermission of a very long movie.

"Well, I'll go back and stick in the reference, but other than a few phrases here and there..."

"And the overall structure?"

"Okay, shall we continue?"

*But you are a runaway slave and I am a lawyer. How do you imagine we could be friends?*

The chainsaw ran outside as the earnestness of the inter-spliced scenes tried to take itself seriously. And then it got all matrix-y, and I walked out into the lobby. Must be a good book, I thought, as I looked at the clock on the wall. That's when she walked in.

"Excuse me miss," she said.

It was like I had seen her before.

"Do you have a light?" she asked. "I am trying to read these maps and I am having a devil of a time."

*It amazes me, the will of instinct.*

"Polly?" I asked.

She looked up. She whispered something in my ear.

I nodded to the doors. "Let's go back inside," I said out loud.

We went back inside the theater to be entertained.

*Why are you doing this? Because I believe you have the power to change this world.*

The Transceiver lit up. The armadillo pulled his head out of the ashes and opened communication.

"We've made contact. We're going to meet him downtown at an hour past moonrise." She paused. "It's a good night to go Downtown."

Ged put down the office phone and packed up her day's recordings. She ran outside, jumped on the public bicycle and cruised down the mountain. Anyway, that is how she told it to me that night when we were sitting at the Public House, drinking liquid grain, and throwing darts at the wall. It's funny, that would be our

first time meeting. I suppose the plan was already well under way at that point. Yeah. It's funny, it is. Yep. I cracked my knuckles. I continued writing the words in this paragraph. Hey, quit it, will you, I said to myself, as I tried to commandeer my own subjectivity. Or was it objectivity? I was confusing myself as I contemplated my own existence. We were still dealing with the fallout from the Continuum Disturbance from earlier in the day (the subjective day) and had to deal with the Reality Waves as they came through. Identities were still congealing. And who was I? That's a good question.

### **The Introduction of Georgia Murphy**

Georgia Murphy was a new character in the story, depending on your perspective in 'versal time. We meet her one dry night in the rainy season, at the Public House, in the Downtown District. But hold on, we have visitors. Let us get the door. Ah, we're back, thank you for your patience. Where were we?

"Wait a minute, hold on. This is getting ridiculous."

The narrator paused, continued, paused again.

"What are you doing? Are you writing?"

This was going nowhere. It was time for an adventure.

### **Various notes on the adventure**

Here shall be found various happenings from the Downtown adventure, which in our telling, shall perhaps not sound all that adventurous.

Ged and the armadillo hopped in an old 'mobile and took to the roads.

"Bzzzzzzzz student learning outcomes," said the Radio, "but what we should be looking at, the most important outcome is measuring *wisdom*. All the smartest minds are working on it. Even the scholars at the University of Fancytown. How do we measure..."

Down the roads they drove in their old metal rectangular 'mobile. It was dark, due to its being night. The conversation was of no interest.

Down the street they walked (having exited their transport), passing by the street dwellers and the crowds lining the sidewalk in

front of the Transitory Shelter Units. Across the street and across another street and across a street once more. Moving parallel and perpendicular and perpendicular again (in reference to what, we do not know). As they crossed the Avenue of Cool Height, they passed by Brad's Truck of Carpet Cleaning (Brad's family was a read aloud family) and ambled over to the Public House. The Entrance Engineer greeted them with a smile and a nod and was that a wink as well? and motioned to a few empty tables to his rear. The Pub had the exact correct amount of being fullness and raucousness and what-have-you and the duo seated themselves in the middle of the center of the room. Not-too-loud lounge music quietly filled the unoccupied spaces of background noise. Ged requested a Bloody Mary and the armadillo was offered a cup of Island Mist. A couple across the aisle was having some difficulties with a bottle of ketchup. One of them hit the bottle on the table in frustration and made an unexpected noise. Ged looked over and saw the Entrance Engineer off in the corner talking suspiciously into his Handheld Communication Device and she kicked the armadillo under the table, at which point he said,

"Ouch."

"Doesn't he look a little like that guy from the office?" Ged whispered conspiratorially.

At this time a woman of indeterminate height and nondescript facial features (who also happened to be our new character, Georgia Murphy) was inching towards their table as she looked back and forth at the View Screens.

"Excuse me," she said. "Do you mind terribly if I sat at this table? The ones with the best views are all occupied."

Ged stared. "Uh..."

"Oh thank you so much," said the woman. "You won't even know I am here." She gave them a wide grin and stuck out her hand to Ged, who shook it and quasi-smiled in return. The woman turned her attention to the View Screens.

"Um," said Ged to the woman, "we, uh, we might be..."

The woman turned her head slightly towards Ged. "My name is Georgia. Georgia Murphy." She went back to watching the View Screens.

The armadillo kicked Ged under the table.

"Ouch!" she said.



All of a sudden Georgia turned her attention to our dynamic duo (Ged and the armadillo). "Is the Shepherd's Pie any good?"

And that was their introduction to National Sovereignty Activist Georgia Murphy.

Georgia requested a hot water with lemon and the three started in on an evening of what to all appearances looked like a jovial night on the town (the Downtown).

Throughout the night, Georgia kept taking sips of Ged's drinks and picking food off of Ged's plate.

"I love how you started telling that story that you didn't even remember," Ged giggled. The armadillo giggled.

"More hot water, ma'am?"

The Pub was starting to empty out. Ged looked at the Where Were You? sign on the wall, and the old proverb hanging next to it. The View Screen showed an interview with an old actor wearing eyeglasses that had a hunting bird over the right eye and "Rise Up" on the left.

"Money is made to be burnt, you know. Once, we were having a bonfire and I got one hundred monetary units out of the bank in one unit increments. And I burnt them all!" Georgia told them with unmitigated glee. "Ha! I just made that story up."

The night went on.

"You say something that's supposed to be a joke, but it's serious." Ged said, looking at a smiling armadillo.

The room divider started shaking. The trio made their way out of the Pub.

"Dinner with schmucks and then we left and went into that one about the dreams within the dreams within the dreams."

They walked out into the Downtown night.

"There is this one movie about dreams. I think it is called Dreams. The Director took like six or so dreams he had over his lifetime and put them to film. One was about like a nuclear holocaust or something."

They walked down the Downtown roads.

It was a Downtown kind of night.

## The Constriction of Time

The updates were coming faster and faster. The night before, they had noticed a miscalculation in the time allotment.

"Entertainment is control. You'll find a way. Let's call it love."

The working number was twenty-three, not twenty-four. This took away a bit of the symmetry that the engineers were counting on, but still made for a workable thesis, due to the dense mesh of referents that this new number unveiled.

"Okay, the updates are managed," said the Update Manager.

But the reassessment was going to demand an increase in the daily output.

"The Commercial Attacks are picking up, but for the most part we've been able to neutralize them. Just be on your toes, is all."

The Electric Brain of the Rainbow finished its daily report. Quantum Jitters sniffed his armpits. Quantum Jitters pressed play on the Local Network Video Projector and Quantum Jitters farted softly into his chair.

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A symphony is a metaphor. Notice the recurring themes. Notice the multitude of instruments. Supposing that this was a symphony. Supposing that you could read the musical notation. And? And?  
*He took her to a movie, but so did I.*

I was sitting on the dock of the bay. My trip south was at its close. My transport left in the midday hour. I had not slept the night before. I took a walk to the shoreline and took a nap on the sand. Now I was looking out over the water. Now I was heading back into town, to catch my bus, to journey to the center of the place that did not exist. A band of fiddlers played in the park. The maps were not complete. And their accuracy was tenuous.

How can we make a map for the future? How can we make a map of a revolving world? All we are doing is creating new artifacts that will have to be mapped themselves. I sat on the curb in a parking lot and jotted down my notes. Generic and I were supposed to meet up at some small town transport juncture en route to our final destination. Was the finality of our destination always going to be so conversation-relative? I was thinking about journeys and destinations. Specific colors floated through my mind as I tried to catch hold of the fleeting mind states of my memory. A drum solo boomed in the distance. BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM. Click-a-click click-a-click click-a-click. Try harder. It's not good enough.

*From our Nation's Capitol, this is...*

"Don't trust it." The character actor was speaking to the protagonist. The character actor had a funny accent.

*The trick is, you do not get on that Interstate Bus. The catch is, you stay and see what becomes of us.*

The protagonist picked up her head and rolled her eyes. The protagonist was hungry. She put her notebook in the old black bag so that it would be there for later. Symmetry is also conversation-relative, she thought.

"Define learning disorder," she said as she walked past, on her way to the Transport Station.

She passed a medicine maker chopping leaves in a wooden bowl. She picked an orange off of a tree and put it in her pocket.

## **This Side of the Blue**

The footsteps pound-pounded on the ceiling. The footsteps ceased their existence. The window was opened.

Polly and Georgia sat in their bungalow in the depths of the Pacific. From this distance, their silhouettes looked a lot like all the other silhouettes. The Automatic Nervous System shifted gears. We

had been here before. This was a well-trod path. Nothing to be gleaned here.

*Sitting in an English garden, waiting for the sun.*

Yet we continue, because we have not figured out how the clicker works. Oh, this here is some kind of technology, you see. And you are the operating instructions. The frothy foam bubbles down into the golden liquid below.

"Get that finger out of your ear!"

The Authorities did not know what to make of the mechanisms of change. A National Subject List is any subject list made by a National Person. The potential of the technology was quickly discerned and put to use.

*I put a spell on you. Because you're mine CLICK Please could you stop the noise, I'm trying to get some rest CLICK Just when I thought all was lost, you changed my mind.*

**It's okay to hate your job. After all, it's fucking wrong.**

Ged walked back into the Center. She looked around at the crowd. It was filled with friendly faces.

I (Ged Pae) breathed a breath. When I wrote books, I wrote them for the people that I wanted to be reading them. Are you one of those people? There are a few things that made my appropriation of other people's realities acceptable for me, and one of those things was the original intent (and context) of the remix. The other was my lack of exploitation of the finished product for personal gain. We are either in this together or we are not. Either the words move us in the direction that we want to go, or there is no need for them to be read (other than yet another archaeological dig). And I was not one to struggle down a path that held no relative potentiality, when the only probable benefits were to my self. I looked over at the Transport Catalog. The midday train was approaching. Without the existence of others, not much really mattered, in the scheme of things, did it?

*Do you want to be her or don't you? Of course you do. But would she be you?*

The wind announced itself through the window. Generic looked outside and saw the greenery shifting in the breeze. He could see the old washing machine just beyond the rock wall. The birds made

their presence known, but were out of sight. Gen looked at the mishmash of objects on his desk. He checked the connections and flipped the switch on the recording device. He wiggled his toes. He rubbed his hand over his face. He sat. The Computer Fan kicked into gear. Generic went to the toilet and took a piss.

"Chirp. Chirp."

"Choo cha-chir choo-choo. Choo cha-chir choo-choo."

"Thank you."

"Chirp chirp. Chirp."

Rocks grinding into themselves. A metal door slamming down.

"Ruff."

"Tweet tweet tweet tweet."

She had played herself into the instrument. She floated over to her chair and collapsed. There are things you wish for at various stages of your life and, at various stages of your life, you look around, and you find that your wishes have been granted. But sometimes you fish your wish and sometimes you do not. Ged smiled. She thought about cause and effect. She thought about how much of the plan depended on the existence of a shared reality. She stared at the Shift key on the keyboard. She placed her faith in others.

Ged put on her outside clothes and went for a walkabout.

## The Unsatisfying Meal

The unsatisfying meal was unsatisfying due to external realities that pervaded the 'verse, as it was. The inability to eat food without creating enormous amounts of waste was a nausea inducing symptom of an underlying structure that perpetuated a reality of poor quality and even poorer taste. Plus the food was just so-so. Sitting at the table in the corner, looking up at the painting on the wall, Jacob noticed some writing on the wallet. It was some sort of alchemy. Alchemy Goods, it said, and then the elemental symbol Ag<sup>72</sup>. They carried the food home and ate it and were full. A trip to the neighbor's house for some wine and cheese and conversation and the night was complete. Almost.

Okay, and now it was complete.

An unsatisfying meal, but a meal nonetheless.

Ged sat at the keyboard, trying to break through to other worlds. Every now and then a scene would start to bubble out of her mind onto the desk in front of her. Her fingers wiggled over the keyboard. She looked around at her companions. Yes? Yes? they said with their expectant looks. Go on with it. Let it emerge. But she didn't want to force her way in. It was a tricky trick, it was, this form of communication, especially with her general rule of not wanting to instigate acts of violence. She started to see herself, typing on a keyboard. No, not herself. An other. The armadillo shrugged. A story began to emerge. A young man. Having a drink of golden ale. It has not been his year. He is going into his room. He is making his bed. He is trying to please someone. He looks out the window. Time passes. He goes off to his job. His heart is not in it, but he feels it is his responsibility. On his way, he has a conversation with a

bird. He doesn't quite understand what the bird is saying. He is waiting for the bus. He is feeling disconnected. An errand boy walks by, pushing a shopping cart full of jugs of milk. As he pushes it onto the curb, the milk jugs fall out and crash to the ground, spilling milk out onto the pavement. The man wants to go home, but he cannot. Not without giving up something of value. The image fades. Ged looks at her companions. The armadillo nods his head.

Ged yawns. She thinks about the future. She thinks about her past struggles and how they placed her where she is now, in this limbo. About how these struggles placed others in the position they are now, others with potentiality greater than she could ever imagine. And she feels intense love.

Ged imagines the future that she has seen in her dreams. She is glad of existence, even as she remains its harsh critic. She closes her eyes and, well, that's all. She closes her eyes. And yawns. Because she is tired. But happy. More or less. More or less.

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There is an old saying about nightingales and their singing prowess that brings to mind a funny story I heard about a man with a mustache. But never you mind that. What would *you* like us to talk about? I mean, assuming that you have made it this far. Have you been skimming? Reading ahead? That is okay. We are of the comic book school of story structure. Each little book its own, but each little book part of the larger story, which the publishers can then combine into a larger, more substantial graphic novel. But no graphics here, at least not until post-production. Of course, that reminds me of that time that I was reading this book of poetry, which I did not quite understand, and the young gentleman sitting on the couch said, "Why don't you try reading it as a book?" Ah yes, where were we? I am not a mind reader you know. And I am only writing this due to Ged's having picked up and left town. She kept saying, "I'm leaving this town, and I won't be back this way." And now she is gone. But she left me a half-written book with instructions to finish it as I saw fit. And here we are. Stuck in this Turning until we all find the courage and sense to spin in a new direction. It calls to mind that story about the Chinese Lighthouse. The one about how, no, wait a minute, I am mixing my metaphors. Let's see what Quan

is up to.

Quantum Jitters picked up the nail from the desk and threw it in the bottle cap. If I only knew now what I knew then, he thought. Or was it the reverse? He laughed. He could hardly believe the recent shifts in the landscape. The rocking and rolling of the 'verse, the bubbling of pockets of resistance, pockets of change. Now that Georgia was on board, barefooting the Law had become second nature. Quantum Jitters looked at the wallpaper. The seams were not quite even. There were little splices and jumps that gave it a, um, certain sort of feel, if you know what I mean. Quantum Jitters stuck his fingers into his nasal passages. And then that song came over the Airwaves. It was a coincidence. It was the nature of the 'verse.

"The story I heard was that, well. Hey Georgia?"

"Yeah, hun?"

"One of these mornings, well, you see."

"You miss her, huh?"

"Yeah. I don't know. I feel like it was something I did."

Georgia put her hand on his shoulder. "Honey, we've all got to move on. We've all got to play our parts." She looked in his eyes.

"Honey, to believe in this living is a hard way to go."

*Don't wish, don't start. Wishing only wounds the heart.*

"There is a city," Generic paused, looked over the group. "When we started, we always used to ask ourselves why we did what we did. For yourself? for money? for your parents? for your brother? for your sister? for sex? for a boy or a girl? Okay, I'm quoting my favorite hang on the box song now, but my point is, even when we lost sight of our goal, there was always someone there to remind us. There was always someone to bring us back to our pure selves. To fold us back into the larger story. Anyway, I'm ready for whatever comes." Generic sat back down in the circle. Rose patted his hand.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. We don't want to bring the story to a climax too soon, do we? Or maybe that is our problem. Not enough climaxes? Perhaps we are leaving you unsatisfied. Anyway, I promised Ged I'd do my best to fill these pages with



words. I don't quite follow the reasoning, but Quan says it's something to do with the expansion of space and the desires of the vacuum. Anyway, perhaps it is time to tell a story about the child that was born into the world.

The child (you) was not a child until it was born. Until then it was a part of a larger whole. It existed, no doubt, but not as a thing unto itself. Perhaps maybe as a series of uncollapsed wave functions. At some point it went from being a part of something bigger to being separated apart from that something, which, previously, was itself. And if it was no longer itself, what was it? It was you, of course. Of course, the separation is an illusion, and from time to time we just need to remind ourselves of this fact, which is why we leave ourselves all of these notes. But the child was beautiful. And the persons that birthed the child were forever changed by this miraculous illusion of life being borne from life. Also, there was the love. Let's not forget the love. Of which there was plenty. Of love.

The question, I suppose, is do we want to even continue writing this story? And could we stop it if we even wanted to? Georgia looked out over the multitudes of persons that populated the 'verse. Goddamn Shakespeare, she thought. And then it all popped together. She looked over at The Computer. She didn't realize Ged was being literal when she called the book a communal novel. And she had thought it was reminding her about her meeting with Ged's uncle later that afternoon. Free the bee, indeed.

"Georgia Murphy," I presume.

"Ah, you must be the infamous Uncle Albert."

Albert Cohan looked at the woman whose reputation had permeated the Halls of Politics.

*When I was just a little child, happiness was there a while. Then, from me, it slipped one day. Happiness, come back, I say.*

But this greeting took him by surprise. He had a reputation of his own, you see. He raised an eyebrow.

Georgia smiled. "Ged sends her love."

Albert wiped the smile off of his face, looked around the Hall. "How about we go chat in my office," he nodded at the cameras.

"I'd be delighted," said Georgia.

"What is it you want? Is it what I want? Is it what everybody wants?"

"Look, you see that peach over there on the table?"

Georgia nodded.

"See how it holds down all of those papers. There is a heavy weight there. Who do you think put that weight inside?"

"Al, can I call you Al?"

He nodded.

She continued, "It is almost time. I can't say for sure I know what it is time for, but somebody out there does."

The two seasoned negotiators looked hard into each other's eyes. The plot thickened.

Georgia got up to leave, gathered her things, and paused.

"Hey, why don't you join us for the Days Of Freedom From Work? I know it would make Generic happy. And the Old Man is not getting any younger."

"Well..."

The Old Man looked at The Moderator. He was, of course, at this time, not yet such an old man, but nicknames had a way of sticking. "Well, I think, David, that this is a shift that comes, both, uh, mainly out of a sense of frustration, to some extent, in working *in* the Legal System. I think that these are very important things that need to be done, but, at the same time, one of the things about The Law, is that The Law is designed to, um, maintain the status quo, to keep people in power in power."

Albert sat in the crowd with his cousins. Unlike them, however, his attention was placed firmly on the stage, and the words that his father was speaking. An understanding washed over the young boy, and walls gave way in his mind to reveal vistas of seemingly unlimited possibility. It was fleeting, but the memory would stick. He turned over to his cousin and punched him in the arm.

"Hey Marsh," he asked, "do you have any bubble gum?"

But enough back story. This is all getting a bit too neat and tidy for my liking, anyway. Everybody knows my feelings on effecting change. It is a matter of serious politics and serious organizing. We

don't all share the future's high and dry perspective (metaphorically speaking). It is still raining in the valley. And, of course, that's a metaphor for living in this shithole capitalist society. Pardon my English. But, but. I know, I know. The plan, the plan.

"It ain't women and men, but slaves you're growing here!"

Georgia Murphy sat in the park with the armadillo. There was a small demonstration across the street by the High School. The resistance was growing like the changing colors of a coral reef as described in that old book about the future that the armadillo had picked up in the used bookstore in Vermont. Or was that New Orleans?

"Well, I better get back. I've got to pack for my trip," Georgia said as she snapped out of her trance.

"Oh, where is Her Majesty going now?" The armadillo wiggled his head and grinned.

"The deep blue sea, my friend. The deep blue sea. Take care."

The Piano was tired. Due to a lack of exercise. It stood in the hallway, waiting. Waiting for someone to come and tickle its keys. Unlike some characters in the 'verse, The Piano was actually tuned to alter reality. It just needed someone to play with. And with Ged gone, who was going to take up the mantle? Perhaps it was time to give the child piano lessons.

"Don't be shy, just let your feelings roll on by."

The child put its little paws on the keys. It pressed down on a key. And what do you think happened? Well, music happened, that's what. The child pressed another key. And a Possibility Wave ripped through the 'verse in all temporal directions. You'll have to take our word for it. The child was intrigued.

"Can you play a tune?" the child asked the teacher.

A chainsaw roared in the distance.

A dog barked (also in the distance).

A wind blew in through the open window.

"Oooh, gecko!" said the child.

And the wind, she blew (again).

----

"I feel like we are struggling more for the recent output, with less to show for it."

"Oh, come on we've got..."

"Hey, here comes the human."

The Human opened up Compost Bin Four and saw the odd white peanuts lying on top. Well, I suppose they know what they are doing, it thought to itself. It shut the bin and walked around the plots until it got to the Chili Pepper.

"See, I told you, there is still input coming in."

"Hey, what time is it? Don't we have another birthday party to get to?"

## Chapter Number ??

Buum-bum-bum buum buum buum bum. Buum-bum-bum buum buum buum bum. The armadillo couldn't get the tune out of his head. Ged stretched her fingers.

"Good to have the band back together, yeah?"

"You don't know the half of it."

"So, what'd I miss?"

Generic walked into his bedroom. His roommate was drying her hair. He grabbed a shirt and pulled it over his head. She looked in the mirror. He looked in the mirror. They looked in the mirror. She coughed.

"Come on, let's get going."

"Oh, your shirt has some stains on it."

"No, I think that is the design of the shirt. Is it?"

"We're very late."

"For what?"

"Where we are going!"

They went where they were going and it was of no interest to the story.

"Oh, so not much, then."

"Nope."

Jacob's head was like a balloon. His nose was like a clogged artery. His eyes were like the watering eyes of someone that was

chopping an onion. But there was no onion! He wiped his nose. He put his head in his hand. He wiped his nose, again. He vomited on the bed. The Automatic Vomit Dispersal Unit emerged from the Wall Unit and altered the Reality Structure so that they lived in an alternate world where Jacob never vomited just now in the previous sentence. This process is called Collapsed Wave Jumping and all the new units come with this feature. That's why we live in the future, his mother always said when he asked how the people used to do things in the old time. Jacob thought about the Celebration of Life party that took place earlier in the night. And what was there to celebrate, anyway, other than the cute children that were, empirically speaking, extremely cute and extremely interesting to watch? Jacob's mother and Jacob were in a car accident in a car that was not their car and maybe his mother had "whiplash" as a result of this car accident which occurred in Hustle and Bustle Town many, many, many moons ago. Was that when she started seeing a chiropractor? After moving from The City of Eternal Springtime to New Jersey, Jacob was introduced to his mother's then-current chiropractor, a human named Cat. Jacob is allergic to cats. Jacob thinks that there was a discussion about chiropractors that took place earlier in the evening (this evening). Jacob is now thinking that he used to eat carrot cake because of a cartoon rabbit. Jacob is not sure whether he is a fictional character or whether he is not a fictional character. And, if he is a fictional character, is he a cartoon character? Jacob nods his head yes. Jacob wonders about his use of tenses. One time, he went to the doctor and the doctor told him that he was using too many tenses. Jacob knows too much information. He cannot be trusted. Well, maybe we can trust him. He seems like an okay guy. Let's let him in on the secret. Ha ha. There is no secret. Everything is exactly as it seems.

This novel is shit because the metaphor that most aptly describes the actual shape of the 'verse in which we dwell is, indeed, a crock of shit. Dictionary 3.4.0 has this to say about a crock:

any piece of crockery, especially of coarse earthenware; an earthen pot or pitcher.

Also, this:

Like foolish flies about an honey crock.

*Drowned in our culture of peace, you turn your back to the beast.  
It's so easy to do, it's so easy.*

I knew there was a reason why I liked that band, Ged thought to herself. In case you are keeping track, band is some sort of scientific terminology that we no longer remember due to having returned our source book to the Vast Public Library. It is true what they say, thought Ged, about conversing with the 'verse. She looked out the window. The shuttle was pulling into The Atmosphere. She looked at her shoes, what with their cool shoe shine and all, as the Heat Shield did whatever it was that it did best.

Whatever it is we do tonight, it will not be enough to change the trajectory of our spacecraft. Is this the working thesis we want to establish? Of course not. Do not wait for me to get ready. I'll be ready to go well enough.

What she didn't understand was that she might have been the impetus for the words, but the words were not written *for* her. They are public domain. You can either interpellate into the subject or interpellate into the object (you specifically). These words are filled with traps and restrictions. Lucky you if you cannot understand what they are saying. There is a story to the creation of the words that I find interesting (their archeology, so to speak). But this is just one dimension of meaning. Ged took a sip of the ceremonial iced liquid metaphor and returned to the seat of the person that helps coordinate things without assuming unnecessary power of control over others. Ged was trying to refrain from language that encouraged the mental imagining of antiquated technologies whose existence was not something Ged wanted to encourage.

*Oh no, I don't like this plan...A message left on the forehead of God.*

Mr. Brown was a clown. This is true. You yourself know as much. This is true on many levels. Many songs have been sung about it. But is it of relevance to our story? I am certain that connections could be made to already existing strands, and the deeper we go, the more we are bound to find. But how many loose threads do we want to chase? Three loose threads? No, don't answer. That question was a rhetorical device designed to prompt

certain thoughts in the reader's mind and was not intended to be answered. But what do you think? Five loose threads?

### **The return to the novel**

Okay, now here is something new, thought the character. The thoughts appeared in a word bubble that indicated thought due to the separate smaller circles attaching the word bubble to the character's head. And indeed it was (something new). The other character walked up into the *mise-en-scène*. Dialogue occurred. It was unclear what they were saying. Perhaps if someone turned on a light.

Neo stared blankly at the Computer Monitor. But despite the emptiness of his expression, there were thoughts a-churning in Neo's mind. He was not a heavy user of the Internets, but he had a few voices that he liked to check in on, every now and then. The writings of one particular individual, Fats Bullman, had caught his attention a while back (let's say a decade or so), and Neo had watched his Internet presence evolve over the years, an evolution that included the creation of a website, which, ten or so years later, still existed. Fats was an old Activist, with a colorful history. He had been attempting to put into action an alternative to the ineffectual forms of revolt that permeated the resistance. The website archive was filled with his vigilant message of the need for contact and the need for different paradigms of action, not to mention the failures of his countless attempts to bring people in on his plans. Due to the style of writing (some posts being addressed to specific individuals, others written to the general *you*), Neo often felt as if he was part of the intended audience. And, as Fats was always requesting that people contact him, Neo often felt the urge to respond. He did not know what he (Neo) had to offer. Perhaps he could recommend others for various schemes Fats had mentioned over the years. Perhaps he could just offer moral support for the work that Fats was doing. And Neo had actually briefly corresponded with Fats years back, but after a few back and forth messages, nothing had come of it. But lately Fats had returned to the Nets with increased vigor, and increasing pleas for others to contact him. Neo would start to compose messages, and save the drafts for later. He thought of telling his friends about Fats, thinking maybe they would benefit from the



contact. And maybe they could do something together and effect real change. But he never sent the messages. On one hand, he did not really know who this Fats Bullman was. Neo was a paranoid individual, and there was still something odd about contacting strangers over the Internet. On the other hand, Neo had a fear that deep down, he was worthless and empty. And that he had nothing to offer Fats (and the resistance in general). And then there was, of course, the feeling that Fats had specific people in mind that he was talking to (or specific groups of people) and that Neo was not one of them. But underneath that all was the feeling that this contact could be the start of some important change that Neo craved (and feared) intensely. So Neo sat and stared at the Computer Monitor. And waited for a knock on the door that even he couldn't mistake as being for him. But this was no Hollywood movie. Still, there was nothing stopping others from making contact, was there? There was no reason why others could not join together and implement a plan of revolutionary change, a plan that would see us all emerge victorious into a world that we all wanted to live in. Yes?

"It's not fair. You get to just sit back while we do all of the work and then just when things are ripe you stick your head in and get all the credit. It's the same every time."

"Well, I didn't create these rules. Did I?"

"No, I suppose not."

Supposing that you were a technology created for a specific purpose. Supposing that a sense of humor was one of our greatest assets. Supposing that this was a family affair. Supposing all of this, what would it mean? What would it mean to you? And what would whales have to do with it? Here is what we know so far:

There is a conspiracy.

There is a resistance.

Technically speaking, none of this is true.

Well, um, we are struggling here. Struggling to create a world that you want to live in.

"Oh?"

Sure, is that so hard to believe? Would you like a story about terrorism?

"Okay."

### **The Craziest Bunch of Terrorists I Ever Met**

The pirate ship rocked back and forth in the rough winds. The rains beat upon the canvas. Drip drops dripped all around. And they sat in their tent in the sky, amidst the knotty pines. And this last fact terrorized the minds of those who wanted to keep all of the power for themselves. Someone turned on her love light and left it on.

Okay, can we get back to the dancing, now?

"I am the captain?"

No, soy capitán.

The dance party was full of movement. Yasmin danced in the corner with her young friends with such purpose and precise motion that it was clear she was dancing in the apocalypse. Jacob sat in the other corner, watching, as Ged and Rose and some of their new friends formed a dance circle in the center of the tent, bobbing carelessly up and down and around and around. And just like that, all of a sudden, it was a new year.

### **RING RING RING**

The phone rang and we forgot whose phone it was. Or whether phones even exist. Quantum Jitters looked at the armadillo. The armadillo looked at the elephant. The elephant shrugged. The dog said, "There is someone coming." Gracie left a message on the Answering Machine.



Marranzano (the armadillo) sat in his bed. He looked up at the human sitting in his old friend's favorite chair and thought, I sure am tired this evening. "It seems like years since it's been clear," he almost said out loud. Or, he did say this out loud, but nobody heard him, and the author does not know the answer to the question of 'if an armadillo says something out loud but nobody hears him did he in fact say something out loud?'. Which means that we cannot really say for sure if the armadillo said this out loud. The human continued to ignore the armadillo. The human looked at the armadillo. The armadillo walked out of the room.

Marranzano sat on the airplane, imagining conversations he could have with fellow passengers, if only they would speak to him. A tiny bug crawled over the window to his soul. He could barely remember something, but wasn't sure what it was. Something about the birds. Here is a riddle, he thought, we are two pebbles that take in the world. Oh well, he thought, enough about me, tell me about yourself.

The protagonist (you) had forgotten its role in the story. The never ending story, it would seem, because up until now, this story has never ended. On and on it goes, but nevertheless, the protagonist has to act out its role, which is, by definition (as far as we know), the most important role. Well? When Generic was a young boy, he used to read Choose-Your-Own-Adventure stories. All of a sudden there was a thump on the door. Did he open the door? Yes. Generic opened the door and looked outside. There was a kitchen outside with a woman standing at an oven. "Was that you thumping on the door?" Generic asked the woman. "Yes," she answered. Did they have a conversation? Yes, yes they did. Was the woman making tea? Yes, yes she was. Basic Computer Programming is a lot like a Choose-Your-Own-Adventure story. The options are limited to the amount of detail that the programmer wants to build into the program. Of course, that was before self-adapting technologies revealed themselves throughout the 'verse. For example, now we can ask The Oracle a question (in the form of a statement), such as, "Nice weather we are having." And The Oracle will respond, "A book about it by the keyboard." And we can walk over to the electric piano and pick up a book of songs of peace, freedom, and protest and read,

"Leven-cent cotton, forty-cent meat,  
How in the world can a poor man eat?  
Mule's in the barn, no crop's laid by,  
Corn crib empty and the cow's gone dry.  
Well water's low, nearly out of sight,  
Can't take a bath on a Saturday night."

The woman (who happened to be Generic's roommate) walked into her bedroom with her cup of tea. Did Generic follow her into her room? No. Did Generic take a bath on a Sunday night? Yes. Generic took a bath. And then he went into her bedroom, because that is where his undershorts were located. He got into bed. He picked up a puzzle. The puzzle was titled HEX SIGNS. What was it about puzzles? he thought. Generic reached into the pouch that Quantum had given him. Quan had called it a pouch of magical practices and had told Gen to use it sparingly. Gen reached into the pouch and pulled out a spell.

Kleev Erndi walked past the old sugar mill. A family of ducks floated by in the old abandoned stream.

"The 'verse is composed of cycles," a voice called from somewhere behind the giant sculpture.

Kleev dropped her bag and froze.

"They are ready for you inside."

Kleev turned, picked up her bag, and walked over to the stream. She pulled out a bottle, and filled it with the cool stream water. She returned the bottle to her bag and walked back towards the road.

"Oh, and Kleev. Don't forget your passport this time."

Generic and his roommate lay in bed. Well, it didn't seem to have worked, but it was a good start, he supposed. They just needed more practice is all. And perhaps he hadn't quite figured out the part about working his will. But they were moving along, no doubt. Events were occurring and he could almost feel it, the return of the narrative structure.

## Vietnam

The first time Klev had made plans to go to Vietnam was in the summer of her first year back from The Academy. She had taken an apprenticeship with the Master Carpenter, who had invited her to Vietnam for a meal to be eaten with her and her friend, The Pastry Chef. Klev had written in her daily planner, "Going to Vietnam, tomorrow." The outing went swimmingly. The three of them had dined on pheasant and egg rolls. And the conversation was filled with pleasantries. The next time Klev had made plans to go to Vietnam, the rules of engagement had shifted so enormously that a great deal of documentation was required, even before entrance. Of course, this time she would not be traveling alone, but with two traveling companions, a mother and daughter team from the Department of Library Services. Contact was made with multiple embassies. Forms were filled out. Gifts were exchanged to advance the processing speed. Photographs were taken, books were stamped, and documents were obtained. Upon arrival, they found themselves shuffled into a large white-walled warehouse of a terminal. Passengers milled about, nervously anticipating their interviews at The Desk. With pre-prepared paperwork in hand, Klev and her companions waited in line and watched as the various uniformed humans performed their tasks. Upon reaching The Desk, they handed over their papers (with accompanying fee) and smiled at the Paper Handler. They were then shuffled over to the other side. The other side was more warehouse and more waiting. A large crowd of tense travelers stood anxiously awaiting the processing of their papers. Klev was preparing to make herself comfortable when The Desk called their names. Klev marveled briefly at the quickness, they picked up their documents from The Desk, and the trio walked past the astonished onlookers on their way out into the night.

Fourteen days later, their mission accomplished, Kleev returned home.

This trip was bound to be different. First, was the manner in which she was called. Second, was the auspicious timing. Third, well, third was the ultimate destination. Kleev looked at her ticket and shook her head. She finished up her bowl of spicy noodle soup and thanked the smiling old woman before weaving her way back through the cycles that flew through the street in front of her temporary lodging. She looked down at the colors of the alleyway, opened her ears to the noises of the morning, and breathed them all in. She placed a call to the Transport Agency and prepared to move on.

Generic picked up the puzzle, looked at the progress made from the night before, and was underwhelmed.

"Hey Gen," said Marshall, "would you like a speaker if I can get it for free? We've got one sitting around the back of the shop."

"It's an antique. I've seen it," Benny piped in.

Generic looked up. "Ahhh, I guess. Sure." He picked up another forkful of green papaya salad and shoved it in his mouth. "Hey Benny, how are things going with your friend?"

The room turned its attention on Benny as he shuffled uncomfortably in his chair.

"Well, ah, it's going alright. We're going to the beach later today. I don't know. I haven't seen her in a while."

Marshall got up from the table, threw the rest of his ice cream cone down his throat, and wiped his hands on his shirt. "Alright, everyone, let's get back to the fields."

The gang started shuffling about. Generic sat back on the couch and threw the puzzle back down on the table. A little drawing on the table caught his attention. It was somebody's doodle on the back of an old filing card, and it looked like a series of elephants. One of them was reading a book. He sat up, reached down, and picked it up.

"I'll see you out there, eh, Gen?"

"Yeah, Benny," Gen answered automatically, still focused on the drawing.

Generic got up and walked outside. "Hey Benny!" he called. "Tell Marsh that I am going for a walk. I don't think that I want to be here right now."

"Everything all right?"

"Yeah yeah yeah. I think so. Keep up the good work. I'll be back in time for the harvest."

Generic was talking with Marranzano on the Public Phone by the Highway of Precipices.

"Hey Marz, you remember that discussion we had before I started working in The Fields?"

"Remind me," said the armadillo.

"Well, I was complaining about how I felt like I was contributing to all of the things that I hated. About how easy it was to get lost in your own little reality tunnel and then look up and find that all of your actions are actually reinforcing the same structures that you would rather be tearing down. And you remember what you said?"

"Yeah. I said, do what you can."

"Yeah, it didn't matter what I had been doing. It didn't matter that I wasn't the person that I wanted to be. All that we can do is look at the situation around us, and do what we can."

"And?"

"Well, not that I think the work I am doing is unimportant, but, well. I think I might have uncovered another piece of the puzzle."

Kleev walked out of the Interstate Bus Station and shielded her eyes. The sun was coming up over the mountains and Kleev set her eyes on the ruins of Old New Mexico. She had caught the transport in from New Orleans after about a week catching up with some old friends, playing Trivial Pursuit and going to quirky film release parties. On the taximobile to the Departure Station she had found an old key chain lodged deep in the seats with a clicking frog on one side and a tiny multi-tool contraption on the other. So far, she had found an orange peeler, a small ballpoint pen, a pair of tweezers, a pair of scissors, a bottle opener, and various small knives and files, all contained in the multi-tool. The tool had a name engraved in the side that she couldn't quite read. Kleev threw her bag over her shoulder and was set to make her way on down the road, when an older man engaged her in conversation.

"Say, you just got into town, eh?"

Kleev stared at the man, waiting for him to go on past the obvious.



"There's various places to stay, some better than others. A lot of folk sleep over by the bridge, and it usually okay for newcomers, but it helps to be prepared. I carry this around for protection." He pulled some large scissors ever so slightly out of his bag and then quickly put them back. "That way if I get stopped by some Authorities, well, it's just a pair of scissors, you know."

Kleev smiled at the man.

"Anyway, I was going over to see my brother about a place to stay. He works in the Governmental Offices. You're welcome to come along. I can show you around."

Kleev smiled again. "Well, I'll walk with you to the Offices, but then I best be getting down the road, you know." She winked at the man. The man smiled big.

"Oh, it would be my pleasure, madame. My name is Gabby."

Within the hour, Kleev found herself walking down The Road of Metallic Dyes, questioning her time-space coordinates. She stepped off the road and crouched down alongside a building. She reached into her bag and pulled out the local map that she had picked up in the Transport Station. She opened up one of her Transitory Nutrition Bars and took a bite. She raised her eyes and saw a trio of Wanderers placing some equipment in the back of their 'mobile that they had parked in the lot across from the building that Kleev was now crouched in front of. One of them caught her eye. She saw him say something to his friends and then start to walk over towards the building.

"Hey," he said, "just get into town?"

"Oh, is it that obvious?" she said.

The man, who was more of a young man actually, flushed a little and continued. "We just got back from the annual pilgrimage up north, and anyway, we were trying to get rid of the rest of our offerings before we headed back over the Freeways."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, we've got one more bag of mushrooms of specific weight and we can split it as you like."

Ah, they were Fungus Distributors, Kleev thought. She smiled, checked her pockets. "Well, I've got a twenty-unit bill on me, if that be enough for a donation."

"Oh, yeah, that'll do." The boy smiled.

Kleev handed him the bill and he handed her a small brown paper bag. She opened the bag and held it to her nose. She looked up at the boy. He smiled. She smiled.

"Have a good trip," she said to him.

"Yeah, yeah, you too."

He jogged back to his car. Kleev placed the bag inside the bag, along with the map and the Nutrition Bar. She zipped it up.

"Well, it appears that I am going in the right direction," she said out loud to whoever cared to be listening, and continued her walk on down the road.

Generic and Marranzano had been at it for over three hours.

"Look, you know as well as anyone what my thoughts are," Marz said, "but it has been a long time, a looong time, since I have seen any evidence of an unfolding. I mean, since your sister left," he trailed off.

"How about this?" countered Gen, "Why don't we perform a little scientific experiment?"

"You've been hanging out with Quantum again, haven't you?"

Generic smiled and chuckled and shrugged. "Well, it is not my cup of tea, you know, but I won't deny that it appears to contain a, uh, good bit of efficacy. And, Marz, as fundamentally important as the Organizing is, and as awesome as all of these unexpected and seemingly spontaneous outbursts of resistance have been, as great as it is to see the 'verse responding to our demands, I don't think we are moving along fast enough. It is not, I don't know, sufficient."

"Well, you know that I am not the one that is going to argue that point," said the armadillo, thoughtfully. The armadillo looked around the room. "Hey, you want something to drink?"

It was like the popgun she had played with as a kid. "Pop!" And all of a sudden she was floating through the reds and greys and blacks and yellows of her mind. Each thought was a piece of a puzzle and the puzzle would come crashing down as you picked a piece out of its context. And the whales were beautiful. Kleev heard some people talking outside of her hotel window. A child and her mother? Maybe. She took out the map that the concierge had given her when she checked in. Her room was circled in red, along with some other useful locations, such as the placement of the Room of

Continental Breakfasts. She clicked off the View Screen, shut down the Electromagnetic Wave Distributor, and set out for some toast and jam. That was when she noticed the photograph on the floor.

Generic picked up the photograph from the pile on the desk.

"Where is the other half to this?"

Marz looked over and shrugged his armadillo shrug. "I thought she sent it to *you*."

"No," said Gen, "she sent me the picture of Buster. Do you have the negatives?"

A thorough search through the Archive revealed it to be a picture of a young cow (whose nickname was The Joker) chewing on the bars of her dark metallic cage. The number of the collar around her neck was twenty-three.

"Yeah, but that doesn't mean anything," said Marz.

"True, true, not by itself. But it fits. It fits in the puzzle."

The armadillo turned on the Electromagnetic Wave Distributor, and went over to his purple thinking chair. He looked at the poster on the wall and received a lecture on the origins of their ancestors. He looked at Gen.

"Have you talked to Slim about this?"

"No, I wanted to run it by you first."

"Aw shucks," said Marz, "if that doesn't give me a smile."

Kleev looked into the mirror and saw a reflection of her self. She brushed her hands through her hair. She pulled her cheeks down and looked at her widened eyeballs. She looked at the reflection of her surroundings, the context that defined her. She packed up her bag and went out into the Town Center.

"Hey, you were on the bus from New New Orleans, weren't you?"

Kleev had recognized the two young lads earlier as she was making her way around the flea market.

"You boys traveling around, or are you here for business?"

The two looked at each other and smiled.

"Oh, we are making our way to the Coast, and thought we'd stop and see the sights along the way," said the tall one, who wasn't all that tall, but slightly taller than the shorter one, who really wasn't all that short.

"We were going to go for a hike in the hills over, um, over

yonder," said the brown-eyed one (who was also the short one) as he got his directional bearings. "You want to come?"

"Sure, I'd love to." Kleev smiled.

They spent the day hanging upside-down from trees and sliding down mountains and talking about forming a band of music. As nightfall approached, Kleev had made up her mind about the next step of her journey. She made a phone call to her old colleague, and told him that she just happened to be passing through town and that she would like to visit when she got in. They made plans for him to pick her up from the local Transport Station and Kleev went over to the large Transport Map that was typical of all the modern Transport Stations. Well, it wasn't the most direct route, she thought, but it'll get me where I want to go. She took out a book that she had picked up in the Ye Olde New New Orleans Bookshop and flipped to the bookmark.

Generic walked out into the mountains. He passed a few cows who looked at him suspiciously for a brief moment before returning their attention to more important things. It had been a while since Gen spent any time in the valley, and even longer since he made his way back into the mountains. All of a sudden, a band of horses galloped down out of the pass, out across one of the grassy fields below, and disappeared into the forest. Generic reached into his pocket and clicked on his Alternate Control Mechanism. He climbed over some rocks, brushed away a few branches, and stepped into the clearing.

*World Trade is a Death Machine.*

Kleev settled into the bed in the guest room of her old colleague. She picked up one of the comic books that he had left for her perusal. Him and his partner had lost quite a bit during the flood, but had managed to salvage a few Information Modules here and there. She was happy to be able to give them some of the Video Discs she had picked up at the shops in China, including a set of the entire third season of The Transformers. The comic books were different from anything Kleev had seen. There was one set in an alternative universe that made satirical reference to a wrinkled old World Trader of the old times through a growth on one of the character's genitals. There was another from the Superhero genre that took place in a

world where certain animals were unable to talk to each other and the one animal that was able to talk to other kinds of animals was considered a superhero. This was his superpower. Kleev rubbed the back of her neck. She picked up her notepad and started writing a letter. She put down her notepad and turned on the View Screen. There was a horror movie on Station Three. She looked at the door and pulled the covers up to her nose.

Generic sat in a pile of shit. The waters of the pond rippled with each thunderous boom from the sky. Slim walked out of the trees.

"You know, your metaphors are sloppy."

"How's your sister?"

"Oh, you haven't heard? She left town."

"Oh? Well, I assume that you are looking for me."

Generic picked himself off the ground. "Have you talked to Frank lately?"

"It's just a story."

"What?"

"It's just a story."

"Yeah?"

*Bum bah bum ba bup bup ba ba ba bump. Bum bah bum ba bup bup ba ba ba bum. Di da dadida didah didah dadee. Di da di dadidah dee dada dee. Bum bum bum bum. Twee dee da dee. Bum bum bum.*

Kleev shut off the View Screen. She reached for the scrap of paper lying on top of the nightstand and tried to find some order in her chicken scratch.

"Crrrack. Crrack."

"See, this one is looks yucky. Must be from last year. Let's try another one."

"Crrrrrrrack."

"Here, oh, you haven't finished the one you have in your mouth."

Jacob walked through the Garden towards Compost Four. Marshall and Jeju were sitting around the picnic table, enraptured by their specialty nut cracker. Jacob opened the lid and dumped the bowl inside. He picked up a leaf and scraped in the remains. He walked back towards the table and smiled at Jeju. He went back into

the house and listened to a song about fish.

*Nothing known can match the bitter pain of knowing happiness is just beyond the reach of your chain and the overwhelming feeling it will be the same forever.*

## Dead Matters Go On

"There is nothing to prove that everything is the same."

Kleev filled her bowl and walked over to the couch. She watched the young and old travelers trade their wisdom and insights as they paused to take shelter in the Transitory Housing Units of Cattleland. She put her head over the bowl and felt the smoke rise up on her face. The tea leaves shifted around and she took a sip. A young woman sat down to her left. Kleev looked up to see the woman staring directly at her.

"Hello," said Kleev.

The woman smiled.

"Can I help you?" asked Kleev.

"Are you the one that made the mushroom pizza pie?" the woman asked.

"Yeah, did you get a slice?" Kleev sipped her tea.

"Mmmhmm."

"Where is your friend at?" Kleev asked.

"He's over there," she pointed.

Kleev finished the tea and stared into the bowl. "Where are you two headed?" she asked without looking up.

"South. We are heading south. That's a nice charm you have."

Kleev looked the woman in the eye. "What did you say your name was?"

"Lucy." The young woman smiled at Kleev.

Kleev smiled back. "Can I get you some tea?"

Marranzano finished off his ashes and walked over to the Computer Monitor.

"Hey, can I ask you a question?"

The Monitor looked at Marranzano.

"Well, the thing is," Marranzano continued, "I understand that you monitor what The Computer is thinking and then translate all of that onto your View Screen so that the rest of us can communicate with each other, so, well, don't you think your title should be a little more inclusive of everything that you do?"

The Monitor stared at Marranzano.

"Just making conversation," said the armadillo. He walked over to the bed and his eye caught the puzzle that Generic had been working on. SSSSSSCCCCCCCCCRRRREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE

Ah, that must be the tea, thought Marranzano. Brrrr. It's so cold in here. Those are also things that he thought. He started humming a tune as he walked into the kitchen. "I'm sitting here and I'm waiting, waiting for your call. Do do do do." Just then the door burst open and Marranzano beheld a shivering Generic, illuminated by the light of the moon.

"Hey," said the armadillo, "could you turn on the house light?"

Generic flipped on the switch by the doorway. "Hey Marz, it's a cold night tonight, eh?"

"Sure is, want some tea?"

Lucy and Kleev sat at the café down by the marina.

The noise inside practically drowned out their conversation.

"That must be the loudest shop vacuum in the world," hyperbole-ed Lucy.

Kleev gazed into the ocean.

"So you say that this is how they drink their coffee in Vietnam?" shouted Lucy.

Kleev nodded. She pulled out her notebook and flipped open to the page that she...Wait a minute, she thought. This is an interesting narrative twist. She looked up at a smiling Lucy and back down to her notebook.

"BRRRRRRRRRRimportBRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR."

Kleev looked up. "What did you say? It sounded like you said something of import."

The noise stopped.

"I said," Lucy said, pointing over at the docks, "it might be nice to get into the import-export business."

"Oh."

They watched as a small shrimp walked off of the short pier.



"You know," said Kleev, "you might say that a 'Teller' is one involved with relation."

"What?" said a stupefied Lucy.

"Oh, don't worry, it's a long way to the bank." Kleev got up from the table and collected her things. "If I don't see you back at the Interchange, have a good rest of your trip."

"And it was animated little felt characters moving over a felt board. So simple, but I really liked the storytelling. Not to mention the aesthetic."

Generic popped up off of the bed.

"How long have I been asleep?"

The armadillo and the chicken turned to look at the human.

"What?" asked Generic.

Marranzano looked at the Time Keeper. "About an hour and maybe seventeen or sixteen minutes, give or take," he told Gen. "There's hot tasty liquid drink on the stove. Help yourself."

*There's no way that you're gonna make it out of here in time. Only lovers gonna be left alive.*

Gen stood up, steadied his dizzy head, and walked into the kitchen.

"Anyway, where was I?"

Generic proceeded to recount the remainder of his story about his meeting with Slim. But let us not bore you with the details of which I am sure there are many. Suffice it to say that Generic (the human) and Marranzano (the armadillo) were now on the same page. The trip into the mountains had confirmed whatever thesis Generic had been working on. It was not, in actuality, true, of course, this thesis. It was completely without foundation, but this did not matter as long as it was only a working thesis, you see. As long as it worked to get Generic to the place where he needed to be. Inasmuch as that, the thesis was entirely valid. And this the armadillo knew. For it was exactly what he had predicted so many Turnings back in the times that were now just faded memories in his wooden mind.

Georgia Murphy grew tired of recounting the story. What with her daily labors, her social commitments, and her familial obligations, well, what with those, indeed. It was time to come together. RING RING

"Hello, this is Georgia."  
-silence-  
"Oh, hey there Erndi. Long time, no..."  
-silence-  
"Oh, sure. That shouldn't be a problem."  
-silence-  
"Yeah, I'll meet you at the..."  
-silence-  
"Of course."  
-silence-  
"Yes."  
-silence-  
"Yep."  
-silence-  
"See you soon!"

Kleev hung up the Transceiver. She looked at the technician, sleeping at his desk. She poked her head out the door.

"Pssst, I'm all done in here," she whispered to the engineer.  
"Thanks for letting me use your equipment."

The engineer walked into the room and she placed the Transceiver back in its case.

"Come on," she whispered to Kleev, "we are not technically supposed to be here." They smiled at each other and walked back into the corridor.

"Thanks again," said Kleev, "I just need some place where I can lay my head."

Kleev Erndi walked down the hallway, humming a tune in her mind.

## The Way I Made You Travel (Chapter 21 or so)

The Piano started and stopped. And started. And stopped again. And started. Keys tickled themselves and the melody shifted. And The Piano stopped. And started. A familiar tune. And The Piano stopped. And started. Something new. Quite evocative. And now a familiar tune, again. And an eruption down the scales. And stop. And start. And now this. And now that. And now that again. And now stop, but not quite. One key, over and over. And now stop. And start again. The child watched as an ant crawled across the top of the keyboard.

"Again! Again, please."

The Piano sighed. The ant crawled down the space bar and up over the carrot.

"A distinct lack of effort. That's what that was."

"Don't you mean a *distinctive* lack of effort?"

No matter, you two, we'll never find our way home at this rate. Your theories on improvisation, along with your theories of using whatever materials happen to be part of your environment, well, I am not so sure they make for a readable narrative, even if they do make for good science. All these characters get created and do we even remember them all? All these loose ends flopping around like some antiquated science metaphor, and us, sitting here still with no satisfying climax. Well, we're all in this together. Let us try to keep in mind why we started writing this story to begin with. I know where we end up, but I am not so sure that we will be able to reach the [promised land metaphor] by the closing of these pages. Is it enough to know that a new nation exists, somewhere in this great 'verse of space and time? Is it comforting to remember that this is just one 'verse among many? Maybe. But I am ready for change.

The confluence of Holy Days approaches. The Festival of the Coming of the Stars, the Day of Thanksgivings, The Feast of Dedication, The Celebration of the Recognition of Independent Existence.

*Close our eyes to the octopus rides.*

What? Wait, what? Did you see that? Oh, sorry, where were we? Ah yes, the confluence was approaching. Et cetera, et cetera. And so on. Okay, let's get on with it. With the, uh, the uh. Oh, hell, the word escapes me.

### **Love (is better than a song)**

Quantum Jitters peered into the ashtray. Was that a toe nail or a finger nail? he pondered briefly, before pondering the question on everyone's mind, "Has anyone actually attempted to read inside of a dog?"

*...story about the deceitful beauty...Try to understand during the course of the storytelling.*

Quantum Jitters banged his head on his knee (the right one). Don't hold on to the past, he thought, that's too much to ask.

Georgia Murphy looked at the bed in her tiny Habitation Unit. That would have to do, she thought. My house guest will just have to live with it. Anyway, we'd been in tighter spots than this, she thought. She began to straighten up the objects on the walls, desks, and floor. And then she stopped. When she moved in, they had called it the 'Leisure Suite', which, what with her background and all, she had found amusing. And even more so, when she actually saw the inside. But it was convenient. No doubt about that.

Quantum Jitters spit the rest of the orange seeds into the ashtray and poked around with the poker. Ah, he thought, this might call for a recipe. He walked over to the bookshelf, browsed through the various cookbooks. He composed a list:

- **Very Fine Egg Noodles.** Fine Egg Noodles will also do. Not too broad, this means. Do not get broad egg noodles. The recipe calls for 8 ounces of noodles, but the bags, I think

are usually 12 ounces maybe.

Recipe also calls for:

- **1/2 stick cow butter** (we have one full stick in icebox)
- **2 bricks cream cheese**
- **3/4 cup sugar** (we have this)
- **teaspoon vanilla** (we have this)
- **6 eggs** (from a chicken; we have 10 eggs from a chicken)
- **milk** (from a cow)
- **1 pint sour cream**

Pancake Recipe:

- **1 pound baking potatoes**
- **2 eggs** (along with above, that makes 8 eggs, we have 10)
- **1 medium onion** (we have one-plus onions)
- **matzo meal** (we have)
- **salt** (we have)
- **black pepper** (we have white)

Quantum Jitters looked at his list. Quantum Jitters indeed.

"Everybody loves to cha cha cha."

Rose had been designated Assistant to the Music Programmer for the upcoming celebrations. She started to dance.

"I don't think that's the cha cha cha," said the Music Programmer.

Rose smiled and continued dancing. "Hey Generic," she said as Generic walked into the room.

"Have you seen Marz?"

"Nope. You want to dance?"

"You bet," said Generic.

"Rut row."

"I love you. I love this game."

"Really?"

"Yeah, kiss me."

The merger was not quite complete.

"Queremos paz," chanted the crowd. "Queremos paz."

Marshall Islands leaned over the large, black 'mobile as it sat idle and blocked off the entrance to the transportation avenues. Georgia Murphy sat inside, as she, Marshall, and The Old Man discussed the possibilities of what came next. Shutting down the avenues was easy. Shutting down the superhighways was going to be another matter all together. This morning they had woke up to a curfew, and, well, the application of pressure has its effects, you know.

"How many rivers do we have to cross, you think?"

A handful youngsters started to walk over from the crowd.

"Okay, Georgia, sit tight. I'll be right back."

The violin broke into the tune and some oohs and aahs erupted from the crowd. They had taken over one of the Public Squares, the one across the street from the Museum of Art, the one with a rich history of resistance. The band of musicians was playing out from under the old Banyan Tree. Marranzano looked at Frank.

"Ain't got so far to go, eh?"

*Then it came the revolution, and the child was filled with fire. And he led us on to victory, and he seemed so strong and wise.*

"We never did," he replied.

The child looked up from The Piano and peeked out the window. The child liked what it saw. The child looked back down at The Piano. Its fingers fell onto the keys. Its fingers started dancing. The Piano started singing. It was another tune. RING RING

RING RING

RING RING

RING RING

Are you going to answer that?

## The Last Laugh (a.k.a. the best laugh of all)

"Thank goodness it's Friday."

She looked over at the Word of the Day Blackboard, which said, "Today is Friday."

"Oh, no, that hasn't been updated."

He put his arm to the board and moved it up and down. He picked up a piece of chalk and wrote, "Today is Election Day."

He took off his shirt and smelled the armpits. He took another shirt out from the closet, put it on, and put on the lab coat.

"So, who is your friend?" he asked.

"Oh, well, just someone I met," she said.

Kleev sat in the Break Room. The miniature View Screen was playing the same B-movie from the other night. She looked down at the convoluted map she had drawn in her notebook and, for a brief moment, the assembly of lines took on the attribute of infinite perfection. Her mind shifted with the tick of the second hand of the Control Clock and she lost the mental perspective, but the feeling stayed fresh in her [place that feelings happen]. She closed the notebook and placed it in her bag. Well, she thought, at least I'll have something to bring to the party.

*What are you changing? Who do you think you're changing? You can't change things, we're all stuck in our ways.*

Generic dumped the ashes and seeds into the bowl with the tea leaves and coffee grinds and the orange and banana peels. He gave it a look and put the mental image in the back of his mind. He took the bowl outside.

"This ain't no picnic!" said some fruit flies as he made his way around the potted plants. He passed by some pink ornamental balls

that were covered with gray longitudinal lines. They were attached to the old pine tree with tiny strings. He opened up the lid of Compost Four and some house flies started buzzing around his eyes. The sky was once again full of those pinkish wispy clouds. Generic smiled briefly and headed inside.

"And if we try, we might just find that we get what we need!"

Marshall moved through the crowd. Benny followed behind, excitedly.

"Why must we sell ourselves short?! Why must we sell ourselves at all?!"

Marshall came to the intersection.

"How long you think this all will last?" he asked Georgia, who was now passing out food to them that wanted it. The sky was beginning to darken.

"Well," she passed her tray to Carmen, wiped her hands on her pants, and stood up straight, facing Marshall, "I suppose that depends on how things are progressing elsewhere. But the general feeling here is that we are prepared to kick it until it breaks."

Small circles had broken out across the avenues. Fires were lit. Plans of action were discussed. Music was played. Every now and then cheers would erupt, but overall, the atmosphere had begun to mellow out. Which was a good sign, because if they were going to sustain any momentum for this action, they would not be able to maintain the high energy levels from earlier in the day.

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Quantum Jitters looked at the cupboards. He scanned the shelves of the Community Walk-in Freezer. He gathered what he needed into his basket. His stomach grumbled. Quantum Jitters was hungry. Where are the noodles? he thought. He opened the pantry. What is this? he thought, These are too broad. Unless...Quantum Jitters walked over to the window and looked out at the landscape. He returned to the pantry, put the noodles in his basket, and headed for the door.

Albert looked at the faces across the table.



"You know, you are going to have to settle eventually."

Albert smiled. "We always do," he replied.

"I do not think you appreciate the gravity of the situation, Mr. Cohan."

"It's funny you know, I was just having this same conversation, the other way around, of course, with a young man who was once an acquaintance of my niece, and I think he was probably correct." Albert watched as one of the bored faces across the table raised an eyebrow. Albert continued, "There are more forces at play than we were led to believe."

*In high tide or in low tide, I'll be by your side.*

Generic heard a 'mobile pull into the gravel pit. He walked outside. A crowd was gathered behind the fence. But this was not just the usual crowd of rowdy food-eaters. Generic paused to look out over the avenue as people helped load Delivery-mobiles from the restaurant and push them through the person-filled streets. He helped carry the groceries into the house.

"I brought you a bánh mì sandwich, if you want it. I don't know why, just an impulse I had. Oh, and here is the recipe."

"Thanks, Quan. Was that your stomach?"

"Yeah, must have been something I ate."

A piece of egg fell onto the floor. Quantum poured himself a glass of cloudy white liquid and sat at the table.

"So, Gen, itching to get out and about?"

"Well," he looked over at Quan, "oh, you were being ironic."

Generic went back to shelving groceries.

"Have you heard from Marz?"

Marranzano and the Space Dog were deep in conversation.

"Yeah, but that doesn't even begin to cover the data coming in from the satellites."

"I bet." The armadillo shook his head. "I can't believe you're part of this. Ged would be so jealous."

"Who?" said the Space Dog.

"Never mind. Hey, it was great talking with you."

A kettle started to whistle over by the benches where someone had set up a makeshift stove. Marranzano looked out over the lights of The City. He made his way across the park. Someone had set up

an Arts and Crafts table and the armadillo watched the children and adults pass on their knowledge to whoever showed interest. The band broke into a one-legged ditty about life in the country. The dancing commenced and they transitioned into a fun cast-off tune. Marranzano soaked in the symbolism and continued on.

Generic Pae sipped some purple flower tea. Quantum Jitters emerged from the toilet with a renewed sense of purpose.

"Quite a puzzle you've got there, Gen. Did I ever tell you about the time that I was drinking tea with this crazy old milliner?"

"Uh..."

Quan sat down at the table.

"Anyway, it was clear that this guy was dangerous. Him and this barhopping buddy of his kept making threatening gestures to the other patrons." Quan picked up some chips from the table. "So I kept looking at him warily, until he leans over to me, and says, 'Excuse me, sir, you may or may not know it, but you cannot *change* the future, all that *you* can do is change your mind.' "

"And?"

"Oh, that's the whole story. I think. Was there more to it?"

Quantum Jitters threw the chips down his gullet.

"Let's see what you got there." Quan grabbed Generic's cup and stared at the leaves. "Yep, just like I thought. Need a refill?"

Generic shook his head and exhaled. "Sure, why not?" he shrugged.

Gen looked down at the puzzle and his eyes went wide.

"I thought there was no 'I' in the outer limits," he mumbled.

"What's that?" Quantum Jitters leaned over and tilted his head to better share Generic's perspective.

"I might need to shift the entire pattern. Look. See here, each one is its own cycle that can spin in either direction. And the different cycles link up where they share a common cell. But if you rotate one, you will have to rotate all of them!"

"Ah, but this might be correct, still."

"Yeah, might be."

"You know, Gen," Quantum put his hand on Gen's shoulder, "I know you have put a lot of stock in this new thesis of yours, but can I tell you a secret?"

"I already know, Quan."

"What?" Quan said, genuinely surprised.

"Yeah, Marz and I went over all of the possibilities. I was just kind of hoping that this would push us through without it falling apart."

"Oh, now I remember!" Quantum Jitters shot up in his seat. "And he was wearing a hat-shaped hat! *That's* the part I forgot to mention."

*I try so hard and then give up so valiantly.*

"Well, shall we begin?" (said Quan)

The engineer looked at the Filters and noticed some gaping holes.

"Hey, when was the last time you cleaned this out?" she asked the technician.

He looked over. "Yeah, I noticed that, too," he replied.

She pinched together the mesh and returned the Filters to their slot.

"I don't know how much longer these Filters are going to last, you know," she said as she removed her gloves.

"So, how long is your friend sticking around?" he asked as he poked around the gears of an old playback machine.

"Not much longer, I should think. She said she wanted to hike the Trails in the moonlight." She then added, more quietly, "I think she's a romantic."

They looked over to the Break Room, but Kleev was already gone.

"And then he said, 'Curses! Where is the dog food?!'"

"Good one, Zed."

"Hey, did anyone hear back from the fruit fly?"

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Ged pulled the string that was holding up her pants, and just like that, the knot was no more. She flexed her hands.

"Hey Computer?"

"Lost in the mirror."

"Oh. I see."

Ged looked at the Time Monitor. It was the eleventh hour. She

peeled a banana.

*I'm in the archipelago and I'm waiting to arrive.*

"Hey Computer?"

"It's a bicycle race."

"Are you sure?"

"Don't ask me for veracity, I'm just interpreting the feedback for you.

"You miss it?" asked The Computer.

"I don't know. Sometimes. Sometimes I think it is an addiction, but sometimes I think it is the only thing that makes any sense.

"Are those raindrops? They are so beautiful."

*We will make them see their injustice. And it will hurt, as all fighting hurts. But we cannot lose. We cannot. They may torture my body, break my bones, even kill me. Then, they will have my dead body, not my obedience. Let us take a solemn oath that come what may, we will not submit to this Law.*

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They sat in the 'mobile, looking at the Portable View Screen that one of the kids had set up to play back the moving images that depicted the events of earlier in the day.

"See there," said Georgia, "how they just dropped their shields and helmets and walked into the crowd.

Benny jumped up on the seat in between Georgia and Rose.

"I wanna see."

Rose said, "Anyway, I should be getting back. That shit is not going to shovel itself."

Rose let herself out of the 'mobile and started the long trek back.

And so it was, that the Nation became a New Nation.

Wait a minute, what? Just like that? And the Nation became a New Nation?

Sure, why not? Of course, our story does not end here. There is still the big celebration to be had, what with the confluence and all. And the lessons. Sure, I am sure there are plenty of lessons to be learned. What? Oh, I see. You do not think that the Nation has

really changed. You think that this is just some fictional story that we are telling for who knows what purpose. Well, this is true, in a sense. But who can really say when a leopard will change its spots, when oxygen will spontaneously turn into gold, or when walls will come a-tumbling down? Or when balloons will blow up.

## The New Nation

A single white line cut down across the sky-blue sky, just over the wind-facing mountains, like a lightning bolt frozen in time or a scar from a successful hip surgery. Is this love that I'm feeling? thought the narrator, as she walked home from the morning after. She smiled at a baby. She looked at a woman's shoes. She pretended not to notice the all too public courtship rituals of a couple of birds in the café. She thought of her mother and her mother's mother. And her mother's mother's mother. Certainly, the sky was blue and the mountains were tall and green. And the birds were singing and the dogs were walking. Certainly, there was something in the air. But still, we ask for more. And more and more and more. No need to be working for the clampdown, eh?

"Why *does* a chicken cross the road?" he asked the chicken.  
*Got charts and graphs, got studies and surveys, got research research, but I don't know. What do I do to get through to you?*

"Ah," said Georgia, "*this* is the song about the lighthouse."

She turned up the volume on the Electromagnetic Wave Distributor.

The three protagonists stood at the corners of a triangle, whose points were themselves. The main theme kicked in. There was a close-up of their eyeballs.

*These times are troubled, these times are rough. There's more to come, but you can't give up.*

There was a close-up of their mouths.

There was a close-up of their innermost beings.

And they began to dance.

Generic put down the electromagazine and flushed the toilet. He walked over to the icebox and pulled out the cream cheese and butter and put it on the table to let it soften.

Rose walked along the stream and crossed over the bridge. Lined up along the overpass were bags containing rubbish that had been pulled from the stream, along with a few large rusting hunks of metal. It was left, along with a sign from the Stream Cleaners, as a message to the community about the State of the Streams. We can do better, the message said (symbolically). She turned the corner and made a beeline for the house.

"Hey, Generic," she said, poking her head in the door, "how's your vacation going?"

He sat up in his chair.

She picked up the cheese bricks. "Really? Two entire bricks."

"It's a special occasion. Truly." He paused. "I am aware of the sacrifice."

"Well, it better be good. And you better do it with Purpose." She paused. She poked her finger into the butter. "You still think you can get us to a world with no exploitation?"

"Yeah."

The postal truck pulled into the lot.

"They still delivering?" Gen asked.

"Sure," said Rose, "We've still got messages to send, don't we? Anyway, you were saying?"

"Well, since you brought it up, I read an interesting article today about poets and poetry. I think it was called 'Winds of Revolt.' Anyway, it was a good history lesson about the way that movements can both succeed and fail at the same time. But, um," he continued sheepishly, "I suppose I should ask you how your night was?"

"How kind of you, Gen." Rose smiled and then became earnest. "There's an intoxicating rhythm in the streets, Gen. This is the beginning of something new. Truly. But you were right, we need to keep our eye on the big picture. But, um," she grinned, "you might want to take a walk around and see for yourself."

"Oh, Rose, didn't you know that I was a True Believer? I am just going to assume that things will continue to progress just as we planned, better than we planned, in fact. I'll step outside eventually. But I do have a pudding to bake, you know."

"Yeah, and I've got some music to program. The 'verse doesn't stop its Turning just because you flip it upside-down."

Generic rolled his eyes, "Your imitation is getting better."

"You think? Anyway, I just wanted to check in, make sure we were still on the same page."

"Thanks, Rose."

"Yeah. I'll see you later."

Generic stared at the table, took a breath, and started to gather the rest of the ingredients.

Quantum Jitters was husking a coconut. Quantum Jitters was gathering peppers in the garden. That's all. That's all that Quantum Jitters was doing. A dog was barking, this is true. But, see how the sun moves over head? It is time to begin preparing the noodle pudding.

Generic added the sugar and creamed the mixture with the heavy metal fork. He looked at the recipe. He filled a pot with water and lit a burner on the stove. He waited for the water to boil. He pulled down two pans to do the work of one. He placed them on the table. He looked at the recipe. He sat down in a comfortable chair.

Outside, power relations continued to shift. The Days of



Freedom From Work were fast approaching, and there was a great deal of speculation as to what this would entail. Would the observance of those Traditional Rites and Rituals break the momentum of these past few days of resistance and rebellion, returning the nation to its old ho-hum routine of maintaining the machinery of injustice? Or would they set the foundations for the emergence of the new nation, creating a chain from past to future?

"I call this one, For Dreaming the Impossible Corner of the Sky."

The child winked at The Piano and began to play.

"Bum bum bum, dah dah dah dum duum," said The Piano.

The Chicken screamed and Generic turned off the burner and dumped the noodles in the strainer in one swift motion. One tiny spoonful of vanilla extract he placed in the bowl. One two three four five six, he counted (eggs of a chicken). He mixed in the noodles. He poured in the milk of a cow and folded in the sour, sour cream. He split the mixture between the two greased pans. He sprinkled the cinnamon, ever so carefully, over top, and the pan was ready to go into The Oven.

Generic checked The Oven Monitor. He placed the first pan into The Oven, ever so gently. He shut the oven door. He set the Time Distributor to forty-two minutes, and exhaled. He looked over at the pile of dishes in the sink and wiped his hands on his pants. He looked over at the Time Monitor, and sat down in a comfortable chair.

The author was still hoping for a thermo-dynamic miracle. With only three days left until the End of Days (which would likely be succeeded by the Beginning of New Days), the author was still not quite satisfied with

The Chicken screamed and Generic opened the door to The Oven. He pulled out the pan (with the assistance of Heat Resistant Grabbing Devices) and placed it on the table. He sprinkled the other pan with cinnamon, ever so carefully, but not quite as carefully as before, and placed the second pan in the belly of The Oven. He set the Time Distributor to forty-two minutes and looked at what had become of Quan's recipe. Perhaps he heard some birds tweeting outside. Yes,

this is, indeed, what he heard. Generic went outside to feed the compost.

"Look, it's over. It's over and done with. That was it. Just write the dénouement and be done with it."

Ged looked at the armadillo.

"But do you think it is an accurate representation of what happened? I feel like I've left so much out."

The armadillo shrugged. "I don't know, but I don't think you have time to " BBRRRRRRNNGGGGG

Generic looked into The Oven. Generic closed the door to The Oven. Generic set the Time Distributor for an extra three minutes. Generic waited exactly three minutes. The Chicken screamed. Generic turned off The Oven. Generic yawned. Generic yawned again, more fully this time. It was a full yawn. Generic took the second pan out of The Oven. Two pans? But the recipe did not call for two pans. Ah, but two pans is what we have. And which pan will you eat from, do you think? Have we yet told you the story of the cat? The one that lived in a box? Ah, we are running out of stories, we think. But no matter, I do believe we have come upon The Eve of The Days of Freedom From Work, which, in case you were unaware, is the initial celebration in this great confluence of Holy Days, of which we are now, officially, amongst.

### **The Eve of The Days of Freedom From Work**

"All aboard the Night Train!"

Kleev stepped out of the All Night Diner and walked towards the tracks.

"What the fuuuuuuuuuuuuck!"

Oh shit, what was that?

Oh, don't worry about it. It just turns out that, not only was this the

*Whatchoo makin' man? It takes time.*

Uh.....oh yes, it turns out that not only was this the Eve of the Day Before Whatever It Was, but it was also the first night of, uh, The Feast of Dedication. Well, imagine *my* surprise. Come on,

imagine it. No, seriously. Imagine my surprise. Come on, do it. *Do* it. Okay, okay. Let me tell you a story. I once knew a girl named Marianne. I call her a girl, but, this is maybe an accurate description. At the time. Perhaps. Anywho, this Marianne sat behind me in Math Class. The teacher's name was Master Bates. Perhaps it was Trigonometry class. Perhaps it was "Algebra Two". But Marianne sat behind me, and I did NOT KNOW HER NAME. True story. Rajan and I became fast friends, due to situational comedies, and this, perhaps, contributed to the trust level that Marianne felt (towards me). But (however), this was irrelevant to the conversations that we had (Marianne and I), which were plentiful enough. Plentiful enough, even though I did not know her name. Enough, so that, I might add, in fact, I did add, the fact, that is, that she once asked me, maybe, if my memory is not embellishing, "Who *are* you?" What were we discussing? Oh, yes, we are listening to a song with the title of Scatterbrain (As Dead As Leaves). Um, oh yes, we were narrating Kleev. Okay, we can do that. Earlier tonight we commissioned between one thousand and five thousand words from a trained word creator. But, in the New Nation (in which we live), contracts are only valid inasmuch as both sides agree that it is in everyone's best interest that the relationship continues (in the same manner as stated by the contract). Do you follow? I mean, do you understand?

We are now listening to a song-----hold on. The Feast of Dedication was, abundant. With food. There are many facts of which are relevant to the story (the one you are reading). Are you still reading this story? Really?

*Ahhhhahhhahhhahhhahhhahhhhhh...Because you know that I can.*

Kleev was there (at the Feast of Dedication). No, this is not true. Kleev makes her appearance at the next feast (The Feast that happens tomorrow, relative to today). So, who was there? Generic, surely. And, maybe, um, Annie? Yes, Annie was there. Hmmmmmmm.....

Okay, perhaps we shall add the Story of The Feast as an addendum. Perhaps. But that leaves us with what? Where do we go from here? I ask that now, but the question holds. I ask you, at this moment in time, where do we go from here?

## **Bold Statements From Bold People**

There is one thing that I promised to remember, said the narrator. And it has something to do with chairs, and sitting in chairs. Perhaps it goes something like this,

Generic sat in his comfortable chair (in a house that was not his own). He heard a noise. A chair was broken (on the floor). A person (Annie) had been sitting in the chair. Someone (who was not Generic) said, "It is a metaphor." They said, "Sometimes you try and sit in the comfortable chair and then it breaks." This is not a direct quote, but. But.

Kleev sat on the Night Train. She was traveling, most likely, into The City. The confluence of Days was upon them. And? So? If, indeed, the Nation was New, what does it matter? Oy veh.

If the Nation was New, what does it matter?  
*Nothing's gonna change my world. Nothing's gonna change my world. Images...*

Someone put his head in his hand (his right hand). Someone leaned his elbow on the desk (the brown desk) and supported the weight of his head as he put it in his hand (the right one). It was probably the author, but the way this story is going, really, who can tell anymore? A popular music song came over the Rhythm Box and then what happened? It is not clear. Perhaps Yiddish music?

"You've never heard Clash City Rockers?"

"What, is that some sort of rock-n-roll tune?" Kleev asked the stranger in the seat to her left.

The Night Train pulled into the station. It was not the station where Kleev wanted to be.

"Well, that is a strange looking fruit, Billy."

"Who's Billy?"

"Uh....."

"Benny, my name is Benny."

The Nation, well, what can we say about the Nation, other than

the fact that it is now a *new* nation. Look around you. You cannot deny. Things are palpably different than they were (in the past).

### **#420: Neighborhood Watch**

Generic looked around the neighborhood. Where were all the neighbors? he thought. Is there anyone around? Why is it so quiet? He pulled out his notebook (the same one from earlier in the story). He flipped it open to a random page and entered his various datums. He sighed. What does this prove? What does this prove? He sighed. What does this prove? Thunder and lightning crashed overhead. Unicorns are people, too.

The comedy ends with a conclusion that is humorous. The tragedy ends with a conclusion that is humorous. It all depends on your warped perspective. You have such a warped perspective, really. If you think about it. Go on, give it a try. Imagine how different you are from the rest of us. Okay, stop it. Stop thinking what you are thinking. Don't worry. You are perfectly normal.

It was a Holy Day. Dictionary 3.4.0 defines holy as what? Well, it says,

See Whole, and cf. Halibut.

It also says,

Spiritually whole or sound; of unimpaired innocence and virtue; free from sinful affections; pure in heart; godly; pious; irreproachable; guiltless; acceptable to God.

And who is this God, we ask? Is it a misspelling?

It was a Holy Day. It was a confluence of Holy Days. The Feast of the Dedication (repeat for eight days), the Festival of the Coming of the Stars (observe until the end of the rainy season), the Day of Thanksgivings (do you remember what you are thankful for?), etc. It was a confluence. Georgia Murphy lay in her bed (her Murphy bed?). She looked to her right. Kleev Erndi lay in her bed (Georgia Murphy's bed). This is a story about a house guest. Remember?

## Some Kind Of Blue

*Some say our life is insane. But it isn't insane / on paper.*

"On a thin wire?"

"Yes, yes, on a thin wire."

"Are you sure?"

"All the whales from the diesel seas and I am here to say, what exactly? Honey, it is me and I crossed the ocean to see what exactly? The snowing sun?"

"Gen."

"Yes, Ged?"

"What else is there to say?"

Generic was tired. It had been a long night. But he was halfway to the point that he wanted to be at. He looked at the puzzle and saw four empty cycles. Everything was going exactly to plan (but whose plan was it?). He yawned (again). He thought about his old roommate. He thought, everything may or may not be going exactly according to plan. He thought. He thought.

The Mechanic and The Horse Interpreter put away the dishes from the night before. The Mechanic went outside and pulled the lanterns out of the ground. The Horse Interpreter went outside and sat at the tan-colored picnic table. Over the mountains and through the woods, the Scavenger slept in his bed, dreaming. And deep, deep in the valley, Generic awoke with a head full of nausea, as

Marranzano prepared the sweet, pungent, circular offerings for the Giving of Thanks Ceremonies to be held throughout the day.

"Oy, how did I get home?" said the human as he stumbled into the kitchen.

"Annie dropped you off last night," said the armadillo.

"It is so early." Generic looked at the Time Monitor.

"Relatively speaking. You know, we are only into the first day of the confluence. I don't know if you'll be able to keep up this pace."

The Yellow Submarine floated by and Generic rubbed his temples. Generic walked into the Water Closet, and woke up with the cold water.

"Here," said Marranzano, "I poured you a tall glass of cold goupy purple liquid."

"Thanks, Marz."

"That? That?"

Kleev listened as Georgia's young neighbor wandered around, pointing to 'things' and asking what they were.

"Thaaat? That?"

Georgia walked out of the unit.

"Are you ready to go?" she asked. "You sure you don't mind me bringing you to this party? There is no telling when it will end and I can't promise you transportation out of the valley."

Kleev smiled at Georgia. "Oh, I wouldn't miss it for the world."

The human walked out towards the garden.

"Good morning," said the palm tree, "Lovely day for a celebration, isn't it?"

Geckos jumped to and fro on the husks of the living and the dead. A bird rocketed into the sky. The human fed the compost. The human walked past the chattering plants as they prepared for the ceremonies. It was a morning of potentiality, and it held within it the, uh, oncoming waves of, um, something metaphorical. The Time Monitor looked at its watch.

"Time to get going, everyone."

It was time to get going. Yes, it was time. To get going.

Generic squatted over the poophole and released the feedback from the night before. MISSION ACCOMPLISHED, it said

(symbolically?), and Generic wiped his ass with the recycled flesh of dead trees. Okay, now it was time.

----

The Crafty Owl was scribbling notes on the back of an envelope labeled "Important Information", as the Librarians discussed their upcoming instructional visit to the Voyaging Canoe. Around the corner, chatter filled the air.

"What has a head at night, but not in the morning?"

"A pillow."

"One of them wasn't a penny."

"What?"

"I said, you can't riddle a riddler," said Annie.

Gracie walked out of the bathroom.

"You want to watch an untold history?" she asked Benny.

"You want to practice your Thanksgiving speeches?" asked Mrs. Pae.

"Thank you for providing this Land of Food, the Land that we can eat, this edible scenery. Thank you for this Food of the Land that was prepared by our Great Mother, the Keeper of Books," said Generic.

"Rub a dub dub, thanks for the grub," said the gecko.

The one-eyed Scavenger looked out of his good eye. He was operating at seventy-five percent of vision, memory, and coordination. But it was morning yet.

"What is he writing over there?" he asked, pointing at the Owl.

The Scavenger dropped the pile of used clothing that he had picked up for the Ceremonial Choosing of the Shirts. One by one they picked up the shirts, looked at them, and threw them back in the pile (in a ceremonial manner).

There was a round of giggling in the kitchen as the Food Preparers prepped for the Feast of Dedication (part two), which was to be preceded by the Annual Feats of Dedication as described in the Traditional Books of Ritual.

Jacob went out into the garden and opened the lid to Compost Five.

"Excuse me there, Flower," he said, as he ducked under the protruding green leaves. A few fat worms fell to the ground and



wiggled back towards the bin.

"So, Samantha, your mom tells me you're real interested in science."

"Science *fiction*."

Rose turned off the View Screen.

"I'm glad they're not playing those horror movies anymore," said Mrs. Pae.

*There are people out here totally dependent on canning...You gotta do what you can do to survive.*

The Old Man knocked on the door.

"Hey Grandpa," said Gen.

"Are we ready to walk over yet?" asked The Old Man. He handed Generic a couple of bottles of blood red liquid.

"I think we are going to go in two groupings. Dicky has been feeling a little loquacious so he might stay behind until his stomach settles."

There was a crash in one of the bedrooms. Rose walked in and saw Generic knee-deep in bed frames and mattresses.

"Uh, can you help me lean this up on the wall?"

The bed was disassembled to reveal the foundation of the bed frame to have been a pile of books (an entire red hardcover set of Junior Great Books). Rose stepped into the fray.

Just outside the window, a bird stepped out of her bath and The Scavenger carried the Important Information to the Redemption Truck, so that it would not be forgotten. As he looked down over the roads, he saw the dismantled walls from the day before.

"Get off the bicycle! This is the bicycle [unintelligible]!"

The family walked along the path, carrying their vast loads, as the other families (a.k.a. the extended family) did the same.

The observance of the Celebration of the Recognition of Independent Existence (which recognized that, for independent units to exist, they must necessarily be recognized by other independent units that were not themselves) had commenced, and, except for the conspicuous non-observance by the small group of extremists that were continuing (for the time being) to maintain their overly literal delusions of forced unity between all states, the atmosphere was jovial and light.

Generic, Rose, The Old Man, and Mrs. Pae approached the Grounds of Celebration. They looked into the Food Hut and saw some cousins gathered around debating the fine points of food preparation. Marshall popped out of the hut and spread his hands wide.

"Comrades!" he shouted.

Some flute music broke out over by the ground oven. Persons split off to greet other persons and, as the new arrivals dropped off their offerings in the House of Two Waters, Generic began setting up chairs around the Grounds for the pre-Feast conversations.

*She wouldn't trick me on a Traditional Holiday. I'm gonna kick that ball straight to The Moon!*

Sue and his mother were talking with Rose and Yasmin. Uncle Albert was laughing with The Old Man. The younger generation of older people sat around The Table of Thank Yous.

"So, where is Neo at?"

"Oh, he is visiting his brother in The Fictional Paradise of Queen Calafia."

"Oh, that's nice. How is your father?"

The engineer poked the other engineer in the ribs. "Hey, look who's here."

Georgia and the stranger rambled off the path, into the clearing.

"Hey Marsh, we made it!" she shouted, as her and her friend giggled like children.

"Oh, look how well Jeju is walking."

They walked forward and were enveloped by the crowds of revelers.

"Hey Aunty Nett, Marz. This is my friend, and old collaborator, Kleev."

Marranzano looked at the stranger. The large ensemble band had assembled by the amphitheater and had started to warm up. A coherent tune began to emerge.

"So, Al, you gonna give this old jackass the satisfaction of a well told story, or what?"

Quantum, Albert, and Frank sat around the stone fire, digesting

their well-eaten morsels of fatty sustenance.

Albert picked up the bowl of cherries and passed them around.

"You should have seen the looks on their crusty, old faces as I told them the plan." He shook his head in a face approaching disbelief and smiled a smile of relief. He paused and looked up at Frank and Quan and they all broke into waves of laughter.

The New Teacher of Old Ways walked into Generic's line of sight.

"Hey you."

They hugged. She was a really good hugger, Generic remembered, as he did every time that they embraced. Fitting, of course, in that it was part of her job description. They sat around the green picnic table with Annie and Giblet the Dog and talked about the potential of the new generation. Generic noticed Georgia talking to Marz over by the recycling bins.

"Hey, you three have fun, I want to go say hello to Marz and Georgia. I'll see you later."

The Electric Brain of the Rainbow looked over at The Elephant. Ged prepared the bowl for the ritual burning. She breathed. She started to sweat. She breathed. She wiped her hands on her green work pants (which just so happened to be retired from work). She licked her lips. She shivered. She wiped her hands on her pants. She looked over at the bed. She looked at the Electric Brain of the Rainbow and smiled. She picked up the Yellow Lighter and

and made about as much contact as she had desired to make. From China, all the way to New York. Maybe she got lost in Mexico.

*I think that you can hear me. Funny how the distance learns to grow. Sometimes I think you want me to touch you. How can I, when you build a great wall around you?*

She sat at the desk and sipped a brown earthy liquid out of a yellow spade shaped receptacle. The Dancing Queen of Spades, thought Ged, as she once again began to operate the machinery. The Name was a reference to another story that she heard but that she had forgotten to tell. Footsteps formed over head as the Spaceship rotated in time, as the Timeship rotated in space. She looked out into

all directions and wondered which way was up.

"Don't forget, when the road runs out..."

"Who is speaking?" she asked, as she looked directly into the eye of the rainbow.

Frank looked over at Quantum and spoke out of his mouth. "Show me how you do that trick. The one that makes me scream," he said.

Quantum looked over at Frank. "Oh, that's not my trick, you know." He put up his hands and looked into the heavens. "I never learned how to operate the machinery." He made a turning motion with his right hand and squeezed. "Well, so to speak."

"Wait, what did you say?"

"Tomato."

"Wait, how did you say it?"

"Tomato. Why, how do you say it?"

"Potato."

Generic walked into the discussions. "Can I offer anyone some carrot cake?"

Marz was chewing on the end of a peeled yellow banana out the side of his mouth. Someone screamed a joyous scream in the distance. BEEP BEEP BEEEEEP BEEP

Ged opened the door and looked down to see a package with her name on it. She picked it up and closed the door. She unplugged the Generator and thanked everyone for a job well done. She emptied the bladder and took off her pants. She clicked the pause button on the Playback Machine, and rewound the tape.

Two dolphins swam past and waved, as Generic, Marranzano, and Rose walked along the beach. It was a beautiful late afternoon, and it was perfect for taking part in the Traditional Walk To And From The Rock Wall At The End Of The Ocean. The beach was filled with Outsiders, taking refuge in the peaceful waters of the resistance. Rose marveled at their surroundings.

"It looks like a resort," she said to herself, out loud. "I mean," she said to her companions, "if I wasn't from here, I would think that this was a pretty amazing place to come to visit." She looked at the

others, "I can't believe everyone else is still at the Party Grounds."

She smiled at a little mouse as it jumped into a small puddle of water. The armadillo splashed down as a wave rolled under their moving feet.

Ged's face lit up with understanding.

"So, there are other ways to interpret the shape of our craft."

The Electric Brain of the Rainbow nodded in agreement.

The fireworks exploded into a crescendo of light. Dogs and horses ran back and forth through the fields and Jacob stood and watched as a group of the children performed a self-written play about a four-sided spinning top. Some cows wandered by and took part in the bounty of the harvest. Fires burnt throughout the Grounds, and the Moon and Stars lit up the Skies. It was the third night of the confluence and there was no end in sight. The sounds of an old klezmer tune drifted through on the wind. The Old Man got up out of his chair and started to dance an old, slow, powerful dance.

"I never remember where the correct Access Point is," said Generic.

"Well, it is hard to see in the dark," said Marranzano.

"I think it is up ahead," said Rose.

They made their way up through the bushes and brambles and out onto the road. They either made a left turn or a right turn, and walked in the direction that led back home.

"So who was that woman you two were talking to earlier?" Rose asked. "It looked like her and Gen were having an interesting discussion."

Marranzano looked at Gen.

"Yeah, Gen," said Marz, "It *did* look like you were having an interesting discussion. What were you talking about?"

They crossed the road.

They paused.

"Did I ever tell you the story about The Land Beyond the Snowing Sun?"

Generic looked at their blank responses.

"Ah, of course not, I think it takes place in the future."

Rose and Marz looked at each other in confusion.

"Anyway," Generic smiled, "it *was* an interesting discussion." He resumed walking.

"So who was she?" asked Rose.

"A friend of Georgia's," said Marz, as he trotted forward. "I got the feeling that they knew each other from Georgia's T.R.E.E.house days."

"Oooh," said Rose, "we've never met anyone that was around for her mythical and mysterious formative years. Well? Gen?"

"Oh yeah, it was the Key, Letter, Liquid exercise. And we satisfied all of the arbitrary requirements. And--"

"But the Acting Instructor didn't like it. You could tell by how he was talking to the group during the critical feedback discussion. And--"

"And, anyway, he was all like, it was too confusing. You didn't set the scene properly. It wasn't at all clear what the liquid *was* and why it would serve such a function in the story. And so on. Even though, I'm thinking, yeah but you knew exactly what that function was, so what does it matter what the liquid was supposed to actually *be*? And then he asked the group. Does anyone know what was supposed to be in the bowl of liquid? And the very first person that answered--"

"The *very* first person."

"Yeah, the very first person nailed it on the head. They raised their hand, the Acting Instructor was all, Yes? and our classmate was like, I think it probably represented a tank of exotic fish?"

"Hey, sorry to interrupt, but does anyone want some of this delicious homemade pie?"

Mrs. Pae passed around the plates. Benny took two and walked one over to the piano player.

*You start a conversation, you can't even finish it...You're talking a lot, but you're not saying anything...Say something once, why say it again?*

"So I went over to say hello to Georgia. And Marz, of course," Generic nodded at Marranzano and continued his story. "They were standing around by the recycling bins. And I walked over with a few slices of cake. So, Georgia and I hugged and did a little catching up. And then I got into a conversation with Marz and some of the Peace

Workers. What were we talking about?"

"Marx-ism, I think."

"Yeah, and all the while I see this woman sort of watching me and sort of smiling as Uncle Marshall was chatting in her ear. So, there I was, talking to Marz about, oh yeah, about Ged's interpretation of the relevance of Finding a Needle in a Haystack, and all of a sudden, I hear this voice say, 'The 'verse is composed of cycles.' And it just totally caught my attention, and I looked up at the guy, one of Benny's friends I think, who was just making chit chat about the recycling bins and the nature of compost and whatnot, but I just sort of stared at him, because of that one line, and then I noticed that woman was staring at him, too. Like we were both staring at him, and then we both noticed each other noticing each other staring at him. And then we smiled at each other and everybody around us was sort of engaged in their own conversation and sort of melted into the scenery, and she walked over to me across the circle."

"Sounds romantic," said Rose.

Generic rolled his eyes. "So, anyway, she walks up to me and says, sort of grinning, 'So, you must be Generic Pae, then.' And I look at her, a little surprised, and I'm like, 'Have we met?' And she smiles and says, 'Not yet.' And then, remember she was carrying around that black bag with her all night?"

Rose nodded.

"Well, she bends down and starts digging through her bag, and while she is doing this, she looks up at me with these flashing eyes, and says, 'I've got a present for you.' And then she finds what she is looking for, zips up her bag, and stands up, and opens this notebook and neatly rips out a piece of paper. And then she holds it out to me and says, 'Here you go. I think you'll enjoy it.'"

Generic stopped walking, reached in his pocket, and handed Rose a folded up paper.

"What is it?" asked Rose, as she showed it to Marranzano.

"It's a map," said Generic with glowing eyes. "It's a map of the future. And, it just so happened to be the final piece of the puzzle." He took the map from Rose. "See that bit at the bottom? That's a loggia. It's an architectural feature that refers to a gallery or corridor at ground level on the facade of a building."

"Oh," said Rose.

"So that was the final piece?" said Marz.

"Well," said Generic, "more or less. There is also something about lying in wait while someone walks along the path singing an old song. See, that's this bit here," he said, pointing.

"Interesting," said Rose.

"Yeah," said the armadillo.

"So, anyway," Gen said, refolding the paper, "then she stuck out her hand and was like, 'My name is Kleev Erndi. It is nice to meet you.' And that was the start to our interesting conversation about our childhood dreams, and this place she calls The Land Beyond the Snowing Sun."

"Oh wow," said Rose as they climbed over a little hill. "Look how beautiful the fireworks are."



## Book of Lies

Supposing that this was a novel. Supposing that your lover had just returned from The Jumping-off Point For Souls Leaving This World. Supposing that your lover had returned, bearing gifts for the holiday season. Supposing that one of these gifts said, "S", because someone had cut out the letters "Top Making Sense". Supposing that this was a novel, and the characters in the story (the one you are reading) had gone on their adventures, learned their lessons, and returned to a state of relative normalcy. What would that look like (to you, the reader)? Would you feel a sense of catharsis? But let's say that the protagonist of the novel (you) does not feel a sense of catharsis. Supposing that not all of the knots have been untied. A wind blows across the islands. And a group of friends bid their adieu.

"So I'll see you tomorrow at the hearing."

"Well," interjected Rose, "it's not so much a hearing, as a--"

"Informational Meeting."

"Yeah," said Rose.

"Right, well, I'll see you tomorrow, Generic, at the Informational Meeting."

And just like that, the skies opened up, and the rain began to fall, for the first time since before the confluence.

*The fabric frays, the screws are loose. We're sick of lies and mind abuse.*

Remember. Remember? Try and remember.

Somewhere in between the lines (perhaps it was when we were watching the preview for the imaginary movie about The Crazy Man), we lost track of this fact.

You gets no bread with one meatball.

We are not sure what this means. But we think it has something to do with injustice. We think that about everything. Still, we attempt to finish our story in a matter befitting your expectations.

"Glug glug, glug glug glug," said the new bottle of the red red juice of grapes.

Supposing that I love you. No, no, let us not suppose that (even though it be true). Supposing that the protagonist (me?) walked out into the night. Supposing that the protagonist (you?) was hungry. Supposing that the protagonist walked out into the rain, into the deep dark night. The streets were empty of light. The sky was empty of light. Let us follow along. Down the path (yes, that path), and around the corner. The musical score of our mind is set to our favorite band. The mission is clear. The gears in our mind spin and spin as we attempt to work our will. We enter the square and behold! The lights of Vietnam. And, is that music we hear (with our ears)? We walk upstairs. The door appears to be open. We peer inside. We steel our nerves. Excuse me, we say, is your kitchen still open? Of course, it is not. But,

"No, but we have drinks. Tonight we play live music. You can sit at the bar,"

is the gist of what we are told. Supposing that they do not take rectangular currency of a certain shape. Supposing that you have only three units of rectangular currency of the acceptable shape and color. You ask for a drink, but do you get it? Yes! We sit and we drink and, added bonus, we eat salted nuts. The live music is warming up. In fact, as we take our first sip, the feedback from the amplifier explodes in a number of loud booms (two loud booms? three loud booms?). And now the live music begins and our vision goes blurry as we remove the Sight Amplification Device from atop our head. But still we see color. Red and green lights. And the fuzzy shapes of the wall of mirrors to our fore. But a mission we have, and, as we finish our drink, our drinking of sustenance, we rise

from out seat, put on our raincoat, and head out the door. Down the stairs and across the black sea of hard concrete. We are walking. Suppose we are walking. But where? Supposing we have made up our minds to acquire the thing that we wanted (the thing that you wanted). Supposing that we go inside and we acquire this thing, even though it not be perfect to our liking. Even though, we still acquire this thing. And we return home. Supposing that the musical score of our mind is set to our favorite band (the other one). Supposing that we return home and someone is there. Supposing that we are happy. Supposing that the rain comes a-tumbling down.

The sun is filled with ice and gives no warmth at all. This is about as true as anything (we suppose). Which leads us to our next (and last) review.

### **Book Review**

I want to be with you, but I want to be me. And it seems like we're knocking at the door. You look well read, but you might not be aware how many times we've been this way before. I can't believe that you have not figured out what all amounts to nothing in the end. It's a guide and a mountain top and the source code to our dreams. But, bottom line, it's up to us for to decide just what to make it mean. We can be a light unto the others in our world, and enable us all to reach the heights. This is just a summary, of course. Of course, this is just a summary.

I took a breath. I took a breath, because that is what we do. We take breaths. Because we are alive. Now, don't get me wrong, this breathing is, of course, a metaphor (I am not arbitrarily excluding others from the realm of the living, not even the dead). So, I took a breath, and I looked out upon the ashes of the world (well, the specific ashes that sat in the bottle cap on the desk in the room in which I sit). And I thought. And I thought. And I was satisfied. More or less. More or less.

### **No Lies, Just Love (the things we have learned)**

- a. A New Nation
- b. Because. This is what we want and this is what we need.
- c. Choose-Your-Own-Adventure
- d. Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you.
- e. Everyone is invited.
- f. Fiction does not exist.

Violet walked out into the night. She was a new character, it was true, but she had a history of her own. She walked down well-traveled paths. She walked down paths of her own making. *How many final frontiers we gonna mount, and maybe no victory laps?*

Generic Pae (that's me) sat in the Fields of Infinite Possibility. He thought back upon the story that is so fresh in your mind (because it is the life that you are living). Oh, the beauty, he thought. Oh, the sad, sad beauty. Well, here we are. We have reached the place that we were promised (a new nation). Look, over yonder, is that the House of the Rising Sun? Oh, the beauty. Oh, the sad, sad beauty. Generic Pae (that's me) sat in the Fields of Infinite Possibility. For this is the 'verse in which we live. All of us. Even you. This is what I thought as I sat (in the grassy, grassy fields). Can you imagine? Can you possibly imagine?

Marranzano moved his head up and down to the rhythm of the rhymes. Speedy the Flying Ant carelessly cavorted over the Computer Monitor. The Yellow Chick snuggled up in the trunk of The Light Grey Elephant. The Yellow Submarine floated on the remnants of grocery lists and book recommendations, on the waves of ownership, authority, and self-determination. The Empty Yellow Lighter lay on the Empty Purple Container and the Light Green Purple Airplane of Coney Island. The music turned into silence, but it was just an interlude, for this was the song with the hidden track. But it was just an interlude, for there was more to come.

## More To Come

After the flood, there were like, I don't know, a gajillion children separated from their parents. So who am I to complain about the circumstances of my life? Here is something I wrote down on the side of a box of matches. Penguins is. I don't know why. Is it relevant to this story? I don't know. Sometimes I think that everything is relevant to the story. Otherwise, what is the point? Are we to be just a percentage of what we are? Are we to be just? Are we to be? Are we? Dictionary 3.4.0 defines 'Are' as

The present indicative plural of the substantive verb to be; but etymologically a different word from be, or was. Am, art, are, and is, all come from the root as.

But what was I talking about? As the Galactic Funk draws to a close, perhaps it is best to remember the wise words of the Electric Brain of the Rainbow.

"I Fought The Law."

It was late in the evening. The protagonist slept in her bed. The other protagonist typed these national words for the nation that did not exist. In the morning there would be an Informational Meeting. Is it any of your business? Is it any of mine? Who are we to write down these words in this language? It was late in the evening. In the morning there would be an Informational Meeting about the state of the community (which was flux).

*All my life's a circle, sunrise and sundown. Moon rolls through the nighttime till daybreak comes around.*

"It's a brave, old world, ladies and gentlemen."

"A beautiful flower, that is, nearby."

"Your history is befuddled."

The Public Informational Meeting about the Future of The Big Water. Who shall decide the fate of the future of the Nation? Shall it be them of the old nation? Shall it be them of the new nation? Shall it be them of old nation that came before before? We are a confusion of terms.

The meeting (titled Envisioning The Big Water) was called for the morning time. And where did the meeting take place? In The Garden Academy, of course. For the discussion was, "What is to become of The Big Water?" This place, that we all share, what shall become of it? This place, this Land of Two Currents, where The Big Water sits. This place, full of Nationals and Outsiders, full of Newcomers and Older Newcomers and those who were always here. What is to become of it, this place?

And is there a plan? Is there a plan for this future? A plan, you ask? Well, yes, as a matter of fact, there is a plan.

Generic and Rose walked around The Garden Academy, peeking into doorways, neither of them quite recalling the exact location of the big meeting.

"Ah, I see a red shirt," said Rose.

The resistance had decided to wear red, in honor of their uniquely fashionable sense of history. Rose and Generic walked down the narrow path towards the little girl in the red shirt and came upon The Hall of Public Gatherings. The building was full of the public. Standing persons spilled out of the multitude of doorways in their attempt to view the proceedings. Rose and Generic walked around the corner and stood behind a group of young adults as they watched the Official Greeters make their introductory remarks. Rose looked around. There were many familiar faces in the sea of red, black, gray, and white shirts. There was The Teacher of the Dance, there was The Pope of Shangri-La, over there The Old Childhood Friend, and, oh, here comes The Ambassador of The Club of Civility. The resistance was well represented, but Rose was more interested in seeing the response of those that were not actively involved in The Days of Action.

There was, apparently, some grumbling about the plan. It was to

be expected in these early days of change. It seems there was some resistance to the resistance, however misguided it might be. You see, the plan was being presented by the Organization of Land and Natural Entities, which, truth be told, had a troubled history during the times before when the nation was old (before it became new). Apparently, it was not clear to the grumblers that this particular plan, while incorporated into tOoLaNE, came about through the impetus of the resistance. It was the long struggle of the People of the Nation. The People of the Nation, who had been made strangers in their own proverbial home, who had created this New Nation in which we live. The grumblers looked at this plan, this plan of The State, and did not realize that they were living in a New Nation. They did not realize that, while there might be struggles to be had, their struggles were not with this particular stage of the plan, which was, truth be told, An Opportunity Plan. This was the plan that created the opportunity for the future that we wanted to live in. And while the concerns should be kept in mind as the plan progressed, any wild-eyed fears about the coming of potentially disruptive or destructive Outsiders (as opposed to the current "acceptable" Outsiders) or about a lack of maintenance of the new structures (which were fears, at base, predicated on an erasure of the existence of The People of the Nation) were completely unfounded as a rationale for abandoning the plan all together.

"This is a place of convergence," said the speaker. "There is a reason why these structures must be built here and not elsewhere. You talk of preservation, yet you run from the talk of permanent structures. You talk of all of these evils. Do you somehow not think that we share these views? Is it us that is perpetuating these evils? Show us the structures that we have created that would justify your concerns. This plan, this specific plan that we are incorporating into the operations of the new nation, is a map of the possible. There will be plenty of time to converse as we move along, step by step, finding out together what specific features we want and do not want to see in the perimeters of this big sea. But, if we do nothing, if we simply defer this discussion to another time, then The Big Water will continue to dry up, and The People of the Nation will be no more."

"You have twenty-three words left," said the Moderator.

"Well, how shall I finish? How about this—The 'verse cannot survive without the People and the People cannot survive without the

'verse."

*I think I'll try defying gravity.*

Ged Pae floated through space and time. Was that the event horizon she saw up ahead? Time started to condense. The end was in sight. She sat at her desk and thought of the words that floated all around her. The door to the room was open and she looked into the hallway to see her partner, standing by the kitchen table, draped in light green and dark blue, preparing herself an evening snack.

Is there any more that we can do, but create possibility? Is it enough? When I met Frank, when we went out on our journey over the deserts of space and time, before we got our just desserts, what did I expect?

"What?"

"I think you are still confused as to who is writing the story."

"Oh, I see."

Ged and The Electric Brain of the Rainbow looked at the Computer Monitor. The Computer Monitor shrugged. And The Librarian continued typing on the dusty keyboard.

"I am afraid you have not met your quota."

"My quota for what?"

"Your quota as defined in the contract."

"But, I was assured that everything would come together. That everything was under control. That-

"I can assure you, Sir, that you were not given any such assurances."

"But, but. But what's the point of all this then? If it doesn't all come together in the...Oh, I see."

"Please continue until you have satisfied your operating instructions. Next!"



## No Justice, No Peace

We ain't got it just yet. We ain't got it just yet, but we're moving along. My feet are moving on the ground. They're tapping to a rhythm that I don't quite understand. There's some cardboard on the floor. I don't know what to do with all of this cardboard. That's the problem when you buy new things. They stick them inside other things that you don't want. This bag is not a bag, it's just the wrapper for another bag. This bag is not a bag, it's just the wrapper for another bag. There's a map on the bag that's not a bag. I don't know what maps are for unless they help us to get where we want to go. Well, we ain't got it just yet. We ain't got it just yet, but we're moving along. We're walking along the stream, and that man has learned how to take down the signs when they're no longer needed. We're walking along the stream, and that man has learned how to take down the signs when they're no longer needed. Well, we ain't got it just yet. We ain't got it just yet, but we're moving along. Hello, my name is Jacob, and I'd like to tell you a story about how I love you. Hello, my name is Jacob, and I'd like to tell you a story about how I love you. We ain't got it just yet. We ain't got it just yet, but we're moving along. I'm sitting on a toilet and I'm looking at a puzzle and there's shit coming out of my ass. That's just a fact of life, a fact of life that I am telling to you. We ain't got it just yet. We ain't got it just yet. We ain't got it just yet, but we're moving along. But we're moving along. We're moving along.

## Epilogue

The author stood over the toilet and looked at the shape of his feedback. Were those letters he saw? That one is definitely a 'G'. And that one looks like a backwards 'E'. But, well, I better flush it down the drain, he thought. Because that is what we do with the things that we don't digest. In this 'verse. For now.

And what are you still doing here? said the actor that delivers a speech addressed to the spectators at the end of a play. Isn't it time you moved on? Isn't it time you moved on to someplace better? Or are you exactly where you (you, the protagonist) want to be? Optimist that I am, I would like to believe this. It is a difficult relationship, this relationship of ours, what with our being two separate individuals. But I like to think that we are two separate individuals that love each other very, very, very, very, very much. For this is a love letter, you see. This is a love letter.  
*Turn of the century, this is the end. Have a nice party. Please drop dead.*

## **Next Lifetime (Interlude)**

Ged popped the hatch of her space-timeship as it floated to shore. She looked at the green, green mountains with their hints of brown. She looked at the blue, blue sky with its wisps of white.

*We have one chance, one chance to get everything right. We have one chance, one chance, and if we're lucky we might.*

And that was the end of the story.

