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AMERICA

By Orson Scott Card

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The difference between Latin America and North America's United States has always been vast; the first being in virtual colonial aspect to the Empire of the Dollar.

Now beyond the border between Mexico and the U.S.A. there lives another race, that of the native Americans miscalled Indians. The majority of the inhabitants of those countries are among the dispossessed of the world. This may change; indeed, as history always calls the tune, no matter how long or in what fashion it takes, it will change.

Sam Monson and Anamari Boagente had two encounters in their lives, forty years apart. The first encounter lasted for several weeks in the high Amazon jungle, the village of Agualinda. The second was for only an hour near the ruins of the Glen Canyon Dam, on the border between Navaho country and the State of Deseret. When they met the first time, Sam was a scrawny teenager from Utah and Anamari was a middle-aged spinster Indian from Brazil. When they met the second time, he was governor of Deseret, the last European state in America, and she was, to some people's way of thinking, the mother of God. It never occurred to anyone that they had ever met before, except me. I saw it plain as day, and pestered Sam until he told me the whole story. Now Sam is dead and she's long gone, and I'm the only one who knows the truth. I thought for a long time that I'd take this story untold to my grave, but I see now that I can't do that. The way I see it, I won't be allowed to die until I write this down. All my real work was done long since, so why else am I alive? I figure the land has kept me breathing so I can tell the story of its victory, and it has kept you alive so you can hear it. Gods are like that. It isn't enough for them to run everything. They want to be famous, too.

Agualinda, Amazonas

Passengers were nothing to her. Anamari only cared about helicopters when they brought medical supplies. This chopper carried a precious packet of benaxidene; Anamari barely noticed the skinny, awkward boy who sat by the crates, looking hostile. Another Yanqui who doesn't want to be stuck out in the jungle. Nothing new about that. Norteamericanos were almost invisible to Anamari by now. They came and went.

It was the Brazilian government people she had to worry about, the petty bureaucrats suffering through years of virtual exile in Manaus, working out their frustration by being petty tyrants over the helpless Indians. No I'm sorry we don't have any more penicillin, no more syringes, what did you do with the AIDS vaccine we gave you three years ago? Do you think we're made of money here? Let them come to town if they want to get well. There's a hospital in Sao Paulo de Olivenca, send them there, we're not going to turn you into a second hospital out there in the middle of nowhere, not for a village of a hundred filthy Baniwas, it's not as if you're a doctor, you're just an old withered up Indian woman yourself, you never graduated from the medical schools, we can't spare medicines for you. It made them feel so important, to decide whether or not an Indian child would live or die. As often as not they passed sentence of death by refusing to send supplies. It made them feel powerful as God.



Anamari knew better than to protest or argue-it would only make that bureaucrat likelier to kill again in the future. But sometimes, when the need was great and the medicine was common, Anamari would go to the Yanqui geologists and ask if they had this or that. Sometimes they would share, but if they didn't, they wouldn't lift a finger to get any. They were not tyrants like the Brazilian bureaucrats. They just didn't give a damn. They were there to make money.

That was what Anamari saw when she looked at the sullen light-haired boy in the helicopter-another Norteamericano, just like all the other NorteamERICANOS, only younger.

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She had the benaxidene, and so she immediately began spreading word that all the Baniwas should come for injections. It was a disease that had been introduced during the war between Guyana and Venezuela two years ago; as usual, most of the victims were not citizens of either country, just the Indios of the jungle, waking up one morning with their joints stiffening, hardening until no movement was possible.

Benaxidene was the antidote, but you had to have it every few months or your joints would stiffen up again. As usual, the bureaucrats had diverted a shipment and there were a dozen Baniwas bedridden in the village. As usual, one or two of the Indians would be too far gone for the cure; one or two of their joints would be stiff for the rest of their lives. As usual, Anamari said little as she gave the injections, and the Baniwas said less to her.

It was not until the next day that Anamari had time to notice the young Yanqui boy wandering around the village. He was wearing rumpled white clothing, already somewhat soiled with the greens and browns of life along the rivers of the Amazon jungle. He showed no sign of being interested in anything, but an hour into her rounds, checking on the results of yesterday's benaxidene treatments, she became aware that he was following her.

She turned around in the doorway of the government-built hovel and faced him. "O que e'?" she demanded. What do you want?

To her surprise, he answered in halting Portuguese. Most of these Yanquis never bothered to learn the language at all, expecting her and everybody else to speak English. "Posso ajudar?" he asked. Can I help?

"Nao," she said. "Mas pode olhar." You can watch.

He looked at her in bafflement.

She repeated her sentence slowly, enunciating clearly. "Pode olhar."

"Eu?" Me?

"Voce, sim. And I can speak English."

"I don't want to speak English."

"Tanto faz," she said. Makes no difference.

He followed her into the hut. It was a little girl, lying naked in her own feces.

She had palsy from a bout with meningitis years ago, when she was an infant, and Anamari figured that the girl would probably be one of the ones for whom the benaxidene came too late. That's how things usually worked-the weak suffer most. But no, her joints were flexing again, and the girl smiled at them, that heartbreakingly happy smile that made palsy victims so beautiful at times.

So. Some luck after all, the benaxidene had been in time for her.



Anamari took the lid off the clay waterjar that stood on the one table in the room, and dipped one of her clean rags in it. She used it to wipe the girl, then lifted her frail, atrophied body and pulled the soiled sheet out from under her. On impulse, she handed the sheet to the boy.

"Leva fora," she said. And, when he didn't understand, "Take it outside."

He did not hesitate to take it, which surprised her. "Do you want me to wash it?"

"You could shake off the worst of it," she said. "Out over the garden in back. I'll wash it later."

He came back in, carrying the wadded-up sheet, just as she was leaving. "All done here," she said. "We'll stop by my house to start that soaking. I'll carry it now."

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He didn't hand it to her. "I've got it," he said. "Aren't you going to give her a clean sheet?"

"There are only four sheets in the village," she said. "Two of them are on my bed. She won't mind lying on the mat. I'm the only one in the village who cares about linens. I'm also the only one who cares about this girl."

"She likes you," he said.

"She smiles like that at everybody.

"So maybe she likes everybody."

Anamari grunted and led the way to her house. It was two government hovels pushed together. The one served as her clinic, the other as her home. Out back she had two metal washtubs. She handed one of them to the Yanqui boy, pointed at the rainwater tank, and told him to fill it. He did. It made her furious.

"What do you want!" she demanded.

"Nothing," he said.

"Why do you keep hanging around!"

"I thought I was helping." His voice was full of injured pride.

"I don't need your help." She forgot that she had meant to leave the sheet to soak.

She began rubbing it on the washboard.

"Then why did you ask me to . . ."

She did not answer him, and he did not complete the question.

After a long time he said, "You were trying to get rid of me, weren't you?"

"What do you want here?" she said. "Don't I have enough to do, without a Norteamericano boy to look after?"

Anger flashed in his eyes, but he did not answer until the anger was gone. "If you're tired of scrubbing, I can take over."

She reached out and took his hand, examined it for a moment. "Soft hands," she said.

"Lady hands. You'd scrape your knuckles on the washboard and bleed all over the sheet."

Ashamed, he put his hands in his pockets. A parrot flew past him, dazzling green and red; he turned in surprise to look at it. It landed on the rainwater tank. "Those sell for a thousand dollars in the States," he said.

Of course the Yanqui boy evaluates everything by price. "Here they're free," she said. "The Baniwas eat them. And wear the feathers."

He looked around at the other huts, the scraggly gardens. "The people are very poor here," he said. "The jungle life must be hard."



"Do you think so?" she snapped. "The jungle is very kind to these people. It has plenty for them to eat, all year. The Indians of the Amazon did not know they were poor until Europeans came and made them buy pants, which they couldn't afford, and built houses, which they couldn't keep up, and plant gardens. Plant gardens! In the midst of this magnificent Eden. The jungle life was good. The Europeans made them poor."

"Europeans?" asked the boy.

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"Brazilians. They're all Europeans. Even the black ones have turned European. Brazil is just another European country, speaking a European language. Just like you Norteamericanos. You're Europeans too."

"I was born in America," he said. "So were my parents and grandparents and great-grandparents."

"But your bis-bis-avos they came on a boat."

"That was a long time ago," he said.

"A long time!" She laughed. "I am a pure Indian. For ten thousand generations I belong to this land. You are a stranger here. A fourth-generation stranger."

"But I'm a stranger who isn't afraid to touch a dirty sheet," he said. He was grinning defiantly.

That was when she started to like him. "How old are you?" she asked.

"Fifteen," he said.

"Your father's a geologist?"

"No. He heads up the drilling team. They're going to sink a test well here. He doesn't think they'll find anything, though."

"They will find plenty of oil," she said.

"How do you know?"

"Because I dreamed it," she said. "Bulldozers cutting down the trees, making an airstrip, and planes coming and going. They'd never do that, unless they found oil. Lots of oil."

She waited for him to make fun of the idea of dreaming true dreams. But he didn't. He just looked at her.

So she was the one who broke the silence. "You came to this village to kill time while your father is away from you, on the job, right?"

"No," he said. "I came here because he hasn't started to work yet. The choppers start bringing in equipment tomorrow."

"You would rather be away from your father?"

He looked away. "I'd rather see him in hell."

"This is hell," she said, and the boy laughed. "Why did you come here with him?"

"Because I'm only fifteen years old, and he has custody of me this summer."

"Custody," she said. "Like a criminal."

"He's the criminal," he said bitterly.

"And his crime?"

He waited a moment, as if deciding whether to answer. When he spoke, he spoke quietly and looked away. Ashamed. Of his father's crime. "Adultery," he said. The word hung in the air. The boy turned back and looked her in the face again. His face was tinged with red.



Europeans have such transparent skin, she thought. All their emotions show through.

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She guessed a whole story from his words, beloved mother betrayed, and now he had to spend the summer with her betrayer. "Is that a crime?"

He shrugged. "Maybe not to Catholics."

"You're Protestant?"

He shook his head. "Mormon. But I'm a heretic."

She laughed. "You're a heretic, and your father is an adulterer."

He didn't like her laughter. "And you're a virgin," he said. His words seemed calculated to hurt her.

She stopped scrubbing, stood there looking at her hands. "Also a crime?" she murmured.

"I had a dream last night," he said. "In my dream your name was Anna Marie, but when I tried to call you that, I couldn't. I could only call you by another name."

"What name?" she asked.

"What does it matter? It was only a dream." He was taunting her. He knew she trusted in dreams.

"You dreamed of me, and in the dream my name was Anamari?"

"It's true, isn't it? That is your name, isn't it?" He didn't have to add the other half of the question: You are a virgin, aren't you?

She lifted the sheet from the water, wrung it out and tossed it to him. He caught it, vile water splattering his face. He grimaced. She poured the washwater onto the dirt. It splattered mud all over his trousers. He did not step back. Then she carried the tub to the water tank and began to fill it with dean water. "Time to rinse," she said.

"You dreamed about an airstrip," he said. "And I dreamed about you."

"In your dreams you better start to mind your own business," she said.

"I didn't ask for it, you know," he said. "But I followed the dream out to this village, and you turned out to be a dreamer, too."

"That doesn't mean you're going to end up with your pinto between my legs, so you can forget it," she said.

He looked genuinely horrified. "Geez, what are you talking about! That would be fornication! Plus you've got to be old enough to be my mother!"

"I'm forty-two," she said. "If it's any of your business."

"You're older than my mother," he said. "I couldn't possibly think of you sexually.

I'm sorry if I gave that impression."

She giggled. "You are a very funny boy, Yanqui. First you say I'm a virgin-•,

"That was in the dream," he said.

"And then you tell me I'm older than your mother and too ugly to think of me sexually."

He looked at her ashen with shame. "I'm sorry, I was just trying to make sure you knew that I would never-"

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"You're trying to tell me that you're a good boy."

"Yes," he said.



She giggled again. "You probably don't even play with yourself," she said. His face went red. He struggled to find something to say. Then he threw the wet sheet back at her and walked furiously away. She laughed and laughed. She liked this boy very much.

The next morning he came back and helped her in the clinic all day. His name was Sam Monson, and he was the first European she ever knew who dreamed true dreams. She had thought only Indians could do that. Whatever god it was that gave her dreams to her, perhaps it was the same god giving dreams to Sam. Perhaps that god brought them together here in the jungle. Perhaps it was that god who would lead the drill to oil, so that Sam's father would have to keep him here long enough to accomplish whatever the god had in mind.

It annoyed her that the god had mentioned she was a virgin. That was nobody's business but her own.

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Life in the jungle was better than Sam ever expected. Back in Utah, when Mother first told him that he had to go to the Amazon with the old bastard, he had feared the worst. Hacking through thick viney jungles with a machete, crossing rivers of piranha in tick-infested dugouts, and always sweat and mosquitos and thick, heavy air. Instead the American oilmen lived in a pretty decent camp, with a generator for electric light. Even though it rained all the time and when it didn't it was so hot you wished it would, it wasn't constant danger as he had feared, and he never had to hack through jungle at all. There were paths, sometimes almost roads, and the thick, vivid green of the jungle was more beautiful than he had ever imagined. He had not realized that the American West was such a desert. Even California, where the old bastard lived when he wasn't traveling to drill wells, even those wooded hills and mountains were gray compared to the jungle green.

The Indians were quiet little people, not headhunters. Instead of avoiding them, like the adult Americans did, Sam found that he could be with them, come to know them, even help them by working with Anamari. The old bastard could sit around and drink his beer with the guys-adultery and beer, as if one contemptible sin of the flesh weren't enough-but Sam was actually doing some good here. If there was anything Sam could do to prove he was the opposite of his father, he would do it; and because his father was a weak, carnal, earthy man with no self-control, then Sam had to be a strong, spiritual, intellectual man who did not let any passions of the body rule him. Watching his father succumb to alcohol, remembering how his father could not even last a month away from Mother without having to get some whore into his bed, Sam was proud of his self-discipline. He ruled his body; his body did not rule him.

He was also proud to have passed Anamari's test on the first day. What did he care if human excrement touched his body? He was not afraid to breathe the hot stink of suffering, he was not afraid of the innocent dirt of a crippled child. Didn't Jesus touch lepers? Dirt of the body did not disgust him. Only dirt of the soul.

Which was why his dreams of Anamari troubled him. During the day they were friends. They talked about important ideas, and she told him stories of the Indians of the Amazon, and about her education as a teacher in Sao Paulo. She listened when he talked about history and religion and evolution and all the theories and ideas that danced in his head. Even Mother never had time for that, always taking care of the



younger kids or doing her endless jobs for the church. Anamari treated him like his ideas mattered.

But at night, when he dreamed, it was something else entirely. In those dreams he kept seeing her naked, and the voice kept calling her "Virgem America." What her
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virginity had to do with America he had no idea-even true dreams didn't always make sense-but he knew this much: when he dreamed of Anamari naked, she was always reaching out to him, and he was filled with such strong passions that more than once he awoke from the dream to find himself throbbing with imaginary pleasure, like Onan in the Bible, Judah's son, who spilled his seed upon the ground and was struck dead for it.

Sam lay awake for a long time each time this happened, trembling, fearful. Not because he thought God would strike him down-he knew that if God hadn't struck his father dead for adultery, Sam was certainly in no danger because of an erotic dream. He was afraid because he knew that in these dreams he revealed himself to be exactly as lustful and evil as his father. He did not want to feel any sexual desire for Anamari. She was old and lean and tough, and he was afraid of her, but most of all Sam didn't want to desire her because he was not like his father, he would never have sexual intercourse with a woman who was not his wife.

Yet when he walked into the village of Agualinda, he felt eager to see her again, and when he found her-the village was small, it never took long-he could not erase from his mind the vivid memory of how she looked in the dreams, reaching out to him, her breasts loose and jostling, her slim hips rolling toward him-and he would bite his cheek for the pain of it, to distract him from desire.

It was because he was living with Father; the old bastard's goatishness was rubbing off on him, that's all. So he spent as little time with his father as possible, going home only to sleep at night.

The harder he worked at the jobs Anamari gave him to do, the easier it was to keep himself from remembering his dream of her kneeling over him, touching him, sliding along his body. Hoe the weeds out of the corn until your back is on fire with pain! Wash the Baniwa hunter's wound and replace the bandage! Sterilize the instruments in the alcohol! Above all, do not, even accidentally, let any part of your body brush against hers; pull away when she is near you, turn away so you don't feel her warm breath as she leans over your shoulder, start a bright conversation whenever there is a silence filled only with the sound of insects and the sight of a bead of sweat slowly etching its way from her neck down her chest to disappear between her breasts where she only tied her shirt instead of buttoning it.

How could she possibly be a virgin, after the way she acted in his dreams?

"Where do you think the dreams come from?" she asked.

He blushed, even though she could not have guessed what he was thinking. Could she?

"The dreams," she said. "Why do you think we have dreams that come true?"

It was nearly dark. "I have to get home," he said. She was holding his hand. When had she taken his hand like that, and why?

"I have the strangest dream," she said. "I dream of a huge snake, covered with bright green and red feathers."

"Not all the dreams come true," he said.



"I hope not," she answered. "Because this snake comes out of--I give birth to this snake."

"Quetzal," he said.

"What does that mean?"

"The gathered serpent god of the Aztecs. Or maybe the Mayas. Mexican, anyway. I have to go home."

"But what does it mean?"

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"It's almost dark," he said.

"Stay and talk to me!" she demanded. "I have room, you can stay the night."

But Sam had to get back. Much as he hated staying with his father, he dared not spend a night in this place. Even her invitation aroused him. He would never last a night in the same house with her. The dream would be too strong for him. So he left her and headed back along the path through the jungle. All during the walk he couldn't get Anamari out of his mind. It was as if the plants were sending him the vision of her, so his desire was even stronger than when he was with her.

The leaves gradually turned from green to black in the seeping dark. The hot darkness did not frighten him; it seemed to invite him to step away from the path into the shadows, where he would find the moist relief, the cool release of all his tension. He stayed on the path, and hurried faster.

He came at last to the oilmen's town. The generator was loud, but the insects were louder, swarming around the huge area light, casting shadows of their demonic dance. He and his father shared a large one-room house on the far edge of the compound. The oil company provided much nicer hovels than the Brazilian government.

A few men called out to greet him. He waved, even answered once or twice, but hurried on. His groin felt so hot and tight with desire that he was sure that only the shadows and his quick stride kept everyone from seeing. It was maddening: the more he thought of trying to calm himself, the more visions of Anamari slipped in and out of his waking mind, almost to the point of hallucination. His body would not relax. He was almost running when he burst into the house.

Inside, Father was washing his dinner plate. He glanced up, but Sam was already past him. "I'll heat up your dinner."

Sam flopped down on his bed. "Not hungry."

"Why are you so late?" asked his father.

"We got to talking."

"It's dangerous in the jungle at night. You think it's safe because nothing bad ever happens to you in the daytime, but it's dangerous."

"Sure, Dad. I know." Sam got up, turned his back to take off his pants. Maddeningly, he was still aroused; he didn't want his father to see.

But with the unerring instinct of prying parents, the old bastard must have sensed that Sam was hiding something. When Sam was buck naked, Father walked around, and looked just as if he never heard of privacy. Sam blushed in spite of himself. His father's eyes went small and hard. I hope I don't ever look like that, thought Sam. I hope my face doesn't get that ugly suspicious expression on it. I'd rather die than look like that.

"Well, put on your pajamas," Father said. "I don't want to look at that forever."



Sam pulled on his sleeping shorts.

"What's going on over there?" asked Father.

"Nothing," said Sam.

"You must do something all day."

"I told you, I help her. She runs a clinic, and she also tends a garden. She's got no electricity, so it takes a lot of work."

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"I've done a lot of work in my time, Sam, but I don't come home like that. "

"No, you always stopped and got it off with some whore along the way."

The old bastard whipped out his hand and slapped Sam across the face. It stung, and the surprise of it wrung tears from Sam before he had time to decide not to cry.

"I never slept with a whore in my life," said the old bastard.

"You only slept with one woman who wasn't," said Sam.

Father slapped him again, only this time Sam was ready, and he bore the slap stoically, almost without flinching.

"I had one affair," said Father.

"You got caught once," said Sam. "There were dozens of women."

Father laughed derisively. "What did you do, hire a detective? There was only the one."

But Sam knew better. He had dreamed these women for years. Laughing, lascivious women. It wasn't until he was twelve years old that he found out enough about sex to know what it all meant. By then he had long since learned that any dream he had more than once was true. So when he had a dream of Father with one of the laughing women, he woke up, holding the dream in his memory. He thought through it from beginning to end, remembering all the details he could. The name of the motel. The room number. It was midnight, but Father was in California, so it was an hour earlier. Sam got out of bed and walked quietly into the kitchen and dialed directory assistance. There was such a motel. He wrote down the number. Then Mother was there, asking him what he was doing.

"This is the number of the Seaview Motor Inn," he said. "Call this number and ask for room twenty-one-twelve and then ask for Dad."

Mother looked at him strangely, like she was about to scream or cry or hit him or throw up. "Your father is at the Hilton," she said.

But he just looked right back at her and said, "No matter who answers the phone, ask for Dad."

So she did. A woman answered, and Mom asked for Dad by name, and he was there. "I wonder how we can afford to pay for two motel rooms on the same night," Mom said coldly. "Or are you splitting the cost with your friend?" Then she hung up the phone and burst into tears.

She cried all night as she packed up everything the old bastard owned. By the time Dad got home two days later, all his things were in storage. Mom moved fast when she made up her mind. Dad found himself divorced and excommunicated all in the same week, not two months later.

Mother never asked Sam how he knew where Dad was that night. Never even hinted at wanting to know. Dad never asked him how Mom knew to call that number, either. An amazing lack of curiosity, Sam thought sometimes. Perhaps they just took it as fate.



For a while it was secret, then it stopped being secret, and it didn't matter how the change happened. But one thing Sam knew for sure--the woman at the Seaview Motor Inn was not the first woman, and the Seaview was not the first motel. Dad had been an adulterer for years, and it was ridiculous for him to lie about it now. But there was no point in arguing with him, especially when he was in the mood to slap Sam around.

"I don't like the idea of you spending so much time with an older woman," said Father.

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"She's the closest thing to a doctor these people have. She needs my help and I'm going to keep helping her," said Sam.

"Don't talk to me like that, little boy."

"You don't know anything about this, so just mind your own business."

Another slap. "You're going to get tired of this before I do, Sammy."

"I love it when you slap me, Dad. It confirms my moral superiority. •"

Another slap, this time so hard that Sam stumbled under the blow, and he tasted blood inside his mouth. "How hard next time, Dad?" he said. "You going to knock me down? Kick me around a little? Show me who's boss?"

"You've been asking for a beating ever since we got here."

"I've been asking to be left alone."

"I know women, Sam. You have no business getting involved with an older woman like that."

"I help her wash a little girl who has bowel movements in bed, Father. I empty pails of vomit. I wash clothes and help patch leaking roofs and while I'm doing all these things we talk. Just talk. I don't imagine you have much experience with that, Dad. You probably never talk at all with the women you know, at least not after the price is set."

It was going to be the biggest slap of all, enough to knock him down, enough to bruise his face and black his eye. But the old bastard held it in. Didn't hit him.

Just stood there, breathing hard, his face red, his eyes tight and piggish.

"You're not as pure as you think," the old bastard finally whispered. "You've got every desire you despise in me."

"I don't despise you for desire," said Sam.

"The guys on the crew have been talking about you and this Indian bitch, Sammy. You may not like it, but I'm your father and it's my job to warn you. These Indian women are easy, and they'll give you a disease."

"The guys on the crew," said Sam. "What do they know about Indian women? They're all fags or jerk-offs."

"I hope someday you say that where they can hear you, Sam. And I hope when it happens I'm not there to stop what they do to you."

"I would never be around men like that, Daddy, if the court hadn't given you shared custody. A no-fault divorce. What a joke."

More than anything else, those words stung the old bastard. Hurt him enough to shut him up. He walked out of the house and didn't come back until Sam was long since asleep.

Asleep and dreaming.



Anamari knew what was on Sam's mind, and to her surprise she found it vaguely flattering. She had never known the shy affection of a boy. When she was a teenager, she was the one Indian girl in the schools in Sao Paulo. Indians were so rare in the Europeanized parts of Brazil that she might have seemed exotic, but in those days she was still so frightened. The city was sterile, all concrete and harsh light, not at all like the deep soft meadows and woods of Xingu Park. Her tribe, the Kuikuru, were much more Europeanized than the jungle Indians-she had seen cars all her life,

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and spoke Portuguese before she went to school. But the city made her hungry for the land, the cobblestones hurt her feet, and these intense, competitive children made her afraid. Worst of all, true dreams stopped in the city. She hardly knew who she was, if she was not a true dreamer. So if any boy desired her then, she would not have known it. She would have rebuffed him inadvertently. And then the time for such things had passed. Until now.

"Last night I dreamed of a great bird, flying west, away from land. Only its right wing was twice as large as its left wing. It had great bleeding wounds along the edges of its wings, and the right wing was the sickest of all, rotting in the air, the feathers dropping off."

"Very pretty dream," said Sam. Then he translated, to keep in practice. "Que sonho lindo."

"Ah, but what does it mean?"

"What happened next?"

"I was riding on the bird. I was very small, and I held a small snake in my hands-"

"The feathered snake."

"Yes. And I turned it loose, and it went and ate up all the corruption, and the bird was clean. And that's all. You've got a bubble in that syringe. The idea is to inject medicine, not air. What does the dream mean?"

"What, you think I'm a Joseph? A Daniel?"

"How about a Sam?"

"Actually, your dream is easy. Piece of cake."

"What?"

"Piece of cake. Easy as pie. That's how the cookie crumbles. Man shall not live by bread alone. All I can think of are bakery sayings. I must be hungry."

"Tell me the dream or I'll poke this needle into your eye."

"That's what I like about you Indians. Always you have torture on your mind."

She planted her foot against him and knocked him off his stool onto the packed dirt floor. A beetle skittered away. Sam held up the syringe he had been working with; it was undamaged. He got up, set it aside. "The bird," he said, "is North and South America. Like wings, flying west. Only the right wing is bigger." He sketched out a rough map with his toe on the floor.

"That's the shape, maybe," she said. "It could be."

"And the corruption-show me where it was."

With her toe, she smeared the map here, there.

"It's obvious," said Sam.

"Yes," she said. "Once you think of it as a map. The corruption is all the Europeanized land. And the only healthy places are where the Indians still live."



"Indians or half-Indians," said Sam. "All your dreams are about the same thing, Anamari. Removing the Europeans from North and South America. Let's face it. You're an Indian chauvinist. You give birth to the resurrection god of the Aztecs, and then you send it out to destroy the Europeans."

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"But why do I dream this?"

"Because you hate Europeans."

"No," she said. "That isn't true."

"Sure it is."

"I don't hate you. "

"Because you know me. I'm not a European anymore, I'm a person. Obviously you've got to keep that from happening anymore, so you can keep your bigotry alive."

"You're making fun of me, Sam."

He shook his head. "No, I'm not. These are true dreams, Anamari. They tell you your destiny."

She giggled. "If I give birth to a feathered snake, I'll know the dream was true."

"To drive the Europeans out of America."

"No," she said. "I don't care what the dream says. I won't do that. Besides, what about the dream of the flowering weed?"

"Little weed in the garden, almost dead, and then you water it and it grows larger and larger and more beautiful-"

"And something else," she said. "At the very end of the dream, all the other flowers in the garden have changed. To be just like the flowering weed." She reached out and rested her hand on his arm. "Tell me that dream."

His arm became still, lifeless under her hand. "Black is beautiful," he said.

"What does that mean?"

"In America. The U.S., I mean. For the longest time, the blacks, the former slaves, they were ashamed to be black. The whiter you were, the more status you had-the more honor. But when they had their revolution in the sixties-"

"You don't remember the sixties, little boy."

"Heck, I barely remember the seventies. But I read books. One of the big changes, and it made a huge difference, was that slogan. Black is beautiful. The blacker the better. They said it over and over. Be proud of blackness, not ashamed of it. And in just a few years, they turned the whole status system upside down."

She nodded. "The weed came into flower."

"So. All through Latin America, Indians are very low status. If you want a Bolivian to pull a knife on you, just call him an Indian. Everybody who possibly can, pretends to be of pure Spanish blood. Pure-blooded Indians are slaughtered wherever there's the slightest excuse. Only in Mexico is it a little bit different."

"What you tell me from my dreams, Sam, this is no small job to do. I'm one middle-aged Indian woman, living in the jungle. I'm supposed to tell all the Indians of America to be proud? When they're the poorest of the poor and the lowest of the low?"

"When you give them a name, you create them. Benjamin Franklin did it, when he coined the name American for the people of the English colonies. They weren't New Yorkers or Virginians, they were Americans. Same thing for you. It isn't Latin



Americans against Norteamericanos. It's Indians and Europeans. Somos todos indios. We're all Indians. Think that would work as a slogan?"

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"Me. A revolutionary."

"Nos somos os americanos. Vai fora, Europa! America p'ra americanos! All kinds of slogans."

"I'd have to translate them into Spanish."

"Indios moram na India. Americanos moram na America. America nossa! No, better still: Nossa America! Nuestra America! It translates. Our America."

"You're a very fine slogan maker."

He shivered as she traced her finger along his shoulder and down the sensitive skin of his chest. She made a circle on his nipple and it shriveled and hardened, as if he were cold.

"Why are you silent now?" She laid her hand flat on his abdomen, just above his shorts, just below his navel. "You never tell me your own dreams," she said. "But I know what they are."

He blushed.

"See? Your skin tells me, even when your mouth says nothing. I have dreamed these dreams all my life, and they troubled me, all the time, but now you tell me what they mean, a white-skinned dream-teller, you tell me that I must go among the Indians and make them proud, make them strong, so that everyone with a drop of Indian blood will call himself an Indian, and Europeans will lie and claim native ancestors, until America is all Indian. You tell me that I will give birth to the new Quetzalcoatl, and he will unify and heal the land of its sickness. But what you never tell me is this: Who will be the father of my feathered snake?"

Abruptly he got up and walked stiffly away. To the door, keeping his back to her, so she couldn't see how alert his body was. But she knew.

"I'm fifteen," said Sam, finally.

"And I'm very old. The land is older. Twenty million years. What does it care of the quarter-century between us?"

"I should never have come to this place."

"You never had a choice," she said. "My people have always known the god of the land. Once there was a perfect balance in this place. All the people loved the land and tended it. Like the garden of Eden. And the land fed them. It gave them maize and bananas. They took only what they needed to eat, and they did not kill animals for sport or humans for hate. But then the Incas turned away from the land and worshiped gold and the bright golden sun. The Aztecs soaked the ground in the blood of their human sacrifices. The Pueblos cut down the forests of Utah and Arizona and turned them into red-rock deserts. The Iroquois tortured their enemies and filled the forest with their screams of agony. We found tobacco and coca and peyote and coffee and forgot the dreams the land gave us in our sleep. And so the land rejected us. The land called to Columbus and told him lies and seduced him and he never had a chance, did he? Never had a choice. The land brought the Europeans to punish us. Disease and slavery and warfare killed most of us, and the rest of us tried to pretend we were Europeans rather than endure any more of the punishment. The land was our jealous lover, and it hated us for a while.



"Some Catholic you are," said Sam. "I don't believe in your Indian gods."

"Say Dens or Cristo instead of the land and the story is the same," she said. "But now the Europeans are worse than we Indians ever were. The land is suffering from a thousand different poisons, and you threaten to kill all of life with your weapons of war. We Indians have been punished enough, and now it's our turn to have the land

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again. The land chose Columbus exactly five centuries ago. Now you and I dream our dreams, the way he dreamed."

"That's a good story," Sam said, still looking out the door. It sounded so close to what the old prophets in the Book of Mormon said would happen to America; close, but dangerously different. As if there were no hope for the Europeans anymore. As if their chance had already been lost, as if no repentance would be allowed. They would not be able to pass the land on to the next generation. Someone else would inherit. It made him sick at heart, to realize what the white man had lost, had thrown away, had torn up and destroyed.

"But what should I do with my story?" she asked. He could hear her coming closer, walking up behind him. He could almost feel her breath on his shoulder. "How can I fulfill it?"

By yourself. Or at least without me. "Tell it to the Indians. You can cross all these borders in a thousand different places, and you speak Portuguese and Spanish and Arawak and Carib, and you'll be able to tell your story in Quechua, too, no doubt, crossing back and forth between Brazil and Colombia and Bolivia and Peru and Venezuela, all close together here, until every Indian knows about you and calls you by the name you were given in my dream."

"Tell me my name."

"Virgem America. See? The land or god or whatever it is wants you to be a virgin." She giggled. "Nossa senhora," she said. "Don't you see? I'm the new Virgin Mother: It wants me to be a mother, all the old legends of the Holy Mother will transfer to me; they'll call me virgin no matter what the truth is. How the priests will hate me. How they'll try to kill my son. But he will live and become Quetzalcoatl, and he will restore America to the true Americans. That is the meaning of my dreams. My dreams and yours."

"Not me," he said. "Not for any dream or any god." He turned to face her. His fist was pressed against his groin, as if to crush out all rebellion there. "My body doesn't rule me," he said. "Nobody controls me but myself."

"That's very sick," she said cheerfully. "All because you hate your father. Forget that hate, and love me instead."

His face became a mask of anguish, and then he turned and fled.

He even thought of castrating himself, that's the kind of madness that drove him through the jungle. He could hear the bulldozers carving out the airstrip, the screams of falling timbers, the calls of birds and cries of animals displaced. It was the terror of the tortured land, and it maddened him even more as he ran between thick walls of green. The rig was sucking oil like heartblood from the forest floor. The ground was wan and trembling under his feet. And when he got home he was grateful to lift his feet off the ground and lie on his mattress, clutching his pillow, panting or perhaps sobbing from the exertion of his run.



He slept, soaking his pillow in afternoon sweat, and in his sleep the voice of the land came to him like whispered lullabies. I did not choose you, said the land. I cannot speak except to those who hear me, and because it is in your nature to hear and listen, I spoke to you and led you here to save me, save me, save me. Do you know the desert they will make of me? Encased in burning dust or layers of ice, either way I'll be dead. My whole purpose is to thrust life upward out of my soils, and feel the press of living feet, and hear the songs of birds and the low music of the animals, growling, lowing, chittering, whatever voice they choose. That's what I ask of you, the dance of life, just once to make the man whose mother will teach him to be Quetzalcoatl and save me, save me, save me.

He heard that whisper and he dreamed a dream. In his dream he got up and walked back to Agualinda, not along the path, but through the deep jungle itself. A longer way,

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but the leaves touched his face, the spiders climbed on him, the tree lizards tangled in his hair, the monkeys dinged him and pinched him and jabbered in his ear, the snakes entwined around his feet; he waded streams and fish caressed his naked ankles, and all the way they sang to him, songs that celebrants might sing at the wedding of a king. Somehow, in the way of dreams, he lost his clothing without removing it, so that he emerged from the jungle naked, and walked through Agualinda as the sun was setting, all the Baniwas peering at him from their doorways, making clicking noises with their teeth.

He awoke in darkness. He heard his father breathing. He must have slept through the afternoon. What a dream, what a dream. He was exhausted.

He moved, thinking of getting up to use the toilet. Only then did he realize that he was not alone on the bed, and it was not his bed. She stirred and nestled against him, and he cried out in fear and anger.

It startled her awake. "What is it?" she asked.

"It was a dream," he insisted. "All a dream."

"Ah yes," she said, "it was. But last night, Sam, we dreamed the same dream." She giggled. "All night long."

In his sleep. It happened in his sleep. And it did not fade like common dreams, the memory was clear, pouring himself into her again and again, her fingers gripping him, her breath against his cheek, whispering the same thing, over and over.

"Aceito, aceito-te, aceito." Not love, no, not when he came with the land controlling him, she did not love him, she merely accepted the burden he placed within her. Before tonight she had been a virgin, and so had he. Now she was even purer than before, Virgem America, but his purity was hopelessly, irredeemably gone, wasted, poured out into this old woman who had haunted his dreams. "I hate you," he said. "What you stole from me."

He got up, looking for his clothing, ashamed that she was watching him.

"No one can blame you," she said. "The land married us, gave us to each other.

There's no sin in that."

"Yeah," he said.

"One time. Now I am whole. Now I can begin."

And now I'm finished.

"I didn't mean to rob you," she said. "I didn't know you were dreaming."



"I thought I was dreaming," he said, "but I loved the dream. I dreamed I was fornicating and it made me glad." He spoke the words with all the poison in his heart. "Where are my clothes?"

"You arrived without them," she said. "It was my first hint that you wanted me." There was a moon outside. Not yet dawn. "I did what you wanted," he said. "Now can I go home?"

"Do what you want," she said. "I didn't plan this."

"I know. I wasn't talking to you." And when he spoke of home, he didn't mean the shack where his father would be snoring and the air would stink of beer.

"When you woke me, I was dreaming," she said.

"I don't want to hear it."

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"I have him now," she said, "a boy inside me. A lovely boy. But you will never see him in all your life, I think."

"Will you tell him? Who I am?"

She giggled. "Tell Quetzalcoatl that his father is a European? A man who blushes? A man who burns in the sun? No, I won't tell him. Unless someday he becomes cruel, and wants to punish the Europeans even after they are defeated. Then I will tell him that the first European he must punish is himself. Here, write your name. On this paper write your name, and give me your fingerprint, and write the date."

"I don't know what day it is."

"October twelfth," she said.

"It's August."

"Write October twelfth," she said. "I'm in the legend business now."

"August twenty-fourth," he murmured, but he wrote the date she asked for.

"The helicopter comes this morning," she said.

"Good-bye," he said. He started for the door.

Her hands caught at him, held his arm, pulled him back. She embraced him, this time not in a dream, cool bodies together in the doorway of the house. The geis was off him now, or else he was worn out; her body had no power over his anymore.

"I did love you," she murmured. "It was not just the god that brought you."

Suddenly he felt very young, even younger than fifteen, and he broke away from her and walked quickly away through the sleeping village. He did not try to retrace his wandering route through the jungle; he stayed on the moonlit path and soon was at his father's hut. The old bastard woke up as Sam came in.

"I knew it'd happen," Father said.

Sam rummaged for underwear and pulled it on.

"There's no man born who can keep his zipper up when a woman wants it." Father laughed. A laugh of malice and triumph. "You're no better than I am, boy."

Sam walked to where his father sat on the bed and imagined hitting him across the face. Once, twice, three times.

"Go ahead, boy, hit me. It won't make you a virgin again."

"I'm not like you," Sam whispered.

"No?" asked Father. "For you it's a sacrament or something? As my daddy used to say, it don't matter who squeezes the toothpaste, boy, it all squirts out the same."

"Then your daddy must have been as dumb a jackass as mine." Sam went back to the



chest they shared, began packing his clothes and books into one big suitcase. "I'm going out with the chopper today. Mom will wire me the money to come home from Manaus."

"She doesn't have to. I'll give you a check."

"I don't want your money. I just want my passport."

"It's in the top drawer." Father laughed again. "At least I always wore my clothes home."

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In a few minutes Sam had finished packing. He picked up the bag, started for the door.

"Son," said Father, and because his voice was quiet, not derisive, Sam stopped and listened. "Son," he said, "once is once. It doesn't mean you're evil, it doesn't even mean you're weak. It just means you're human." He was breathing deeply. Sam hadn't heard him so emotional in a long time. "You aren't a thing like me, son," he said. "That should make you glad."

Years later Sam would think of all kinds of things he should have said. Forgiveness. Apology. Affection. Something. But he said nothing, just left and went out to the clearing and waited for the helicopter. Father didn't come to try to say good-bye. The chopper pilot came, unloaded, left the chopper to talk to some people. He must have talked to Father because when he came back he handed Sam a check. Plenty to fly home, and stay in good places during the layovers, and buy some new clothes that didn't have jungle stains on them. The check was the last thing Sam had from his father. Before he came home from that rig, the Venezuelans bought a hardy and virulent strain of syphilis on the black market, one that could be passed by casual contact, and released it in Guyana. Sam's father was one of the first million to die, so fast that he didn't even write.

Page, Arizona

The state of Deseret had only sixteen helicopters, all desperately needed for surveying, spraying, and medical emergencies. So Governor Sam Monson rarely risked them on government business. This time, though, he had no choice. He was only fifty-five, and in good shape, so maybe he could have made the climb into Glen Canyon and back up the other side. But Carpenter wouldn't have made it, not in a wheel-chair, and Carpenter had a right to be here. He had a right to see what the red-rock Navaho desert had become.

Deciduous forest, as far as the eye could see.

They stood on the bluff where the old town of Page had once been, before the dam was blown up. The Navahos hadn't tried to reforest here. It was their standard practice. They left all the old European towns unplanted, like pink scars in the green of the forest. Still, the Navahos weren't stupid. They had come to the last stronghold of European science, the University of Deseret at Zarahemla, to find out how to use the heavy rainfalls to give them something better than perpetual floods and erosion. It was Carpenter who gave them the plan for these forests, just as it was Carpenter whose program had turned the old Utah deserts into the richest farmland in America. The Navahos filled their forests with bison, deer, and bears. The Mormons raised crops enough to feed five times their population. That was the European mindset, still in place: enough is never enough. Plant more, grow more, you'll need it



tomorrow.

"They say he has two hundred thousand soldiers," said Carpenter's computer voice. Carpenter could speak, Sam had heard, but he never did. Preferred the synthesized voice. "They could all be right down there, and we'd never see them."

"They're much farther south and east. Strung out from Phoenix to Santa Fe, so they aren't too much of a burden on the Navahos."

"Do you think they'll buy supplies from us? Or send an army in to take them?"

"Neither," said Sam. "We'll give our surplus grain as a gift."

"He rules all of Latin America, and he needs gifts from a little remnant of the U.S. in the Rockies?"

"We'll give it as a gift, and be grateful if he takes it that way."

"How else might he take it?"

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"As tribute. As taxes. As ransom. The land is his now, not ours."

"We made the desert live, Sam. That makes it ours."

"There they are."

They watched in silence as four horses walked slowly from the edge of the woods, out onto the open ground of an ancient gas station. They bore a litter between them, and were led by two-not Indians-Americans. Sam had schooled himself long ago to use the word American to refer only to what had once been known as Indians, and to call himself and his own people Europeans. But in his heart he had never forgiven them for stealing his identity, even though he remembered very clearly where and when that change began.

It took fifteen minutes for the horses to bring the litter to him, but Sam made no move to meet them, no sign that he was in a hurry. That was also the American way now, to take time, never to hurry, never to rush. Let the Europeans wear their watches. Americans told time by the sun and stars.

Finally the litter stopped, and the men opened the litter door and helped her out. She was smaller than before, and her face was tightly wrinkled, her hair steel-white.

She gave no sign that she knew him, though he said his name. The Americans introduced her as Nuestra Senora. Our Lady. Never speaking her most sacred name: Virgem America.

The negotiations were delicate but simple. Sam had authority to speak for Deseret, and she obviously had authority to speak for her son. The grain was refused as a gift, but accepted as taxes from a federal state. Deseret would be allowed to keep its own government, and the borders negotiated between the Navahos and the Mormons eleven years before were allowed to stand.

Sam went further. He praised Quetzalcoatl for coming to pacify the chaotic lands that had been ruined by the Europeans. He gave her maps that his scouts had prepared, showing strongholds of the prairie raiders, decommissioned nuclear missiles, and the few places where stable governments had been formed. He offered and she accepted, a hundred experienced scouts to travel with Quetzalcoatl at Deseret's expense, and promised that when he chose the site of his North American capital, Deseret would provide architects and engineers and builders to teach his American workmen how to build the place themselves.



She was generous in return. She granted all citizens of Deseret conditional status as adopted Americans, and she promised that Quetzalcoatl's armies would stick to the roads through the northwest Texas panhandle, where the grasslands of the newest New Lands project were still so fragile that an army could destroy five years of labor just by marching through. Carpenter printed out two copies of the agreement in English and Spanish, and Sam and Virgem America signed both.

Only then, when their official work was done, did the old woman look up into Sam's eyes and smile. "Are you still a heretic, Sam?"

"No," he said. "I grew up. Are you still a virgin?"

She giggled, and even though it was an old lady's broken voice, he remembered the laughter he had heard so often in the village of Agualinda, and his heart ached for the boy he was then, and the girl she was. He remembered thinking then that forty-two was old.

"Yes, I'm still a virgin," she said. "God gave me my child. God sent me an angel, to put the child in my womb. I thought you would have heard the story by now."

"I heard it," he said.

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She leaned closer to him, her voice a whisper. "Do you dream, these days?"

"Many dreams. But the only ones that come true are the ones I dream in daylight."

"Ah," she sighed. "My sleep is also silent."

She seemed distant, sad, distracted. Sam also; then, as if by conscious decision, he brightened, smiled, spoke cheerfully. "I have grandchildren now."

"And a wife you love," she said, reflecting his brightening mood. "I have grandchildren, too." Then she became wistful again. "But no husband. Just memories of an angel."

"Will I see Quetzalcoatl?"

"No," she said, very quickly. A decision she had long since made and would not reconsider. "It would not be good for you to meet face to face, or stand side by side. Quetzalcoatl also asks that in the next election, you refuse to be a candidate."

"Have I displeased him?" asked Sam.

"He asks this at my advice," she said. "It is better, now that his face will be seen in this land, that your face stay behind closed doors."

Sam nodded. "Tell me," he said. "Does he look like the angel?"

"He is as beautiful," she said. "But not as pure."

They embraced each other and wept. Only for a moment. Then her men lifted her back into her litter, and Sam returned with Carpenter to the helicopter. They never met again.

In retirement, I came to visit Sam, full of questions lingering from his meeting with Virgem America. "You knew each other," I insisted. "You had met before." He told me all this story then.

That was thirty years ago. She is dead now, he is dead, and I am old, my fingers slapping these keys with all the grace of wooden blocks. But I write this sitting in the shade of a tree on the brow of a hill, looking out across woodlands and orchards, fields and rivers and roads, where once the land was rock and grit and sagebrush. This is what America wanted, what it bent our lives to accomplish. Even



if we took twisted roads and got lost or injured on the way, even if we came limping to this place, it is a good place, it is worth the journey, it is the promised, the promising land.

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Atlantis

By Orson Scott Card

Kemal Akyazi grew up within a few miles of the ruins of Troy; from his boyhood home above Kumkale he could see the waters of the Dardanelles, the narrow strait that connects the waters of the Black Sea with the Aegean. Many a war had been fought on both sides of that strait, one of which had produced the great epic of Homer's ILLIAD.

This pressure of history had a strange influence on Kemal as a child. He learned all the tales of the place, of course, but he also knew that the tales were Greek, and the place was of the Greek Aegean world. Kemal was a Turk; his own ancestors had not come to the Dardanelles until the fifteenth century. He felt that it was a powerful place, but it did not belong to him. So the ILLIAD was not the story that spoke to Kemal's soul. Rather it was the story of Heinrich Schliemann, the German explorer who, in an era when Troy had been regarded as a mere legend, a myth, a fiction, had been sure not only that Troy was real but also where it was. Despite all scoffers, he mounted an expedition and found it and unburied it. The old stories turned out to be true.

In his teens Kemal thought it was the greatest tragedy of his life that Pastwatch had to use machines to look through the the millennia of human history. There would be no more Schliemanns, studying and pondering and guessing until they found some artifact, some ruin of a long-lost city, some remnant of a legend made true again. Thus Kemal had no interest in joining Pastwatch. It was not history that he hungered for--it was exploration and discovery that he wanted, and what was the glory in finding the truth through a machine?

So, after an abortive try at physics, he studied to become a meteorologist. At the age of eighteen, heavily immersed in the study of climate and weather, he touched again on the findings of Pastwatch. No longer did meteorologists have to depend on only a few centuries of weather measurements and fragmentary fossil evidence to determine long-range patterns. Now they had accurate accounts of storm patterns for millions of years. Indeed, in the earliest years of Pastwatch, the machinery had been so coarse that individual humans could not be seen. It was like time-lapse photography in which people don't remain in place long enough to be on more than a single frame of the film, making them invisible. So in those days



Pastwatch recorded the weather of the past, erosion patterns, volcanic eruptions, ice ages, climatic shifts.

All that data was the bedrock on which modern weather prediction and control rested. Meteorologists could see developing patterns and, without disrupting the overall pattern, could make tiny changes that prevented any one area from going completely rainless during a time of drought, or sunless during a wet growing season. They had taken the sharp edge off the relentless scythe of climate, and now the great project was to determine how they might make a more serious change, to bring a steady pattern of light rain to the desert regions of the world, to restore the prairies and savannahs that they once had been. That was the work that Kemal wanted to be a part of.

Yet he could not bring himself out from the shadow of Troy, the memory of Schliemann. Even as he studied the climatic shifts involved with the waxing and waning of the ice ages, his mind contained fleeting images of lost civilizations, legendary places that waited for a Schliemann to uncover them.

His project for his degree in meteorology was part of the effort to determine how the Red Sea might be exploited to develop dependable rains for either the Sudan or central Arabia; Kemal's immediate target was to study the difference between weather patterns during the last ice age, when the Red Sea had all but disappeared, and the present, with the Red Sea at its fullest. Back and forth he went

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through the coarse old Pastwatch recordings, gathering data on sea level and on precipitation at selected points inland. The old TruSite I had been imprecise at best, but good enough for counting rainstorms.

Time after time Kemal would cycle through the up-and-down fluctuations of the Red Sea, watching as the average sea level gradually rose toward the end of the Ice Age. He always stopped, of course, at the abrupt jump in sea level that marked the rejoining of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. After that, the Red Sea was useless for his purposes, since its sea level was tied to that of the great world ocean.

But the echo of Schliemann inside Kemal's mind made him think: What a flood that must have been.

What a flood. The Ice Age had locked up so much water in glaciers and ice sheets that the sea level of the whole world fell. It eventually reached a low enough point that land bridges arose out of the sea. In the north Pacific, the Bering land bridge allowed the ancestors of the Indies to cross on foot into their great empty homeland. Britain and Flanders were joined. The Dardanelles were closed and the Black Sea became a salty lake. The Persian Gulf disappeared and became a great plain cut by the Euphrates. And the



Bab al Mandab, the strait at the mouth of the Red Sea, became a land bridge.

But a land bridge is also a dam. As the world climate warmed and the glaciers began to release their pent-up water, the rains fell heavily everywhere; rivers swelled and the seas rose. The great south-flowing rivers of Europe, which had been mostly dry during the peak of glaciation, now were massive torrents. The Rhone, the Po, the Strimon, the Danube poured so much water into the Mediterranean and the Black Sea that their water level rose at about the same rate as that of the great world ocean.

The Red Sea had no great rivers, however. It was a new sea, formed by rifting between the new Arabian plate and the African, which meant it had uplift ridges on both coasts. Many rivers and streams flowed from those ridges down into the Red Sea, but none of them carried much water compared to the rivers that drained vast basins and carried the melt-off of the glaciers of the north. So, while the Red Sea gradually rose during this time, it lagged far, far behind the great world ocean. Its water level responded to the immediate local weather patterns rather than to worldwide weather.

Then one day the Indian Ocean rose so high that tides began to spill over the Bab al Mandab. The water cut new channels in the grassland there. Over a period of several years, the leakage grew, creating a series of large new tidal lakes on the Hanish Plain. And then one day, some fourteen thousand years ago, the flow cut a channel so deep that it didn't dry up at low tide, and the water kept flowing, cutting the channel deeper and deeper, until those tidal lakes were full, and brimmed over. With the weight of the Indian Ocean behind it the water gushed into the basin of the Red Sea in a vast flood that in a few days brought the Red Sea up to the level of the world ocean.

This isn't just the boundary marker between useful and useless water level data, thought Kemal. This is a cataclysm, one of the rare times when a single event changes vast reaches of land in a period of time short enough that human beings could notice it. And, for once, this cataclysm happened in an era when human beings were there. It was not only possible but likely that someone saw this flood--indeed, that it killed many, for the southern end of the Red Sea basin was rich savannah and marshes up to the moment when the ocean broke through, and surely the humans of fourteen thousand years ago would have hunted there. Would have gathered seeds and fruits and berries there. Some hunting party must have seen, from the peaks of the Dehalak mountains, the great walls of water that roared up the plain, breaking and parting around the slopes of the

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Dehalaks, making islands of them.

Such a hunting party would have known that their families had been



killed by this water. What would they have thought? Surely that some god was angry with them. That the world had been done away, buried under the sea. And if they survived, if they found a way to the Eritrean shore after the great turbulent waves settled down to the more placid waters of the new, deeper sea, they would tell the tale to anyone who would listen. And for a few years they could take their hearers to the water's edge, show them the treetops barely rising above the surface of the sea, and tell them tales of all that had been buried under the waves.

Noah, thought Kemal. Gilgamesh. Atlantis. The stories were believed. The stories were remembered. Of course they forgot where it happened--the civilizations that learned to write their stories naturally transposed the events to locations that they knew. But they remembered the things that mattered. What did the flood story of Noah say? Not just rain, no, it wasn't a flood caused by rain alone. The "fountains of the great deep" broke open. No local flood on the Mesopotamian plain would cause that image to be part of the story. But the great wall of water from the Indian Ocean, coming on the heels of years of steadily increasing rain--THAT would bring those words to the storytellers' lips, generation after generation, for ten thousand years until they could be written down.

As for Atlantis, everyone was so sure they had found it years ago. Santorini--Thios--the Aegean island that blew up. But the oldest stories of Atlantis said nothing of blowing up in a volcano. They spoke only of the great civilization sinking into the sea. The supposition was that later visitors came to Santorini and, seeing water where an island city used to be, assumed that it had sunk, knowing nothing of the volcanic eruption. To Kemal, however, this now seemed far-fetched indeed, compared to the way it would have looked to the people of Atlantis themselves, somewhere on the Mits'iwa Plain, when the Red Sea seemed to leap up in its bed, engulfing the city. THAT would be sinking into the sea! No explosion, just water. And if the city were in the marshes of what was now the Mits'iwa Channel, the water would have come, not just from the southeast, but from the northeast and the north as well, flowing among and around the Dehalak mountains, making islands of them and swallowing up the marshes and the city with them.

Atlantis. Not beyond the pillars of Hercules, but Plato was right to associate the city with a strait. He, or whoever told the tale to him, simply replaced the Bab al Mandab with the greatest strait that he had heard of. The story might well have reached him by way of Phoenicia, where Mediterranean sailors would have made the story fit the sea they knew. They learned it from Egyptians, perhaps, or nomad wanderers from the hinterlands of Arabia, and "within the straits of Mandab" would quickly have become "within the pillars of Hercules," and then, because the Mediterranean itself was not strange and exotic enough, the locale was moved outside the pillars of Hercules.



All these suppositions came to Kemal with absolute certainty that they were true, or nearly true. He rejoiced at the thought of it: There was still an ancient civilization left to discover.

Everyone knew that Naog of the Derku People was going to be a tall man when he grew up, because his father and mother were both tall and he was an unusually large baby. He was born in floodwater season, when all the Engu clan lived on reed boats. Their food supply, including the precious seed for next year's planting, was kept dry in the seedboats, which were like floating huts of plaited reeds. The people themselves, though, rode out the flood on the open dragonboats, bundles of reeds which they straddled as if they were riding a crocodile--which, according to legend, was how the

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dragonboats began, when the first Derku woman, Gweia, saved herself and her baby from the flood by climbing onto the back of a huge crocodile. The crocodile--the first Great Derku, or dragon--endured their weight until they reached a tree they could climb, whereupon the dragon swam away. So when the Derku people plaited reeds into long thick bundles and climbed aboard, they believed that secret of the dragonboats had been given to them by the Great Derku, and in a sense they were riding on his back.

During the raiding season, other nearby tribes had soon learned to fear the coming of the dragonboats, for they always carried off captives who, in those early days, were never seen again. In other tribes when someone was said to have been carried off by the crocodiles, it was the Derku people they meant, for it was well known that all the clans of the Derku worshipped the crocodile as their savior and god, and fed their captives to a dragon that lived in the center of their city.

At Naog's birthtime, the Engu clan were nestled among their tether trees as the flooding Selud River flowed mudbrown underneath them. If Naog had pushed his way out of the womb a few weeks later, as the waters were receding, his mother would have given birth in one of the seedboats. But Naog came early, before highwater, and so the seedboats were still full of grain. During floodwater, they could neither grind the grain into flour nor build cooking fires, and thus had to eat the seeds in raw handfuls. Thus it was forbidden to spill blood on the grain, even birthblood; no one would touch grain that had human blood on it, for that was the juice of the forbidden fruit.

This was why Naog's mother, Lewik, could not hide alone in an enclosed seedboat for the birthing. Instead she had to give birth out in the open, on one of the dragonboats. She clung to a branch of a tether tree as two women on their own dragonboats held hers steady. From a near distance Naog's father, Twerk, could not hide his mortification that his new young wife was giving birth in full



view, not only of the women, but of the men and boys of the tribe. Not that any but the youngest and stupidest of the men was overtly looking. Partly because of respect for the event of birth itself, and partly because of a keen awareness that Twerk could cripple any man of the Engu that he wanted to, the men paddled their boats toward the farthest tether trees, herding the boys along with them. There they busied themselves with the work of floodwater season--twining ropes and weaving baskets.

Twerk himself, however, could not keep from looking. He finally left his dragonboat and climbed his tree and watched. The women had brought their dragonboats in a large circle around the woman in travail. Those with children clinging to them or bound to them kept their boats on the fringes--they would be little help, with their hands full already. It was the older women and the young girls who were in close, the older women to help, the younger ones to learn. But Twerk had no eyes for the other women today. It was his wide-eyed, sweating wife that he watched. It frightened him to see her in such pain, for Lewik was usually the healer, giving herbs and ground-up roots to others to take away pain or cure a sickness. It also bothered him to see that as she squatted on her dragonboat, clinging with both hands to the branch above her head, neither she nor any of the other women was in position to catch the baby when it dropped out. It would fall into the water, he knew, and it would die, and then he and everyone else would know that it had been wrong of him to marry this woman who should have been a servant of the crocodile god, the Great Derku.

When he could not contain himself a moment longer, Twerk shouted to the women: "Who will catch the baby?"

Oh, how they laughed at him, when at last they understood what he was saying. "Derku will catch him!" they retorted, jeering, and the men around him also laughed, for that could mean several things. It

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could mean that the god would provide for the child's safety, or it could mean that the flood would catch the child, for the flood was also called derkuwed, or dragonwater, partly because it was aswarm with crocodiles swept away from their usual lairs, and partly because the floodwater slithered down from the mountains like a crocodile sliding down into the water, quick and powerful and strong, ready to sweep away and swallow up the unwary. Derku will catch him indeed!

The men began predicting what the child would be named. "He will be Rogogu, because we all laughed," said one. Another said, "It will be a girl and she will be named Mehug, because she will be spilled into the water as she plops out!" They guessed that the child would be named for the fact that Twerk watched the birth; for the branch that Lewik clung to or the tree that Twerk climbed; or for the



dragonwater itself, into which they imagined the child spilling and then being drawn out with the embrace of the god still dripping from him. Indeed, because of this notion Derkuwed became a childhood nickname for Lewik's and Twerk's baby, and later it was one of the names by which his story was told over and over again in faraway lands that had never heard of dragonwater or seen a crocodile, but it was not his real name, not what his father gave him to be his man-name when he came of age.

After much pushing, Lewik's baby finally emerged. First came the head, dangling between her ankles like the fruit of a tree--that was why the word for HEAD and was the same as the word for FRUIT in the language of the Derku people. Then as the newborn's head touched the bound reeds of the dragonboat, Lewik rolled her eyes in pain and waddled slowly backward, so that the baby flopped out of her body stretched along the length of the boat. He did not fall into the water, because his mother had made sure of it.

"Little man!" cried all the women as soon as they saw the sex of the child.

Lewik grunted out her firstborn's baby-name. "Glogmeriss," she said. GLOG meant "thorn" and MERISS meant "trouble"; together, they made the term that the Derku used for annoyances that turned out all right in the end, but which were quite painful at the time. There were some who thought that she wasn't naming the baby at all, but simply commenting on the situation, but it was the first thing she said and so it would be his name until he left the company of women and joined the men.

As soon as the afterbirth dropped onto the dragonboat, all the other women paddled nearer--like a swarm of gnats, thought Twerk, still watching. Some helped Lewik pry her hands loose from the tree branch and lie down on her dragonboat. Others took the baby and passed it from hand to hand, each one washing a bit of the blood from the baby. The afterbirth got passed with the baby at first, often dropping into the floodwater, until at last it reached the cutting woman, who severed the umbilical cord with a flint blade. Twerk, seeing this for the first time, realized that this might be how he got his name, which meant "cutting" or "breaking." Had his father seen this remarkable thing, too, the women cutting a baby off from this strange belly-tail? No wonder he named him for it.

But the thing that Twerk could not get out of his mind was the fact that his Lewik had taken off her apron in full view of the clan, and all the men had seen her nakedness, despite their efforts to pretend that they had not. Twerk knew that this would become a joke among the men, a story talked about whenever he was not with them, and this would weaken him and mean that he would never be the clan leader, for one can never give such respect to a man that one laughs about behind his back.

Twerk could think of only one way to keep this from having the power



to hurt him, and that was to confront it openly so that no one would

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laugh behind his back. "His name is Naog!" cried Twerk decisively, almost as soon as the baby was fully washed in river water and the placenta set loose to float away on the flood.

"You are such a stupid man!" cried Lewik from her dragonboat.

Everyone laughed, but in this case it was all right. Everyone knew Lewik was a bold woman who said whatever she liked to any man. That was why it was such a mark of honor that Twerk had chosen to take her as wife and she had taken him for husband--it took a strong man to laugh when his wife said disrespectful things to him. "Of course he's naog," she said. "All babies are born naked."

"I call him Naog because YOU were naked in front of all the clan," answered Twerk. "Yes, I know you all looked when you thought I couldn't see," he chided the men. "I don't mind a bit. You all saw my Lewik naked when the baby came out of her--but what matters is that only I saw her naked when I put the baby in!"

That made them all laugh, even Lewik, and the story was often repeated. Even before he became a man and gave up the baby-name Glogmeriss, Naog had often heard the tale of why he would have such a silly name--so often, in fact, that he determined that one day he would do such great deeds that when the people heard the word NAOG they would think first of him and his accomplishments, before they remembered that the name was also the word for the tabu condition of taking the napron off one's secret parts in public.

As he grew up, he knew that the water of derkuwed on him as a baby had touched him with greatness. It seemed he was always taller than the other boys, and he reached puberty first, his young body powerfully muscled by the labor of dredging the canals right among the slaves of the dragon during mudwater season. He wasn't much more than twelve floodwaters old when the grown men began clamoring for him to be given his manhood journey early so that he could join them in slave raids--his sheer size would dishearten many an enemy, making them despair and throw down his club or his spear. But Twerk was adamant. He would not tempt Great Derku to devour his son by letting the boy get ahead of himself. Naog might be large of body, but that didn't mean that he could get away with taking a man's role before he had learned all the skills and lore that a man had to acquire in order to survive.

This was all fine with Naog. He knew that he would have his place in the clan in due time. He worked hard to learn all the skills of manhood--how to fight with any weapon; how to paddle his dragonboat straight on course, yet silently; how to recognize the signs of the seasons and the directions of the stars at different hours of the night and times of the year; which wild herbs were good to eat, and which deadly; how to kill an animal and dress it so it would keep



long enough to bring home for a wife to eat. Twerk often said that his son was as quick to learn things requiring wit and memory as to learn skills that depended only on size and strength and quickness. What Twerk did not know, what no one even guessed, was that these tasks barely occupied Naog's mind. What he dreamed of, what he thought of constantly, was how to become a great man so that his name could be spoken with solemn honor instead of a smile or laughter.

One of Naog's strongest memories was a visit to the Great Derku in the holy pond at the very center of the great circular canals that linked all the Derku people together. Every year during the mud season, the first dredging was the holy pond, and no slaves were used for THAT. No, the Derku men and women, the great and the obscure, dredged the mud out of the holy pond, carried it away in baskets, and heap it up in piles that formed a round lumpen wall around the pond. As the dry season came, crocodiles a-wandering in search of water would smell the pond and come through the gaps in the wall to drink it and bathe in it. The crocodiles knew nothing of danger from coming within walls. Why would they have learned to fear the works of humans? What other people in all the world had ever

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built such a thing? So the crocodiles came and wallowed in the water, heedless of the men watching from trees. At the first full moon of the dry season, as the crocodiles lay stupidly in the water during the cool of night, the men dropped from the trees and quietly filled the gaps in the walls with earth. At dawn, the largest crocodile in the pond was hailed as Great Derku for the year. The rest were killed with spears in the bloodiest most wonderful festival of the year.

The year that Naog turned six, the Great Derku was the largest crocodile that anyone could remember ever seeing. It was a dragon indeed, and after the men of raiding age came home from the blood moon festival full of stories about this extraordinary Great Derku, all the families in all the clans began bringing their children to see it.

"They say it's a crocodile who was Great Derku many years ago," said Naog's mother. "He has returned to our pond in hopes of the offerings of manfruit that we used to give to the dragon. But some say he's the very one who was Great Derku the year of the forbidding, when he refused to eat any of the captives we offered him."

"And how would they know?" said Twerk, ridiculing the idea. "Is there anyone alive now who was alive then, to recognize him? And how could a crocodile live so long?"

"The Great Derku lives forever," said Lewik.

"Yes, but the true dragon is the derkuwed, the water in flood," said



Twerk, "and the crocodiles are only its children."

To the child, Naog, these words had another meaning, for he had heard the word DERKUWED far more often in reference to himself, as his nickname, than in reference to the great annual flood. So to him it sounded as though his father was saying that HE was the true dragon, and the crocodiles were his children. Almost at once he realized what was actually meant, but the impression lingered in the back of his mind.

"And couldn't the derkuwed preserve one of its children to come back to us to be our god a second time?" said Lewik. "Or are you suddenly a holy man who knows what the dragon is saying?"

"All this talk about this Great Derku being one of the ancient ones brought back to us is dangerous," said Twerk. "Do you want us to return to the terrible days when we fed manfruit to the Great Derku? When our captives were all torn to pieces by the god, while WE, men and women alike, had to dig out all the canals without slaves?"

"There weren't so many canals then," said Lewik. "Father said."

"Then it must be true," said Twerk, "if your old father said it. So think about it. Why are there so many canals now, and why are they so long and deep? Because we put our captives to work dredging our canals and making our boats. What if the Great Derku had never refused to eat manfruit? We would not have such a great city here, and other tribes would not bring us gifts and even their own children as slaves. They can come and visit our captives, and even buy them back from us. That's why we're not hated and feared, but rather

LOVED and feared in all the lands from the Nile to the Salty Sea."

Naog knew that his father's manhood journey had been from the Salty Sea all the way up the mountains and across endless grasslands to the great river of the west. It was a legendary journey, fitting for such a large man. So Naog knew that he would have to undertake an even greater journey. But of that he said nothing.

"But these people talking stupidly about this being that same Great Derku returned to us again--don't you realize that they will want to put it to the test again, and offer it manfruit? And what if the Great Derku EATS it this time? What do we do then, go back to doing all the dredging ourselves? Or let the canals fill in so we can't

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float the seedboats from village to village during the dry season, and so we have no defense from our enemies and no way to ride our dragonboats all year?"

Others in the clan were listening to this argument, since there was little enough privacy under normal circumstances, and none at all when you spoke with a raised voice. So it was no surprise when they chimed in. One offered the opinion that the reason no manfruit should be offered to this Great Derku was because the eating of



manfruit would give the Great Derku knowledge of all the thoughts of the people they ate. Another was afraid that the sight of a powerful creature eating the flesh of men would lead some of the young people to want to commit the unpardonable sin of eating that forbidden fruit themselves, and in that case all the Derku people would be destroyed.

What no one pointed out was that in the old days, when they fed manfruit to the Great Derku, it wasn't JUST captives that were offered. During years of little rain or too much rain, the leader of each clan always offered his own eldest son as the first fruit, or, if he could not bear to see his son devoured, he would offer himself in his son's place--though some said that in the earliest times it was always the leader himself who was eaten, and they only started offering their sons as a cowardly substitute. By now everyone expected Twerk to be the next clan leader, and everyone knew that he doted on his Glogmeriss, his Naog-to-be, his Derkuwed, and that he would never throw his son to the crocodile god. Nor did any of them wish him to do so. A few people in the other clans might urge the test of offering manfruit to the Great Derku, but most of the people in all of the tribes, and all of the people in Engu clan, would oppose it, and so it would not happen.

So it was with an assurance of personal safety that Twerk brought his firstborn son with him to see the Great Derku in the holy pond. But six-year-old Glogmeriss, oblivious to the personal danger that would come from the return of human sacrifice, was terrified at the sight of the holy pond itself. It was surrounded by a low wall of dried mud, for once the crocodile had found its way to the water inside, the gaps in the wall were closed. But what kept the Great Derku inside was not just the mud wall. It was the row on row of sharpened horizontal stakes pointing straight inward, set into the mud and lashed to sharp vertical stakes about a hand's-breadth back from the point. The captive dragon could neither push the stakes out of the way nor break them off. Only when the floodwater came and the river spilled over the top of the mud wall and swept it away, stakes and all, would that year's Great Derku be set free. Only rarely did the Great Derku get caught on the stakes and die, and when it happened it was regarded as a very bad omen.

This year, though, the wall of stakes was not widely regarded as enough assurance that the dragon could not force his way out, he was so huge and clever and strong. So men stood guard constantly, spears in hand, ready to prod the Great Derku and herd it back into place, should it come dangerously close to escaping.

The sight of spikes and spears was alarming enough, for it looked like war to young Glogmeriss. But he soon forgot those puny sticks when he caught sight of the Great Derku himself, as he shambled up on the muddy, grassy shore of the pond. Of course Glogmeriss had seen crocodiles all his life; one of the first skills any child,



male or female, had to learn was how to use a spear to poke a crocodile so it would leave one's dragonboat--and therefore one's arms and legs--in peace. This crocodile, though, this dragon, this god, was so huge that Glogmeriss could easily imagine it swallowing him whole without having to bite him in half or even chew.

Glogmeriss gasped and clung to his father's hand.

"A giant indeed," said his father. "Look at those legs, that powerful tail. But remember that the Great Derku is but a weak child compared to the power of the flood."

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Perhaps because human sacrifice was still on his mind, Twerk then told his son how it had been in the old days. "When it was a captive we offered as manfruit, there was always a chance that the god would let him live. Of course, if he clung to the stakes and refused to go into the pond, we would never let him out alive--we poked him with our spears. But if he went boldly into the water so far that it covered his head completely, and then came back out alive and made it back to the stakes without the Great Derku taking him and eating him, well, then, we brought him out in great honor. We said that his old life ended in that water, that the man we had captured had been buried in the holy pond, and now he was born again out of the flood. He was a full member of the tribe then, of the same clan as the man who had captured him. But of course the Great Derku almost never let anyone out alive, because we always kept him hungry."

"YOU poked him with your spear?" asked Glogmeriss.

"Well, not me personally. When I said that WE did it, I meant of course the men of the Derku. But it was long before I was born. It was in my grandfather's time, when he was a young man, that there came a Great Derku who wouldn't eat any of the captives who were offered to him. No one knew what it meant, of course, but all the captives were coming out and expecting to be adopted into the tribe. But if THAT had happened, the captives would have been the largest clan of all, and where would we have found wives for them all? So the holy men and the clan leaders realized that the old way was over, that the god no longer wanted manfruit, and therefore those who survived after being buried in the water of the holy pond were NOT adopted into the Derku people. But we did keep them alive and set them to work on the canals. That year, with the captives working alongside us, we dredged the canals deeper than ever, and we were able to draw twice the water from the canals into the fields of grain during the dry season, and when we had a bigger harvest than ever before, we had hands enough to weave more seedboats to contain it. Then we realized what the god had meant by refusing to eat the manfruit. Instead of swallowing our captives into the belly of the water where the god lives, the god was giving them all back to us, to make us rich and strong. So from that day on we have fed no



captives to the Great Derku. Instead we hunt for meat and bring it back, while the women and old men make the captives do the labor of the city. In those days we had one large canal. Now we have three great canals encircling each other, and several other canals cutting across them, so that even in the driest season a Derku man can glide on his dragonboat like a crocodile from any part of our land to any other, and never have to drag it across dry earth. This is the greatest gift of the dragon to us, that we can have the labor of our captives instead of the Great Derku devouring them himself."

"It's not a bad gift to the captives, either," said Glogmeriss. "Not to die."

Twerk laughed and rubbed his son's hair. "Not a bad gift at that," he said.

"Of course, if the Great Derku really loved the captives he would let them go home to their families."

Twerk laughed even louder. "They have no families, foolish boy," he said. "When a man is captured, he is dead as far as his family is concerned. His woman marries someone else, his children forget him and call another man father. He has no more home to return to."

"Don't some of the ugly-noise people buy captives back?"

"The weak and foolish ones do. The gold ring on my arm was the price of a captive. The father-of-all priest wears a cape of bright feathers that was the ransom of a boy not much older than you, not long after you were born. But most captives know better than to hope for ransom. What does THEIR tribe have that we want?"

"I would hate to be a captive, then," said Glogmeriss. "Or would YOU

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be weak and foolish enough to ransom me?"

"You?" Twerk laughed out loud. "You're a Derku man, or will be. We take captives wherever we want, but where is the tribe so bold that it dares to take one of US? No, we are never captives. And the captives we take are lucky to be brought out of their poor, miserable tribes of wandering hunters or berry-pickers and allowed to live here among wall-building men, among canal-digging people, where they don't have to wander in search of food every day, where they get plenty to eat all year long, twice as much as they ever ate before."

"I would still hate to be one of them," said Glogmeriss. "Because how could you ever do great things that everyone will talk about and tell stories about and remember, if you're a captive?"

All this time that they stood on the wall and talked, Glogmeriss never took his eyes off the Great Derku. It was a terrible creature, and when it yawned it seemed its mouth was large enough to swallow a tree. Ten grown men could ride on its back like a dragonboat. Worst of all were the eyes, which seemed to stare into a man's heart. It was probably the eyes of the dragon that gave it its name, for DERKU



could easily have originated as a shortened form of DERK-UNT, which meant "one who sees." When the ancient ancestors of the Derku people first came to this floodplain, the crocodiles floating like logs on the water must have fooled them. They must have learned to look for eyes on the logs. "Look!" the watcher would cry. "There's one with eyes! Derk-unt!" They said that if you looked in the dragon's eyes, he would draw you toward him, within reach of his huge jaws, within reach of his curling tail, and you would never even notice your danger, because his eyes held you. Even when the jaws opened to show the pink mouth, the teeth like rows of bright flame ready to burn you, you would look at that steady, all-knowing, wise, amused, and coolly angry eye.

That was the fear that filled Glogmeriss the whole time he stood on the wall beside his father. For a moment, though, just after he spoke of doing great things, a curious change came over him. For a moment Glogmeriss stopped fearing the Great Derku, and instead imagined that he WAS the giant crocodile. Didn't a man paddle his dragonboat by lying on his belly straddling the bundled reeds, paddling with his hands and kicking with his feet just as a crocodile did under the water? So all men became dragons, in a way. And Glogmeriss would grow up to be a large man, everyone said so. Among men he would be as extraordinary as the Great Derku was among crocodiles. Like the god, he would seem dangerous and strike fear into the hearts of smaller people. And, again like the god, he would actually be kind, and not destroy them, but instead help them and do good for them.

Like the river in flood. A frightening thing, to have the water rise so high, sweeping away the mud hills on which they had built the seedboats, smearing the outsides of them with sun-heated tar so they would be watertight when the flood came. Like the Great Derku, the flood seemed to be a destroyer. And yet when the water receded, the land was wet and rich, ready to receive the seed and give back huge harvests. The land farther up the slopes of the mountains was salty and stony and all that could grow on it was grass. It was here in the flatlands where the flood tore through like a mad dragon that the soil was rich and trees could grow.

I will BE the Derkuwed. Not as a destroyer, but as a lifebringer. The real Derku, the true dragon, could never be trapped in a cage as this poor crocodile has been. The true dragon comes like the flood and tears away the walls and sets the Great Derku crocodile free and makes the soil wet and black and rich. Like the river, I will be another tool of the god, another manifestation of the power of the god in the world. If that was not what the dragon of the deep heaven of the sea intended, why would he have make Glogmeriss so tall and strong?

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This was still the belief in his heart when Glogmeriss set out on his manhood journey at the age of fourteen. He was already the tallest man in his clan and one of the tallest among all the Derku people. He was a giant, and yet well-liked because he never used his strength and size to frighten other people into doing what he wanted; on the contrary, he seemed always to protect the weaker boys. Many people felt that it was a shame that when he returned from his manhood journey, the name he would be given was a silly one like Naog. But when they said as much in Glogmeriss's hearing, he only laughed at them and said, "The name will only be silly if it is borne by a silly man. I hope not to be a silly man."

Glogmeriss's father had made his fame by taking his manhood journey from the Salty Sea to the Nile. Glogmeriss's journey therefore had to be even more challenging and more glorious. He would go south and east, along the crest of the plateau until he reached the legendary place called the Heaving Sea, where the gods that dwelt in its deep heaven were so restless that the water splashed onto the shore in great waves all the time, even when there was no wind. If there was such a sea, Glogmeriss would find it. When he came back as a man with such a tale, they would call him Naog and none of them would laugh.

Kemal Akyazi knew that Atlantis had to be there under the waters of the Red Sea; but why hadn't Pastwatch found it? The answer was simple enough. The past was huge, and while the TruSite I had been used to collect climatological information, the new machines that were precise enough that could track individual human beings would never have been used to look at oceans where nobody lived. Yes, the Tempoview had explored the Bering Strait and the English Channel, but that was to track long-known-of migrations. There was no such migration in the Red Sea. Pastwatch had simply never looked through their precise new machines to see what was under the water of the Red Sea in the waning centuries of the last Ice Age. And they never WOULD look, either, unless someone gave them a compelling reason. Kemal understood bureaucracy enough to know that he, a student meteorologist, would hardly be taken seriously if he brought an Atlantis theory to Pastwatch--particularly a theory that put Atlantis in the Red Sea of all places, and fourteen thousand years ago, no less, long before civilizations arose in Sumeria or Egypt, let alone China or the Indus Valley or among the swamps of Tehuantepec.

Yet Kemal also knew that the setting would have been right for a civilization to grow in the marshy land of the Mits'iwa Channel. Though there weren't enough rivers flowing into the Red Sea to fill it at the same rate as the world ocean, there were still rivers. For instance, the Zula, which still had enough water to flow even today, watered the whole length of the Mits'iwa Plain and flowed down into the rump of the Red Sea near Mersa Mubarek. And, because of the



different rainfall patterns of that time, there was a large and dependable river flowing out of the Assahara basin. Assahara was now a dry valley below sea level, but then would have been a freshwater lake fed by many rivers and spilling over the lowest point into the Mits'iwa Channel. The river meandered along the nearly level Mits'iwa Plain, with some branches of it joining the Zula River, and some wandering east and north to form several mouths in the Red Sea. Thus dependable sources of fresh water fed the area, and in rainy season the Zula, at least, would have brought new silt to freshen the soil, and in all seasons the wandering flatwater rivers would have provided a means of transportation through the marshes. The climate was also dependably warm, with plenty of sunlight and a long growing season. There was no early civilization that did not grow up in such a setting. There was no reason such a civilization might not

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have grown up then.

Yes, it was six or seven thousand years too early. But couldn't it be that it was the very destruction of Atlantis that convinced the survivors that the gods did not want human beings to gather together in cities? Weren't there hints of that anti-civilization bias lingering in many of the ancient religions of the Middle East? What was the story of Cain and Abel, if not a metaphorical expression of the evil of the city-dweller, the farmer, the brother-killer who is judged unworthy by the gods because he does not wander with his sheep? Couldn't such stories have circulated widely in those ancient times? That would explain why the survivors of Atlantis hadn't immediately begun to rebuild their civilization at another site: They knew that the gods forbade it, that if they built again their city would be destroyed again. So they remembered the stories of their glorious past, and at the same time condemned their ancestors and warned everyone they met against people gathering together to build a city, making people yearn for such a place and fear it, both at once.

Not until a Nimrod came, a tower-builder, a Babel-maker who defied the old religion, would the ancient proscription be overcome at last and another city rise up, in another river valley far in time and space from Atlantis, but remembering the old ways that had been memorialized in the stories of warning and, as far as possible, replicating them. We will build a tower so high that it CAN'T be immersed. Didn't Genesis link the flood with Babel in just that way, complete with the nomad's stern disapproval of the city? This was the story that survived in Mesopotamia--the tale of the beginning of city life there, but with clear memories of a more ancient civilization that had been destroyed in a flood.

A more ancient civilization. The golden age. The giants who once walked the earth. Why couldn't all these stories be remembering the



first human civilization, the place where the city was invented?
Atlantis, the city of the Mits'iwa plain.

But how could he prove it without using the Tempoview? And how could he get access to one of those machines without first convincing Pastwatch that Atlantis was really in the Red Sea? It was circular, with no way out.

Until he thought: Why do large cities form in the first place?

Because there are public works to do that require more than a few people to accomplish them. Kemal wasn't sure what form the public works might take, but surely they would have been something that would change the face of the land obviously enough that the old TruSite I recordings would show it, though it wouldn't be noticeable unless someone was looking for it.

So, putting his degree at risk, Kemal set aside the work he was assigned to do and began poring over the old TruSite I recordings. He concentrated on the last few centuries before the Red Sea flood--there was no reason to suppose that the civilization had lasted very long before it was destroyed. And within a few months he had collected data that was irrefutable. There were no dikes and dams to prevent flooding--that kind of structure would have been large enough that no one would have missed it. Instead there were seemingly random heaps of mud and earth that grew between rainy seasons, especially in the drier years when the rivers were lower than usual. To people looking only for weather patterns, these unstructured, random piles would mean nothing. But to Kemal they were obvious: In the shallowing water, the Atlanteans were dredging channels so that their boats could continue to traffic from place to place. The piles of earth were simply the dumping-places for the muck they dredged from the water. None of the boats showed up on the TruSite I, but now that Kemal knew where to look, he began to catch fleeting glimpses of houses. Every year when the floods came, the houses disappeared, so they were only visible for a moment or two in the TruSite I: flimsy mud-and-reed structures that must have been

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swept away in every flood season and rebuilt again when the waters receded. But they were there, close by the hillocks that marked the channels. Plato was right again--Atlantis grew up around its canals. But Atlantis was the people and their boats; the buildings were washed away and built again every year.

When Kemal presented his findings to Pastwatch he was not yet twenty years old, but his evidence was impressive enough that Pastwatch immediately turned, not one of the Tempoviews, but the still-newer TruSite II machine to look under the waters of the Red Sea in the Massawa Channel during the hundred years before the Red Sea flood. They found that Kemal was gloriously, spectacularly right. In an era when other humans were still following game animals and gathering



berries, the Atlanteans were planting amaranth and ryegrass, melons and beans in the rich wet silt of the receding rivers, and carrying food in baskets and on reed boats from place to place. The only thing that Kemal had missed was that the reed buildings weren't houses at all. They were silos for the storage of grain, built watertight so that they would float during the flood season. The Atlanteans slept under the open air during the dry season, and in the flood season they slept on their tiny reed boats.

Kemal was brought into Pastwatch and made head of the vast new Atlantis project. This was the seminal culture of all cultures in the old world, and a hundred researchers examined every stage of its development. This methodical work, however, was not for Kemal. As always, it was the grand legend that drew him. He spent every moment he could spare away from the management of the project and devoted it to the search for Noah, for Gilgamesh, for the great man who rode out the flood and whose story lived in memory for thousands of years. There had to be a real original, and Kemal would find him.

The flood season was almost due when Glogmeriss took his journey that would make him into a man named Naog. It was a little early for him, since he was born during the peak of the flood, but everyone in the clan agreed with Twerk that it was better for a manling so well-favored to be early than late, and if he wasn't already up and out of the flood plain before the rains came, then he'd have to wait months before he could safely go. And besides, as Twerk pointed out, why have a big eater like Glogmeriss waiting out the flood season, eating huge handfuls of grain. People listened happily to Twerk's argument, because he was known to be a generous, wise, good-humored man, and everyone expected him to be named clan leader when sweet old ailing Dheub finally died.

Getting above the flood meant walking up the series of slight inclines leading to the last sandy shoulder, where the land began to rise more steeply. Glogmeriss had no intention of climbing any higher than that. His father's journey had taken him over those ridges and on to the great river Nile, but there was no reason for Glogmeriss to clamber through rocks when he could follow the edge of the smooth, grassy savannah. He was high enough to see the vast plain of the Derku lands stretching out before him, and the land was open enough that no cat or pack of dogs could creep up on him unnoticed, let alone some hunter of another tribe.

How far to the Heaving Sea? Far enough that no one of the Derku tribe had ever seen it. But they knew it existed, because when they brought home captives from tribes to the south, they heard tales of such a place, and the farther south the captives came from, the more vivid and convincing the tales became. Still, none of them had ever seen it with their own eyes. So it would be a long journey, Glogmeriss knew that. And all the longer because it would be on foot, and not on his dragonboat. Not that Derku men were any weaker



or slower afoot than men who lived above the flood--on the contrary, they had to be fleet indeed, as well as stealthy, to bring home either captives or meat. So the boys' games included footracing, and
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while Glogmeriss was not the fastest sprinter, no one could match his long-legged stride for sheer endurance, for covering ground quickly, on and on, hour after hour.

What set the bodies of the Derku people apart from other tribes, what made them recognizable in an instant, was the massive development of their upper bodies from paddling dragonboats hour after hour along the canals or through the floods. It wasn't just paddling, either. It was the heavy armwork of cutting reeds and binding them into great sheaves to be floated home for making boats and ropes and baskets. And in older times, they would also have developed strong arms and backs from dredging the canals that surrounded and connected all the villages of the great Derku city. Slaves did most of that now, but the Derku took great pride in never letting their slaves be stronger than they were. Their shoulders and chests and arms and backs were almost monstrous compared to those of the men and women of other tribes. And since the Derku ate better all year round than people of other tribes, they tended to be taller, too. Many tribes called them giants, and others called them the sons and daughters of the gods, they looked so healthy and strong. And of all the young Derku men, there was none so tall and strong and healthy as Glogmeriss, the boy they called Derkuwed, the man who would be Naog.

So as Glogmeriss loped along the grassy rim of the great plain, he knew he was in little danger from human enemies. Anyone who saw him would think: There is one of the giants, one of the sons of the crocodile god. Hide, for he might be with a party of raiders. Don't let him see you, or he'll take a report back to his people. Perhaps one man in a pack of hunters might say, "He's alone, we can kill him," but the other hunters would jeer at the one who spoke so rashly. "Look, fool, he a javelin in his hands and three tied to his back. Look at his arms, his shoulders--do you think he can't put his javelin through your heart before you got close enough to throw a rock at him? Let him be. Pray for a great cat to find him in the night."

That was Glogmeriss's only real danger. He was too high into the dry lands for crocodiles, and he could run fast enough to climb a tree before any pack of dogs or wolves could bring him down. But there was no tree that would give a moment's pause to one of the big cats. No, if one of THEM took after him, it would be a fight. But Glogmeriss had fought cats before, on guard duty. Not the giants that could knock a man's head off with one blow of its paw, or take his whole belly with one bite of its jaws, but still, they were big



enough, prowling around the outside of the clan lands, and Glogmeriss had fought them with a hand javelin and brought them down alone. He knew something of the way they moved and thought, and he had no doubt that in a contest with one of the big cats, he would at least cause it grave injury before it killed him.

Better not to meet one of them, though. Which meant staying well clear of any of the herds of bison or oxen, antelope or horses that the big cats stalked. Those cats would never have got so big waiting around for lone humans--it was herds they needed, and so it was herds that Glogmeriss did NOT need.

To his annoyance, though, one came to HIM. He had climbed a tree to sleep the night, tying himself to the trunk so he wouldn't fall out in his sleep. He awoke to the sound of nervous lowing and a few higher-pitched, anxious moos. Below him, milling around in the first grey light of the coming dawn, he could make out the shadowy shapes of oxen. He knew at once what had happened. They caught scent of a cat and began to move away in the darkness, shambling in fear and confusion in the near darkness. They had not run because the cat wasn't close enough to cause a panic in the herd. With luck it would be one of the smaller cats, and when it saw that they knew it was there, it would give up and go away.

But the cat had not given up and gone away, or they wouldn't still
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be so frightened. Soon the herd would have enough light to see the cat that must be stalking them, and then they WOULD run, leaving Glogmeriss behind in a tree. Maybe the cat would go in full pursuit of the running oxen, or maybe it would notice the lone man trapped in a tree and decide to go for the easier, smaller meal.

I wish I were part of this herd, thought Glogmeriss. Then there'd be a chance. I would be one of many, and even if the cat brought one of us down, it might not be me. As a man alone, it's me or the cat.

Kill or die. I will fight bravely, but in this light I might not get a clear sight of the cat, might not be able to see in the rippling of its muscles where it will move next. And what if it isn't alone?

What if the reason these oxen are so frightened yet unwilling to move is that they know there's more than one cat and they have no idea in which direction safety can be found?

Again he thought, I wish I were part of this herd. And then he thought, Why should I think such a foolish thought twice, unless the god is telling me what to do? Isn't that what this journey is for, to find out if there is a god who will lead me, who will protect me, who will make me great? There's no greatness in having a cat eviscerate you in one bite. Only if you live do you become a man of stories. Like Gweia--if she had mounted the crocodile and it had thrown her off and devoured her, who would ever have heard her name? There was no time to form a plan, except the plan that formed so



quickly that it might have been the god putting it there. He would ride one of these oxen as Gweia rode the crocodile. It would be easy enough to drop out of the tree onto an ox's back--hadn't he played with the other boys, year after year, jumping from higher and higher branches to land on a dragonboat that was drifting under the tree? An ox was scarcely less predictable than a dragonboat on a current. The only difference was that when he landed on the ox's back, it would not bear him as willingly as a dragonboat. Glogmeriss had to hope that, like Gweia's crocodile frightened of the flood, the ox he landed on would be more frightened of the cat than of the sudden burden on his back.

He tried to pick well among the oxen within reach of the branches of the tree. He didn't want a cow with a calf running alongside--that would be like begging the cats to come after him, since such cows were already the most tempting targets. But he didn't want a bull, either, for he doubted it would have the patience to bear him. And there was his target, a full-sized cow but with no calf leaning against it, under a fairly sturdy branch. Slowly, methodically, Glogmeriss untied himself from the tree, cinched the bindings of his javelins and his flintsack and his grainsack, and drew his loincloth up to hold his genitals tight against his body, and then crept out along the branch until he was as nearly over the back of the cow he had chosen as possible. The cow was stamping and snorting now--they all were, and in a moment they would bolt, he knew it--but it held still as well as a bobbing dragonboat, and so Glogmeriss took aim and jumped, spreading his legs to embrace the animal's back, but not SO wide that he would slam his crotch against the bony ridge of its spine.

He landed with a grunt and immediately lunged forward to get his arms around the ox's neck, just like gripping the stem of the dragonboat. The beast immediately snorted and bucked, but its bobbing was no worse than the dragonboat ducking under the water at the impact of a boy on its back. Of course, the dragonboat stopped bobbing after a moment, while this ox would no doubt keep trying to be rid of him until he was gone, bucking and turning, bashing its sides into other oxen.

But the other animals were already so nervous that the sudden panic of Glogmeriss's mount was the trigger that set off the stampede.

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Almost at once the herd mentality took over, and the oxen set out in a headlong rush all in the same direction. Glogmeriss's cow didn't forget the burden on her back, but now she responded to her fear by staying with the herd. It came as a great relief to Glogmeriss when she leapt out and ran among the other oxen, in part because it meant that she was no longer trying to get him off her back, and in part because she was a good runner and he knew that unless she swerved to



the edge of the herd where a cat could pick her off, both she and he would be safe.

Until the panic stopped, of course, and then Glogmeriss would have to figure out a way to get OFF the cow and move away without being gored or trampled to death. Well, one danger at a time. And as they ran, he couldn't help but feel the sensations of the moment: The prickly hair of the ox's back against his belly and legs, the way her muscles rippled between his legs and within the embrace of his arms, and above all the sheer exhilaration of moving through the air at such a speed. Has any man ever moved as fast over the ground as I am moving now? he wondered. No dragonboat has ever found a current so swift.

It seemed that they ran for hours and hours, though when they finally came to a stop the sun was still only a palm's height above the mountains far across the plain to the east. As the running slowed to a jolting jog, and then to a walk, Glogmeriss kept waiting for his mount to remember that he was on her back and to start trying to get him off. But if she remembered, she must have decided she didn't mind, because when she finally came to a stop, still in the midst of the herd, she simply dropped her head and began to graze, making no effort to get Glogmeriss off her back.

She was so calm--or perhaps like the others was simply so exhausted--that Glogmeriss decided that as long as he moved slowly and calmly he might be able to walk on out of the herd, or at least climb a tree and wait for them to move on. He knew from the roaring and screaming sounds he had heard near the beginning of the stampede that the cats--more than one--had found their meal, so the survivors were safe enough for now.

Glogmeriss carefully let one leg slide down until he touched the ground. Then, smoothly as possible, he slipped off the cow's back until he was crouched beside her. She turned her head slightly, chewing a mouthful of grass. Her great brown eye regarded him calmly.

"Thank you for carrying me," said Glogmeriss softly.

She moved her head away, as if to deny that she had done anything special for him.

"You carried me like a dragonboat through the flood," he said, and he realized that this was exactly right, for hadn't the stampede of oxen been as dangerous and powerful as any flood of water? And she had borne him up, smooth and safe, carrying him safely to the far shore. "The best of dragonboats."

She lowed softly, and for a moment Glogmeriss began to think of her as being somehow the embodiment of the god--though it could not be the crocodile god that took this form, could it? But all thoughts of the animal's godhood were shattered when it started to urinate. The thick stream of ropey piss splashed into the grass not a span away from Glogmeriss's shoulder, and as the urine spattered him he could



not help but jump away. Other nearby oxen mooed complainingly about his sudden movement, but his own cow seemed not to notice. The urine stank hotly, and Glogmeriss was annoyed that the stink would stay with him for days, probably.

Then he realized that no COW could put a stream of urine between her forelegs. This animal was a bull after all. Yet it was scarcely larger than the normal cow, not bull-like at all. Squatting down, he looked closely, and realized that the animal had lost its testicles somehow. Was it a freak, born without them? No, there was a scar, a ragged sign of old injury. While still a calf, this animal had had

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its bullhood torn away. Then it grew to adulthood, neither cow nor bull. What purpose was there in life for such a creature as that? And yet if it had not lived, it could not have carried him through the stampede. A cow would have had a calf to slow it down; a bull would have flung him off easily. The god had prepared this creature to save him. It was not itself a god, of course, for such an imperfect animal could hardly be divine. But it was a god's tool.

"Thank you," said Glogmeriss, to whatever god it was. "I hope to know you and serve you," he said. Whoever the god was must have known him for a long time, must have planned this moment for years. There was a plan, a destiny for him. Glogmeriss felt himself thrill inside with the certainty of this.

I could turn back now, he thought, and I would have had the greatest manhood journey of anyone in the tribe for generations. They would regard me as a holy man, when they learned that a god had prepared such a beast as this to be my dragonboat on dry land. No one would say I was unworthy to be Naog, and no more Glogmeriss.

But even as he thought this, Glogmeriss knew that it would be wrong to go back. The god had prepared this animal, not to make his manhood journey easy and short, but to make his long journey possible. Hadn't the ox carried him southeast, the direction he was already heading? Hadn't it brought him right along the very shelf of smooth grassland that he had already been running on? No, the god meant to speed him on his way, not to end his journey. When he came back, the story of the unmanned ox that carried him like a boat would be merely the first part of his story. They would laugh when he told them about the beast peeing on him. They would nod and murmur in awe as he told them that he realized that the god was helping him to go on, that the god had chosen him years before in order to prepare the calf that would be his mount. Yet this would all be the opening, leading to the main point of the story, the climax. And what that climax would be, what he would accomplish that would let him take on his manly name, Glogmeriss could hardly bear to wait to find out.

Unless, of course, the god was preparing him to be a sacrifice. But



the god could have killed him at any time. It could have killed him when he was born, dropping him into the water as everyone said his father had feared might happen. It could have let him die there at the tree, taken by a cat or trampled under the feet of the oxen. No, the god was keeping him alive for a purpose, for a great task. His triumph lay ahead, and whatever it was, it would be greater than his ride on the back of an ox.

The rains came the next day, but Glogmeriss pressed on. The rain made it hard to see far ahead, but most of the animals stopped moving in the rain and so there wasn't as much danger to look out for. Sometimes the rain came down so thick and hard that Glogmeriss could hardly see a dozen steps ahead. But he ran on, unhindered. The shelf of land that he ran along was perfectly flat, neither uphill nor downhill, as level as water, and so he could lope along without wearying. Even when the thunder roared in the sky and lightning seemed to flash all around him, Glogmeriss did not stop, for he knew that the god that watched over him was powerful indeed. He had nothing to fear. And since he passed two burning trees, he knew that lightning could have struck him at any time, and yet did not, and so it was a second sign that a great god was with him.

During the rains he cross many swollen streams, just by walking. Only once did he have to cross a river that was far too wide and deep and swift in flood for him to cross. But he plunged right in, for the god was with him. Almost at once he was swept off his feet, but he swam strongly across the current. Yet even a strong Derku man cannot swim forever, and it began to seem to Glogmeriss that he would never reach the other side, but rather would be swept down to

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the salt sea, where one day his body would wash to shore near a party of Derku raiders who would recognize from the size of his body that it was him. So, this is what happened to Twerk's son Glogmeriss. The flood took him after all.

Then he bumped against a log that was also floating on the current, and took hold of it, and rolled up onto the top of it like a dragonboat. Now he could use all his strength for paddling, and soon he was across the current. He drew the log from the water and embraced it like a brother, lying beside it, holding it in the wet grass until the rising water began to lick at his feet again. Then he dragged the log with him to higher ground and placed it up in the notch of a tree where no flood would dislodge it. One does not abandon a brother to the flood.

Three times the god has saved me, he thought as he climbed back up to the level shelf that was his path. From the tooth of the cat, from the fire of heaven, from the water of the flood. Each time a tree was part of it: The tree around which the herd of oxen gathered and from which I dropped onto the ox's back; the trees that died in



flames from taking to themselves the bolts of lightning meant for me; and finally this log of a fallen tree that died in its home far up in the mountains in order to be my brother in the water of the flood. Is it a god of trees, then, that leads me on? But how can a god of trees be more powerful than the god of lightning or the god of the floods or even the god of sharp-toothed cats? No, trees are simply tools the god has used. The god flings trees about as easily as I fling a javelin.

Gradually, over many days, the rains eased a bit, falling in steady showers instead of sheets. Off to his left, he could see that the plain was rising up closer and closer to the smooth shelf along which he ran. On the first clear morning he saw that there was no more distant shining on the still waters of the Salty Sea--the plain was now higher than the level of that water; he had behind the only sea that the Derku people had ever seen. The Heaving Sea lay yet ahead, and so he ran on.

The plain was quite high, but he was still far enough above it that he could see the shining when it came again on a clear morning. He had left one sea behind, and now, with the ground much higher, there was another sea. Could this be it, the Heaving Sea?

He left the shelf and headed across the savannah toward the water. He did not reach it that day, but on the next afternoon he stood on the shore and knew that this was not the place he had been looking for. The water was far smaller than the Salty Sea, smaller even than the Sweetwater Sea up in the mountains from which the Selud River flowed. And yet when he dipped his finger into the water and tasted it, it WAS a little salty. Almost sweet, but salty nonetheless. Not good for drinking. That was obvious from the lack of animal tracks around the water. It must usually be saltier than this, thought Glogmeriss. It must have been freshened somewhat by the rains. Instead of returning to his path along the shelf by the route he had followed to get to this small sea, Glogmeriss struck out due south. He could see the shelf in the distance, and could see that by running south he would rejoin the level path a good way farther along.

As he crossed a small stream, he saw animal prints again, and among them the prints of human feet. Many feet, and they were fresher than any of the animal prints. So fresh, in fact, that for all Glogmeriss knew they could be watching him right now. If he stumbled on them suddenly, they might panic, seeing a man as large as he was. And in this place what would they know of the Derku people? No raiders had ever come this far in search of captives, he was sure. That meant that they wouldn't necessarily hate him--but they wouldn't fear retribution from his tribe, either. No, the best course was for him to turn back and avoid them.

But a god was protecting him, and besides, he had been without the



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sound of a human voice for so many days. If he did not carry any of his javelins, but left them all slung on his back, they would know he meant no harm and they would not fear him. So there at the stream, he bent over, slipped off the rope holding his javelins, and untied them to bind them all together.

As he was working, he heard a sound and knew without looking that he had been found. Perhaps they HAD been watching him all along. His first thought was to pick up his javelins and prepare for battle.

But he did not know how many they were, or whether they were all around him, and in the dense brush near the river he might be surrounded by so many that they could overwhelm him easily, even if he killed one or two. For a moment he thought, The god protects me, I could kill them all. But then he rejected that idea. He had killed nothing on this journey, not even for meat, eating only the grain he carried with him and such berries and fruits and roots and greens and mushrooms as he found along the way. Should he begin now, killing when he knew nothing about these people? Perhaps meeting them was what the god had brought him here to do.

So a slowly, carefully finished binding the javelins and then slung them up onto his shoulder, being careful never to hold the javelins in a way that might make his watcher or watchers think that he was making them ready for battle. Then, his hands empty and his weapons bound to his back, he splashed through the stream and followed the many footprints on the far side.

He could hear feet padding along behind him--more than one person, too, from the sound. They might be coming up behind him to kill him, but it didn't sound as if they were trying to overtake him, or to be stealthy, either. They must know that he could hear them. But perhaps they thought he was very stupid. He had to show them that he did not turn to fight them because he did not want to fight, and not because he was stupid or afraid.

To show them he was not afraid, he began to sing the song of the dog who danced with a man, which was funny and had a jaunty tune. And to show them he knew they were there, he bent over as he walked, scooped up a handful of damp soil, and flung it lightly over his shoulder.

The sound of sputtering outrage told him that the god had guided his lump of mud right to its target. He stopped and turned to find four men following him, one of whom was brushing dirt out of his face, cursing loudly. The others looked uncertain whether to be angry at Glogmeriss for flinging dirt at them or afraid of him because he was so large and strange and unafraid.

Glogmeriss didn't want them to be either afraid or angry. So he let a slow smile come to his face, not a smile of derision, but rather a friendly smile that said, I mean no harm. To reinforce this idea, he held his hands out wide, palms facing the strangers.



They understood him, and perhaps because of his smile began to see the humor in the situation. They smiled, too, and then, because the one who was hit with dirt was still complaining and trying to get it out of his eyes, they began to laugh at him. Glogmeriss laughed with them, but then walked slowly toward his victim and, carefully letting them all see what he was doing, took his waterbag from his waist and untied it a little, showing them that water dropped from it. They uttered something in an ugly-sounding language and the one with dirt in his eyes stopped, leaned his head back, and stoically allowed Glogmeriss to bathe his eyes with water.

When at last, dripping and chagrined, the man could see again, Glogmeriss flung an arm across his shoulder like a comrade, and then reached out for the man who seemed to be the leader. After a moment's hesitation, the man allowed Glogmeriss the easy embrace, and together they walked toward the main body of the tribe, the other two walking as closely as possible, behind and ahead, talking

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to Glogmeriss even though he made it plain that he did not understand.

When they reached the others they were busy building a cookfire. All who could, left their tasks and came to gawk at the giant stranger. While the men who had found him recounted the tale, others came and touched Glogmeriss, especially his strong arms and chest, and his loincloth as well, since none of the men wore any kind of clothing. Glogmeriss viewed this with disgust. It was one thing for little boys to run around naked, but he knew that men should keep their privates covered so they wouldn't get dirty. What woman would let her husband couple with her, if he let any kind of filth get on his javelin?

Of course, these men were all so ugly that no woman would want them anyway, and the women were so ugly that the only men who would want them would be these. Perhaps ugly people don't care about keeping themselves clean, thought Glogmeriss. But the women wore naprons made of woven grass, which looked softer than the beaten reeds that the Derku wove. So it wasn't that these people didn't know how to make cloth, or that the idea of wearing clothing had never occurred to them. The men were simply filthy and stupid, Glogmeriss decided. And the women, while not as filthy, must be just as stupid or they wouldn't let the men come near them.

Glogmeriss tried to explain to them that he was looking for the Heaving Sea, and ask them where it was. But they couldn't understand any of the gestures and handsigns he tried, and his best efforts merely left them laughing to the point of helplessness. He gave up and made as if to leave, which immediately brought protests and an obvious invitation to dinner.

It was a welcome thought, and their chief seemed quite anxious for



him to stay. A meal would only make him stronger for the rest of his journey.

He stayed for the meal, which was strange but good. And then, wooed by more pleas from the chief and many others, he agreed to sleep the night with them, though he halfway feared that in his sleep they planned to kill him or at least rob him. In the event, it turned out that they DID have plans for him, but it had nothing to do with killing. By morning the chief's prettiest daughter was Glogmeriss's bride, and even though she was as ugly as any of the others, she had done a good enough job of initiating him into the pleasures of men and women that he could overlook her thin lips and beakish nose. This was not supposed to happen on a manhood journey. He was expected to come home and marry one of the pretty girls from one of the other clans of the Derku people. Many a father had already been negotiating with Twerk or old Dheub with an eye toward getting Glogmeriss as a son-in-law. But what harm would it do if Glogmeriss had a bride for a few days with these people, and then slipped away and went home? No one among the Derku would ever meet any of these ugly people, and even if they did, who would care? You could do what you wanted with strangers. It wasn't as if they were people, like the Derku.

But the days came and went, and Glogmeriss could not bring himself to leave. He was still enjoying his nights with Zawada--as near as he could come to pronouncing her name, which had a strange click in the middle of it. And as he began to learn to understand something of their language, he harbored a hope that they could tell him about the Heaving Sea and, in the long run, save him time.

Days became weeks, and weeks became months, and Zawada's blood-days didn't come and so they knew she was pregnant, and then Glogmeriss didn't want to leave, because he had to see the child he had put into her. So he stayed, and learned to help with the work of this tribe. They found his size and prodigious strength very helpful, and Zawada was comically boastful about her husband's prowess--marrying him had brought her great prestige, even more than being the chief's daughter. And it gradually came to Glogmeriss's mind that if he

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stayed he would probably be chief of these people himself someday.

At times when he thought of that, he felt a strange sadness, for what did it mean to be chief of these miserable ugly people, compared to the honor of being the most ordinary of the Derku people? How could being chief of these grub-eaters and gatherers compare to eating the common bread of the Derku and riding on a dragonboat through the flood or on raids? He enjoyed Zawada, he enjoyed the people of this tribe, but they were not his people, and he knew that he would leave. Eventually.

Zawada's belly was beginning to swell when the tribe suddenly



gathered their tools and baskets and formed up to begin another trek. They didn't move back north, however, the direction they had come from when Glogmeriss found them. Rather their migration was due south, and soon, to his surprise, he found that they were hiking along the very shelf of land that had been his path in coming to this place.

It occurred to him that perhaps the god had spoken to the chief in the night, warning him to get Glogmeriss back on his abandoned journey. But no, the chief denied any dream. Rather he pointed to the sky and said it was time to go get--something. A word Glogmeriss had never heard before. But it was clearly some kind of food, because the adults nearby began laughing with anticipatory delight and pantomiming eating copious amounts of--something.

Off to the northeast, they passed along the shores of another small sea. Glogmeriss asked if the water was sweet and if it had fish in it, but Zawada told him, sadly, that the sea was spoiled. "It used to be good," she said. "The people drank from it and swam in it and trapped fish in it, but it got poisoned."

"How?" asked Glogmeriss.

"The god vomited into it."

"What god did that?"

"The great god," she said, looking mysterious and amused.

"How do you know he did?" asked Glogmeriss.

"We saw," she said. "There was a terrible storm, with winds so strong they tore babies from their mothers' arms and carried them away and they were never seen again. My own mother and father held me between them and I wasn't carried off--I was scarcely more than a baby then, and I remember how scared I was, to have my parents crushing me between them while the wind screamed through the trees."

"But a rainstorm would sweeten the water," said Glogmeriss. "Not make it salty."

"I told you," said Zawada. "The god vomited into it."

"But if you don't mean the rain, then what do you mean?"

To which her only answer was a mysterious smile and a giggle.

"You'll see," she said.

And in the end, he did. Two days after leaving this second small sea behind, they rounded a bend and some of the men began to shinny up trees, looking off to the east as if they knew exactly what they'd see. "There it is!" they cried. "We can see it!"

Glogmeriss lost no time in climbing up after them, but it took a while for him to know what it was they had seen. It wasn't till he climbed another tree the next morning, when they were closer and when the sun was shining in the east, that he realized that the vast plain opening out before them to the east wasn't a plain at all. It was water, shimmering strangely in the sunlight of morning. More water than Glogmeriss had ever imagined. And the reason the light shimmered that way was because the water was moving. It was the



Heaving Sea.

He came down from tree in awe, only to find the whole tribe watching him. When they saw his face, they burst into hysterical laughter, including even Zawada. Only now did it occur to him that they had

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understood him perfectly well on his first day with them, when he described the Heaving Sea. They had known where he was headed, but they hadn't told him.

"There's the joke back on you!" cried the man in whose face Glogmeriss had thrown dirt on that first day. And now it seemed like perfect justice to Glogmeriss. He had played a joke, and they had played one back, an elaborate jest that required even his wife to keep the secret of the Heaving Sea from him.

Zawada's father, the chief, now explained that it was more than a joke. "Waiting to show you the Heaving Sea meant that you would stay and marry Zawada and give her giant babies. A dozen giants like you!"

Zawada grinned cheerfully. "If they don't kill me coming out, it'll be fine to have sons like yours will be!"

Next day's journey took them far enough that they didn't have to climb trees to see the Heaving Sea, and it was larger than Glogmeriss had ever imagined. He couldn't see the end of it. And it moved all the time. There were more surprises when they got to the shore that night, however. For the sea was noisy, a great roaring, and it kept throwing itself at the shore and then retreating, heaving up and down. Yet the children were fearless--they ran right into the water and let the waves chase them to shore. The men and women soon joined them, for a little while, and Glogmeriss himself finally worked up the courage to let the water touch him, let the waves chase him. He tasted the water, and while it was saltier than the small seas to the northwest, it was nowhere near as salty as the Salt Sea.

"This is the god that poisoned the little seas," Zawad explained to him. "This is the god that vomited into them."

But Glogmeriss looked at how far the waves came onto the shore and laughed at her. "How could these heavings of the sea reach all the way to those small seas? It took days to get here from there."

She grimaced at him. "What do you know, giant man? These waves are not the reason why this is called the Heaving Sea by those who call it that. These are like little butterfly flutters compared to the true heaving of the sea."

Glogmeriss didn't understand until later in the day, as he realized that the waves weren't reaching as high as they had earlier. The beach sand was wet much higher up the shore than the waves could get to now. Zawada was delighted to explain the tides to him, how the sea heaved upward and downward, twice a day or so. "The sea is



calling to the moon," she said, but could not explain what that meant, except that the tides were linked to the passages of the moon rather than the passages of the sun.

As the tide ebbed, the tribe stopped playing and ran out onto the sand. With digging stones they began scooping madly at the sand. Now and then one of them would shout in triumph and hold up some ugly, stony, dripping object for admiration before dropping it into a basket. Glogmeriss examined them and knew at once that these things could not be stones--they were too regular, too symmetrical. It wasn't till one of the men showed him the knack of prying them open by hammering on a sharp wedgestone that he really understood, for inside the hard stony surface there was a soft, pliable animal that could draw its shell closed around it.

"That's how it lives under the water," explained the man. "It's watertight as a mud-covered basket, only all the way around. Tight all the way around. So it keeps the water out!"

Like the perfect seedboat, thought Glogmeriss. Only no boat of reeds could ever be made THAT watertight, not so it could be plunged underwater and stay dry inside.

That night they built a fire and roasted the clams and mussels and oysters on the ends of sticks. They were tough and rubbery and they tasted salty--but Glogmeriss soon discovered that the very saltiness was the reason this was such a treat, that and the juices they

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released when you first chewed on them. Zawada laughed at him for chewing his first bite so long. "Cut it off in smaller bits," she said, "and then chew it till it stops tasting good and then swallow it whole." The first time he tried, it took a bit of doing to swallow it without gagging, but he soon got used to it and it WAS delicious.

"Don't drink so much of your water," said Zawada.

"I'm thirsty," said Glogmeriss.

"Of course you are," she said. "But when we run out of fresh water, we have to leave. There's nothing to drink in this place. So drink only a little at a time, so we can stay another day."

The next morning he helped with the clam-digging, and his powerful shoulders and arms allowed him to excel at this task, just as with so many others. But he didn't have the appetite for roasting them, and wandered off alone while the others feasted on the shore. They did their digging in a narrow inlet of the sea, where a long thin finger of water surged inward at high tide and then retreated almost completely at low tide. The finger of the sea seemed to point straight toward the land of the Derku, and it made Glogmeriss think of home.

Why did I come here? Why did the god go to so much trouble to bring me? Why was I saved from the cats and the lightning and the flood?



Was it just to see this great water and taste the salty meat of the clams? These are marvels, it's true, but no greater than the marvel of the castrated bull-ox that I rode, or the lightning fires, or the log that was my brother in the flood. Why would it please the god to bring me here?

He heard footsteps and knew at once that it was Zawada. He did not look up. Soon he felt her arms come around him from behind, her swelling breasts pressed against his back.

"Why do you look toward your home?" she asked softly. "Haven't I made you happy?"

"You've made me happy," he said.

"But you look sad."

He nodded.

"The gods trouble you," she said. "I know that look on your face. You never speak of it, but I know at such times you are thinking of the god who brought you here and wondering if she loved you or hated you."

He laughed aloud. "Do you see inside my skin, Zawada?"

"Not your skin," she said. "But I could see inside your loincloth when you first arrived, which is why I told my father to let me be the one to marry you. I had to beat up my sister before she would let me be the one to share your sleeping mat that night. She has never forgiven me. But I wanted your babies."

Glogmeriss grunted. He had known about the sister's jealousy, but since she was ugly and he had never slept with her, her jealousy was never important to him.

"Maybe the god brought you here to see where she vomited."

That again.

"It was in a terrible storm."

"You told me about the storm," said Glogmeriss, not wanting to hear it all again.

"When the storms are strong, the sea rises higher than usual. It heaved its way far up this channel. Much farther than this tongue of the sea reaches now. It flowed so far that it reached the first of the small seas and made it flow over and then it reached the second one and that, too, flowed over. But then the storm ceased and the water flowed back to where it was before, only so much salt water had gone into the small seas that they were poisoned."

"So long ago, and yet the salt remains?"

"Oh, I think the sea has vomited into them a couple more times

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sincethen. Never as strongly as that first time, though. You can see this channel--so much of the seawater flowed through here that it cut a channel in the sand. This finger of the sea is all that's left of it, but you can see the banks of it--like a dried-up river, you see? That was cut then, the ground used to be at the level of the



rest of the valley there. The sea still reaches into that new channel, as if it remembered. Before, the shore used to be clear out there, where the waves are high. It's much better for clam-digging now, though, because this whole channel gets filled with clams and we can get them easily."

Glogmeriss felt something stirring inside him. Something in what she had just said was very, very important, but he didn't know what it was.

He cast his gaze off to the left, to the shelf of land that he had walked along all the way on his manhood journey, that this tribe had followed in coming here. The absolutely level path.

Absolutely level. And yet the path was not more than three or four man-heights above the level of the Heaving Sea, while back in the lands of the Derku, the shelf was so far above the level of the Salt Sea that it felt as though you were looking down from a mountain. The whole plain was enormously wide, and yet it went so deep before reaching the water of the Salt Sea that you could see for miles and miles, all the way across. It was deep, that plain, a valley, really. A deep gouge cut into the earth. And if this shelf of land was truly level, the Heaving Sea was far, far higher.

He thought of the floods. Thought of the powerful current of the flooding river that had snagged him and swept him downward. And then he thought of a storm that lifted the water of the Heaving Sea and sent it crashing along this valley floor, cutting a new channel until it reached those smaller seas, filling them with saltwater, causing THEM to flood and spill over. Spill over where? Where did their water flow? He already knew--they emptied down into the Salt Sea. Down and down and down.

It will happen again, thought Glogmeriss. There will be another storm, and this time the channel will be cut deeper, and when the storm subsides the water will still flow, because now the channel will be below the level of the Heaving Sea at high tide. And at each high tide, more water will flow and the channel will get deeper and deeper, till it's deep enough that even at low tide the water will still flow through it, cutting the channel more and more, and the water will come faster and faster, and then the Heaving Sea will spill over into the great valley, faster and faster and faster.

All this water then will spill out of the Heaving Sea and go down into the plain until the two seas are the same level. And once that happens, it will never go back.

The lands of the Derku are far below the level of the new sea, even if it's only half as high as the waters of the Heaving Sea are now. Our city will be covered. The whole land. And it won't be a trickle. It will be a great bursting of water, a huge wave of water, like the first gush of the floodwater down the Selud River from the Sweetwater Sea. Just like that, only the Heaving Sea is far larger than the Sweetwater Sea, and its water is angry and poisonous.



"Yes," said Glogmeriss. "I see what you brought me here to show me."

"Don't be silly," said Zawada. "I brought you here to have you eat clams!"

"I wasn't talking to you," said Glogmeriss. He stood up and left her, walking down the finger of the sea, where the tide was rising again, bringing the water lunging back up the channel, pointing like a javelin toward the heart of the Derku people. Zawada followed behind him. He didn't mind.

Glogmeriss reached the waves of the rising tide and plunged in. He knelt down in the water and let a wave crash over him. The force of the water toppled him, twisted him until he couldn't tell which was

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was up and he thought he would drown under the water. But then the wave retreated again, leaving him in the shallow water on the shore.

He crawled back out stayed there, the taste of salt on his lips, gasping for air, and then cried out, "Why are you doing this! Why are you doing this to my people!"

Zawada stood watching him, and others of the tribe came to join her, to find out what the strange giant man was doing in the sea.

Angry, thought Glogmeriss. The god is angry with my people. And I have been brought here to see just what terrible punishment the god has prepared for them. "Why?" he cried again. "Why not just break through this channel and send the flood and bury the Derku people in poisonous water? Why must I be shown this first? So I can save myself by staying high out of the flood's way? Why should I be saved alive, and all my family, all my friends be destroyed? What is their crime that I am not also guilty of? If you brought me here to save me, then you failed, God, because I refuse to stay, I will go back to my people and warn them all, I'll tell them what you're planning. You can't save me alone. When the flood comes I'll be right there with the rest of them. So to save me, you must save them all. If you don't like THAT, then you should have drowned me just now when you had the chance!"

Glogmeriss rose dripping from the beach and began to walk, past the people, up toward the shelf of land that made the level highway back home to the Derku people. The tribe understood at once that he was leaving, and they began calling out to him, begging him to stay.

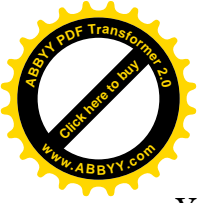
"I can't," he said. "Don't try to stop me. Even the god can't stop me."

They didn't try to stop him, not by force. But the chief ran after him, walked beside him--ran beside him, really, for that was the only way he could keep up with Glogmeriss's long-legged stride.

"Friend, Son," said the chief. "Don't you know that you will be king of these people after me?"

"A people should have a king who is one of their own."

"But you ARE one of us now," said the chief. "The mightiest of us."



You will make us a great people! The god has chosen you, do you think we can't see that? This is why the god brought you here, to lead us and make us great!"

"No," said Glogmeriss. "I'm a man of the Derku people."

"Where are they? Far from here. And there is my daughter with your first child in her womb. What do they have in Derku lands that can compare to that?"

"They have the womb where I was formed," said Glogmeriss. "They have the man who put me there. They have the others who came from that woman and that man. They are my people."

"Then go back, but not today! Wait till you see your child born. Decide then!"

Glogmeriss stopped so abruptly that the chief almost fell over, trying to stop running and stay with him. "Listen to me, father of my wife. If you were up in the mountain hunting, and you looked down and saw a dozen huge cats heading toward the place where your people were living, would say to yourself, Oh, I suppose the god brought me here to save me? Or would you run down the mountain and warn them, and do all you could to fight off the cats and save your people?"

"What is this story?" asked the chief. "There are no cats. You've seen no cats."

"I've seen the god heaving in his anger," said Glogmeriss. "I've seen how he looms over my people, ready to destroy them all. A flood that will tear their flimsy reed boats to pieces. A flood that will come in a single great wave and then will never go away. Do you think I shouldn't warn my mother and father, my brothers and sisters, the friends of my childhood?"

"I think you have new brothers and sisters, a new father and mother.

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The god isn't angry with US. The god isn't angry with you. We should stay together. Don't you WANT to stay with us and live and rule over us? You can be our king now, today. You can be king over me, I give you my place!"

"Keep your place," said Glogmeriss. "Yes, a part of me wants to stay. A part of me is afraid. But that is the part of me that is Glogmeriss, and still a boy. If I don't go home and warn my people and show them how to save themselves from the god, then I will always be a boy, nothing but a boy, call me a king if you want, but I will be a boy-king, a coward, a child until the day I die. So I tell you now, it is the child who dies in this place, not the man.

It was the child Glogmeriss who married Zawada. Tell her that a strange man named Naog killed her husband. Let her marry someone else, someone of her own tribe, and never think of Glogmeriss again." Glogmeriss kissed his father-in-law and embraced him. Then he turned away, and with his first step along the path leading back to the Derku people, he knew that he was truly Naog now, the man who



would save the Derku people from the fury of the god.

Kemal watched the lone man of the Engu clan as he walked away from the beach, as he conversed with his father-in-law, as he turned his face again away from the Gulf of Aden, toward the land of the doomed crocodile-worshippers whose god was no match for the forces about to be unleashed on them. This was the one, Kemal knew, for he had seen the wooden boat--more of a watertight cabin on a raft, actually, with none of this nonsense about taking animals two by two. This was the man of legends, but seeing his face, hearing his voice, Kemal was no closer to understanding him than he had been before. What can we see, using the TruSite II? Only what is visible. We may be able to range through time, to see the most intimate, the most terrible, the most horrifying, the most inspiring moments of human history, but we only see them, we only hear them, we are witnesses but we know nothing of the thing that matters most: motive.

Why didn't you stay with your new tribe, Naog? They heeded your warning, and camped always on higher ground during the monsoon season. They lived through the flood, all of them. And when you went home and no one listened to your warnings, why did you stay? What was it that made you remain among them, enduring their ridicule as you built your watertight seedboat? You could have left at any time--there were others who cut themselves loose from their birth tribe and wandered through the world until they found a new home. The Nile was waiting for you. The grasslands of Arabia. They were already there, calling to you, even as your own homeland became poisonous to you. Yet you remained among the Engu, and by doing so, you not only gave the world an unforgettable story, you also changed the course of history. What kind of being is it who can change the course of history, just because he follows his own unbending will?

It was on his third morning that Naog realized that he was not alone on his return journey. He awoke in his tree because he heard shuffling footsteps through the grass nearby. Or perhaps it was something else that woke him--some unhearable yearning that he nevertheless heard. He looked, and saw in the faint light of the thinnest crescent moon that a lone baboon was shambling along, lazy, staggering. No doubt an old male, thought Naog, who will soon be meat for some predator.

Then his eyes adjusted and he realized that this lone baboon was not as close as he had thought, that in fact it was much bigger, much TALLER than he had thought. It was not male, either, but female, and far from being a baboon, it was a human, a pregnant woman, and he knew her now and shuddered at his own thought of her becoming the meal for some cat, some crocodile, some pack of dogs.

Silently he unfastened himself from his sleeping tree and dropped to the ground. In moments he was beside her.



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"Zawada," he said.

She didn't turn to look at him.

"Zawada, what are you doing?"

Now she stopped. "Walking," she said.

"You're asleep," he said. "You're in a dream."

"No, YOU'RE asleep," she said, giggling madly in her weariness.

"Why have you come? I left you."

"I know," she said.

"I'm returning to my own people. You have to stay with yours." But he knew even as he said it that she could not go back there, not unless he went with her. Physically she was unable to go on by herself--clearly she had eaten nothing and slept little in three days. Why she had not died already, taken by some beast, he could not guess. But if she was to return to her people, he would have to take her, and he did not want to go back there. It made him very angry, and so his voice burned when he spoke to her.

"I wanted to," she said. "I wanted to weep for a year and then make an image of you out of sticks and burn it."

"You should have," he said.

"Your son wouldn't let me." As she spoke, she touched her belly.

"Son? Has some god told you who he is?"

"He came to me himself in a dream, and he said, 'Don't let my father go without me.' So I brought him to you."

"I don't want him, son OR daughter." But he knew even as he said it that it wasn't true.

She didn't know it, though. Her eyes welled with tears and she sank down into the grass. "Good, then," she said. "Go on with your journey. I'm sorry the god led me near you, so you had to be bothered." She sank back in the grass. Seeing the faint gleam of light reflected from her skin awoke feelings that Naog was now ashamed of, memories of how she had taught him the easing of a man's passion.

"I can't walk off and leave you."

"You already did," she said. "So do it again. I need to sleep now."

"You'll be torn by animals and eaten."

"Let them," she said. "You never chose me, Derku man, I chose YOU. I invited this baby into my body. Now if we die here in the grass, what is that to you? All you care about is not having to watch. So don't watch. Go. The sky is getting light. Run on ahead. If we die, we die. We're nothing to you anyway."

Her words made him ashamed. "I left you knowing you and the baby would be safe, at home. Now you're here and you aren't safe, and I can't walk away from you."

"So run," she said. "I was your wife, and this was your son, but in your heart we're already dead anyway."



"I didn't bring you because you'd have to learn the Derku language. It's much harder than your language."

"I would have had to learn it anyway, you fool," she said. "The baby inside me is a Derku man like you. How would I get him to understand me, if I didn't learn Derku talk?"

Naog wanted to laugh aloud at her hopeless ignorance. But then, how would she know? Naog had seen the children of captives and knew that in Derku lands they grew up speaking the Derku language, even when both parents were from another tribe that had not one word of Derku language in it. But Zawada had never seen the babies of strangers; her tribe captured no one, went on no raids, but rather lived at peace, moving from place to place, gathering whatever the earth or the sea had to offer them. How could she match even a small part of the great knowledge of the Derku, who brought the whole world within their city?

He wanted to laugh, but he did not laugh. Instead he watched over her as she slept, as the day waxed and waned. As the sun rose he

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carried her to the tree to sleep in the shade. Keeping his eye open for animals prowling near her, he gathered such leaves and seeds and roots as the ground offered the traveler at this time of year. Twice he came back and found her breath rasping and noisy; then he made her wake enough to drink a little of his water, but she was soon asleep, water glistening on her chin.

At last in the late afternoon, with the air was hot and still, he squatted down in the grass beside her and woke her for good, showing her the food. She ate ravenously, and when she was done, she embraced him and called him the best of the gods because he didn't leave her to die after all.

"I'm not a god," he said, baffled.

"All my people know you are a god, from a land of gods. So large, so powerful, so good. You came us so you could have a human baby. But this baby is only half human. How will he ever be happy, living among US, never knowing the gods?"

"You've seen the Heaving Sea, and you call ME a god?"

"Take me with you to the land of the Derku. Let me give birth to your baby there. I will leave it with your mother and your sisters, and I will go home. I know I don't belong among the gods, but my baby does."

In his heart, Naog wanted to say yes, you'll stay only till the baby is born, and then you'll go home. But he remembered her patience as he learned the language of her people. He remembered the sweet language of the night, and the way he had to laugh at how she tried to act like a grown woman when she was only a child, and yet she couldn't act like a child because she was, after all, now a woman. Because of me she is a woman, thought Naog, and because of her and



her people I will come home a man. Do I tell her she must go away, even though I know that the others will think she's ugly as I thought she was ugly?

And she IS ugly, thought Naog. Our son, if he IS a son, will be ugly like her people, too. I will be ashamed of him. I will be ashamed of her.

Is a man ashamed of his firstborn son?

"Come home with me to the land of the Derku," said Naog. "We will tell them together about the Heaving Sea, and how one day soon it will leap over the low walls of sand and pour into this great plain in a flood that will cover the Derku lands forever. There will be a great migration. We will move, all of us, to the land my father found. The crocodiles live there also, along the banks of the Nile."

"Then you will truly be the greatest among the gods," she said, and the worship in her eyes made him proud and ill-at-ease, both at once. Yet how could he deny that the Derku were gods? Compared to her poor tribe, they would seem so. Thousands of people living in the midst of their own canals; the great fields of planted grain stretching far in every direction; the great wall of earth surrounding the Great Derku; the seedboats scattered like strange soft boulders; the children riding their dragonboats through the canals; a land of miracles to her. Where else in all the world had so many people learned to live together, making great wealth where once there had been only savannah and floodplain?

We live like gods, compared to other people. We come like gods out of nowhere, to carry off captives the way death carries people off. Perhaps that is what the life after death is like--the REAL gods using us to dredge their canals. Perhaps that is what all of human life is for, to create slaves for the gods. And what if the gods themselves are also raided by some greater beings yet, carrying THEM off to raise grain in some unimaginable garden? Is there no end to the capturing?

There are many strange and ugly captives in Derku, thought Naog. Who will doubt me if I say that this woman is my captive? She doesn't speak the language, and soon enough she would be used to the life. I

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would be kind to her, and would treat her son well--I would hardly be the first man to father a child on a captive woman.

The thought made him blush with shame.

"Zawada, when you come to the Derku lands, you will come as my wife," he said. "And you will not have to leave. Our son will know his mother as well as his father."

Her eyes glowed. "You are the greatest and kindest of the gods."

"No," he said, angry now, because he knew very well just exactly how far from "great" and "kind" he really was, having just imagined bringing this sweet, stubborn, brave girl into captivity. "You must



never call me a god again. Ever. There is only one god, do you understand me? And it is that god that lives inside the Heaving Sea, the one that brought me to see him and sent me back here to warn my people. Call no one else a god, or you can't stay with me."

Her eyes went wide. "Is there room in the world for only one god?"

"When did a crocodile ever bury a whole land under water forever?"

Naog laughed scornfully. "All my life I have thought of the Great Derku as a terrible god, worthy of the worship of brave and terrible men. But the Great Derku is just a crocodile. It can be killed with a spear. Imagine stabbing the Heaving Sea. We can't even touch it. And yet the god can lift up that whole sea and pour it over the wall into this plain. THAT isn't just a god. That is GOD."

She looked at him in awe; he wondered whether she understood. And then realized that she could not possibly have understood, because half of what he said was in the Derku language, since he didn't even know enough words in HER language to think of these thoughts, let alone say them.

Her body was young and strong, even with a baby inside it, and the next morning she was ready to travel. He did not run now, but even so they covered ground quickly, for she was a sturdy walker. He began teaching her the Derku language as they walked, and she learned well, though she made the words sound funny, as so many captives did, never able to let go of the sounds of their native tongue, never able to pronounce the new ones.

Finally he saw the mountains that separated the Derku lands from the Salty Sea, rising from the plain. "Those will be islands," said

Naog, realizing it for the first time. "The highest ones. See?

They're higher than the shelf of land we're walking on."

Zawada nodded wisely, but he knew that she didn't really understand what he was talking about.

"Those are the Derku lands," said Naog. "See the canals and the fields?"

She looked, but seemed to see nothing unusual at all. "Forgive me," she said, "but all I see are streams and grassland."

"But that's what I meant," said Naog. "Except that the grasses grow where we plant them, and all we plant is the grass whose seed we grind into meal. And the streams you see--they go where we want them to go. Vast circles surrounding the heart of the Derku lands. And there in the middle, do you see that hill?"

"I think so," she said.

"We build that hill every year, after the floodwater."

She laughed. "You tell me that you aren't gods, and yet you make hills and streams and meadows wherever you want them!"

Naog set his face toward the Engu portion of the great city. "Come home with me," he said.

Since Zawada's people were so small, Naog had not realized that he had grown even taller during his manhood journey, but now as he led



his ugly wife through the outskirts of the city, he realized that he was taller than everyone. It took him by surprise, and at first he was disturbed because it seemed to him that everyone had grown smaller. He even said as much to Zawada--"They're all so small"--but she laughed as if it were a joke. Nothing about the place or the people seemed small to HER.

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At the edge of the Engu lands, Naog hailed the boys who were on watch. "Hai!"

"Hai!" they called back.

"I've come back from my journey!" he called.

It took a moment for them to answer. "What journey was this, tall man?"

"My manhood journey. Don't you know me? Can't you see that I'm Naog?"

The boys hooted at that. "How can you be naked when you have your napron on?"

"Naog is my manhood name," said Naog, quite annoyed now, for he had not expected to be treated with such disrespect on his return. "You probably know of my by my baby name. They called me Glogmeriss." They hooted again. "You used to be trouble, and now you're naked!" cried the bold one. "And your wife is ugly, too!"

But now Naog was close enough that the boys could see how very tall he was. Their faces grew solemn.

"My father is Twerk," said Naog. "I return from my manhood journey with the greatest tale ever told. But more important than that, I have a message from the god who lives in the Heaving Sea. When I have given my message, people will include you in my story. They will say, 'Who were the five fools who joked about Naog's name, when he came to save us from the angry god?'"

"Twerk is dead," said one of the boys.

"The Dragon took him," said another.

"He was head of the clan, and then the Great Derku began eating human flesh again, and your father gave himself to the Dragon for the clan's sake."

"Are you truly his son?"

Naog felt a gnawing pain that he did not recognize. He would soon learn to call it grief, but it was not too different from rage. "Is this another jest of yours? I'll break your heads if it is."

"By the blood of your father in the mouth of the beast, I swear that it's true!" said the boy who had earlier been the boldest in his teasing. "If you're his son, then you're the son of a great man!"

The emotion welled up inside him. "What does this mean?" cried Naog.

"The Great Derku does not eat the flesh of men! Someone has murdered my father! He would never allow such a thing!" Whether he meant his father or the Great Derku who would never allow it even Naog did not



know.

The boys ran off then, before he could strike out at them for being the tellers of such an unbearable tale. Zawada was the only one left, to pat at him, embrace him, try to soothe him with her voice. She abandoned the language of the Derku and spoke to him soothingly in her own language. But all Naog could hear was the news that his father had been fed to the Great Derku as a sacrifice for the clan. The old days were back again, and they had killed his father. His father, and not even a captive!

Others of the Engu, hearing what the boys were shouting about, brought him to his mother. Then he began to calm down, hearing her voice, the gentle reassurance of the old sound. She, at least, was unchanged. Except that she looked older, yes, and tired. "It was your father's own choice," she explained to him. "After floodwater this year the Great Derku came into the pen with a human baby in its jaws. It was a two-year-old boy of the Ko clan, and it happened he was the firstborn of his parents."

"This means only that Ko clan wasn't watchful enough," said Naog.

"Perhaps," said his mother. "But the holy men saw it as a sign from the god. Just as we stopped giving human flesh to the Great Derku when he refused it, so now when he claimed a human victim, what else were we to think?"

"Captives, then. Why not captives?"

"It was your own father who said that if the Great Derku had taken a

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child from the families of the captives, then we would sacrifice captives. But he took a child from one of our clans. What kind of sacrifice is it, to offer strangers when the Great Derku demanded the meat of the Derku people?"

"Don't you see, Mother? Father was trying to keep them from sacrificing anybody at all, by making them choose something so painful that no one would do it."

She shook her head. "How do you know what my Twerk was trying to do?"

He was trying to save YOU."

"Me?"

"Your father was clan leader by then. The holy men said, 'Let each clan give the firstborn son of the clan leader.'"

"But I was gone."

"Your father insisted on the ancient privilege, that a father may go in place of his son."

"So he died in my place, because I was gone."

"If you had been here, Glogmeriss, he would have done the same."

He thought about this for a few moments, and then answered only, "My name is Naog now."

"We thought you were dead, Naked One, Stirrer of Troubles," said Mother.



"I found a wife."

"I saw her. Ugly."

"Brave and strong and smart," said Naog.

"Born to be a captive. I chose a different wife for you."

"Zawada is my wife."

Even though Naog had returned from his journey as a man and not a boy, he soon learned that even a man can be bent by the pressure of others. This far he did NOT bend: Zawada remained his wife. But he also took the wife his mother had chosen for him, a beautiful girl named Kormo. Naog was not sure what was worse about the new arrangement--that everyone else treated Kormo as Naog's real wife and Zawada as barely a wife at all, or that when Naog was hungry with passion, it was always Kormo he thought of. But he remembered Zawada at such times, how she bore him his first child, the boy Moiro; how she followed him with such fierce courage; how good she was to him when he was a stranger. And when he remembered, he followed his duty to her rather than his natural desire. This happened so often that Kormo complained about it. This made Naog feel somehow righteous, for the truth was that his first inclination had been right. Zawada should have stayed with her own tribe. She was unhappy most of the time, and kept to herself and her baby, and as years passed, her babies. She was never accepted by the other women of the Derku. Only the captive women became friends with her, which caused even more talk and criticism.

Years passed, yes, and where was Naog's great message, the one the god had gone to such great trouble to give him? He tried to tell it.

First to the leaders of the Engu clan, the whole story of his journey, and how the Heaving Sea was far higher than the Salty Sea and would soon break through and cover all the land with water. They listened to him gravely, and then one by one they counseled with him that when the gods wish to speak to the Derku people, they will do as they did when the Great Derku ate a human baby. "Why would a god who wished to send a message to the Derku people choose a mere BOY as messenger?"

"Because I was the one who was taking the journey," he said.

"What will you have us do? Abandon our lands? Leave our canals behind, and our boats?"

"The Nile has fresh water and a flood season, my father saw it."

"But the Nile also has strong tribes living up and down its shores. Here we are masters of the world. No, we're not leaving on the word of a boy."

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They insisted that he tell no one else, but he didn't obey them. In fact he told anyone who would listen, but the result was the same. For his father's memory or for his mother's sake, or perhaps just because he was so tall and strong, people listened politely--but



Naog knew at the end of each telling of his tale that nothing had changed. No one believed him. And when he wasn't there, they repeated his stories as if they were jokes, laughing about riding a castrated bull ox, about calling a tree branch his brother, and most of all about the idea of a great flood that would never go away.

Poor Naog, they said. He clearly lost his mind on his manhood journey, coming home with impossible stories that he obviously believes and an ugly woman that he dotes on.

Zawada urged him to leave. "You know that the flood is coming," she said. "Why not take your family up and out of here? Go to the Nile ourselves, or return to my father's tribe."

But he wouldn't hear of it. "I would go if I could bring my people with me. But what kind of man am I, to leave behind my mother and my brothers and sisters, my clan and all my kin?"

"You would have left me behind," she said once. He didn't answer her. He also didn't go.

In the third year after his return, when he had three sons to take riding on his dragonboat, he began the strangest project anyone had ever seen. No one was surprised, though, that crazy Naog would do something like this. He began to take several captives with him upriver to a place where tall, heavy trees grew. There they would wear out stone axes cutting down trees, then shape them into logs and ride them down the river. Some people complained that the captives belonged to everybody and it was wrong for Naog to have their exclusive use for so many days, but Naog was such a large and strange man that no one wanted to push the matter.

One or two at a time, they came to see what Naog was doing with the logs. They found that he had taught his captives to notch them and lash them together into a huge square platform, a dozen strides on a side. Then they made a second platform crossways to the first and on top of it, lashing every log to every other log, or so it seemed.

Between the two layers he smeared pitch, and then on the top of the raft he built a dozen reed structures like the tops of seedboats.

Before floodwater he urged his neighbors to bring him their grain, and he would keep it all dry. A few of them did, and when the rivers rose during floodwater, everyone saw that his huge seedboat floated, and no water seeped up from below into the seedhouses. More to the point, Naog's wives and children also lived on the raft, dry all the time, sleeping easily through the night instead of having to remain constantly wakeful, watching to make sure the children didn't fall into the water.

The next year, Engu clan built several more platforms following Naog's pattern. They didn't always lash them as well as he had, and during the next flood several of their rafts came apart--but gradually, so they had time to move the seeds. Engu clan had far more seed make it through to planting season than any of the other tribes, and soon the men had to range farther and farther upriver,



because all the nearer trees of suitable size had been harvested. Naog himself, though, wasn't satisfied. It was Zawada who pointed out that when the great flood came, the water wouldn't rise gradually as it did in the river floods. "It'll be like the waves against the shore, crashing with such force ... and these reed shelters will never hold against such a wave."

For several years Naog experimented with logs until at last he had the largest movable structure ever built by human hands. The raft was as long as ever, but somewhat narrower. Rising from notches between logs in the upper platform were sturdy vertical posts, and these were bridged and roofed with wood. But instead of using logs for the planking and the roofing, Naog and the captives who served him split the logs carefully into planks, and these were smeared

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inside and out with pitch, and then another wall and ceiling were built inside, sandwiching the tar between them. People were amused to see Naog's captives hoisting dripping baskets of water to the roof of this giant seedboat and pouring them out onto it. "What, does he think that if he waters these trees, they'll grow like grass?" Naog heard them, but he cared not at all, for when they spoke he was inside his boat, seeing that not a drop of water made it inside.

The doorway was the hardest part, because it, too, had to be able to be sealed against the flood. Many nights Naog lay awake worrying about it before building this last and largest and tightest seedboat. The answer came to him in a dream. It was a memory of the little crabs that lived in the sand on the shore of the Heaving Sea. They dug holes in the sand and then when the water washed over them, their holes filled in above their heads, keeping out the water. Naog awoke knowing that he must put the door in the roof of his seedboat, and arrange a way to lash it from the inside.

"How will you see to lash it?" said Zawada. "There's no light inside."

So Naog and his three captives learned to lash the door in place in utter darkness.

When they tested it, water leaked through the edges of the door. The solution was to smear more pitch, fresh pitch, around the edges of the opening and lay the door into it so that when they lashed it the seal was tight. It was very hard to open the door again after that, but they got it open from the inside--and when they could see again they found that not a drop of water had got inside. "No more trials," said Naog.

Their work then was to gather seeds--and more than seeds this time. Water, too. The seeds went into baskets with lids that were lashed down, and the water went into many, many flasks. Naog and his captives and their wives worked hard during every moment of daylight



to make the waterbags and seedbaskets and fill them. The Engu didn't mind at all storing more and more of their grain in Naog's boat--after all, it was ludicrously watertight, so that it was sure to make it through the flood season in fine form. They didn't have to believe in his nonsense about a god in the Heaving Sea that was angry with the Derku people in order to recognize a good seedboat when they saw it.

His boat was nearly full when word spread that a group of new captives from the southeast were telling tales of a new river of saltwater that had flowed into the Salty Sea from the direction of the Heaving Sea. When Naog heard the news, he immediately climbed a tree so he could look toward the southeast. "Don't be silly," they said to him. "You can't see the Salty Shore from here, even if you climb the tallest tree."

"I was looking for the flood," said Naog. "Don't you see that the Heaving Sea must have broken through again, when a storm whipped the water into madness. Then the storm subsided, and the sea stopped flowing over the top. But the channel must be wider and longer and deeper now. Next time it won't end when the storm ends. Next time it will be the great flood."

"How do you know these things, Naog? You're a man like the rest of us. Just because you're taller doesn't mean you can see the future."

"The god is angry," said Naog. "The true god, not this silly crocodile god that you feed on human flesh." And now, in the urgency of knowing the imminence of the flood, he said what he had said to no one but Zawada. "Why do you think the true god is so angry with us? Because of the crocodile! Because we feed human flesh to the Dragon! The true god doesn't want offerings of human flesh. It's an abomination. It's as forbidden as the forbidden fruit. The crocodile god is not a god at all, it's just a wild animal, one that crawls on its belly, and yet we bow down to it. We bow down to the enemy of

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the true god!"

Hearing him say this made the people angry. Some were so furious they wanted to feed him to the Great Derku at once, but Naog only laughed at them. "If the Great Derku is such a wonderful god, let HIM come and get me, instead of you taking me! But no, you don't believe for a moment that he CAN do it. Yet the TRUE god had the power to send me a castrated bull to ride, and a log to save me from a flood, and trees to catch the lightning so it wouldn't strike me. When has the Dragon ever had the power to do THAT?"

His ridicule of the Great Derku infuriated them, and violence might have resulted, had Naog not had such physical presence, and had his father not been a noble sacrifice to the Dragon. Over the next weeks, though, it became clear that Naog was now regarded by all as something between an enemy and a stranger. No one came to speak to



him, or to Zawada, either. Only Kormo continued to have contact with the rest of the Derku people.

"They want me to leave you," she told him. "They want me to come back to my family, because you are the enemy of the god."

"And will you go?" he said.

She fixed her sternest gaze on him. "You are my family now," she said. "Even when you prefer this ugly woman to me, you are still my husband."

Naog's mother came to him once, to warn him. "They have decided tokill you. They're simply biding their time, waiting for the right moment."

"Waiting for the courage to fight me, you mean," said Naog.

"Tell them that a madness came upon you, but it's over," she said.

"Tell them that it was the influence of this ugly foreign wife of yours, and then they'll kill her and not you."

Naog didn't bother to answer her.

His mother burst into tears. "Was this what I bore you for? I named you very well, Glogmeriss, my son of trouble and anguish!"

"Listen to me, Mother. The flood is coming. We may have very little warning when it actually comes, very little time to get into my seedboat. Stay near, and when you hear us calling--"

"I'm glad your father is dead rather than to see his firstborn son so gone in madness."

"Tell all the others, too, Mother. I'll take as many into my seedboat as will fit. But once the door in the roof is closed, I can't open it again. Anyone who isn't inside when we close it will never get inside, and they will die."

She burst into tears and left.

Not far from the seedboat was a high hill. As the rainy season neared, Naog took to sending one of his servants to the top of the hill several times a day, to watch toward the southeast. "What should we look for?" they asked. "I don't know," he answered. "A new river. A wall of water. A dark streak in the distance. It will be something that you've never seen before."

The sky filled with clouds, dark and threatening. The heart of the storm was to the south and east. Naog made sure that his wives and children and the wives and children of his servants didn't stray far from the seedboat. They freshened the water in the waterbags, to stay busy. A few raindrops fell, and then the rain stopped, and then a few more raindrops. But far to the south and east it was raining heavily. And the wind--the wind kept rising higher and higher, and it was out of the east. Naog could imagine it whipping the waves higher and farther into the deep channel that the last storm had opened. He imagined the water spilling over into the salty riverbed. He imagined it tearing deeper and deeper into the sand, more and more of it tearing away under the force of the torrent. Until finally it was no longer the force of the storm driving the water



through the channel, but the weight of the whole sea, because at

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last it had been cut down below the level of low tide. And then the sea tearing deeper and deeper.

"Naog." It was the head of the Engu clan, and a dozen men with him.

"The god is ready for you."

Naog looked at them as if they were foolish children. "This is the storm," he said. "Go home and bring your families to my seedboat, so they can come through the flood alive."

"This is no storm," said the head of the clan. "Hardly any rain has fallen."

The servant who was on watch came running, out of breath, his arms bleeding where he had skidded on the ground as he fell more than once in his haste. "Naog, master!" he cried. "It's plain to see--the Salty Shore is nearer. The Salty Sea is rising, and fast."

What a torrent of water it would take, to make the Salty Sea rise in its bed. Naog covered his face with his hands. "You're right," said Naog. "The god is ready for me. The true god. It was for this hour that I was born. As for YOUR god--the true god will drown him as surely as he will drown anyone who doesn't come to my seedboat."

"Come with us now," said the head of the clan. But his voice was not so certain now.

To his servants and his wives, Naog said, "Inside the seedboat. When all are in, smear on the pitch, leaving only one side where I can slide down."

"You come too, husband," said Zawada.

"I can't," he said. "I have to give warning one last time."

"Too late!" cried the servant with the bleeding arms. "Come now."

"You go now," said Naog. "I'll be back soon. But if I'm not back, seal the door and open it for no man, not even me."

"When will I know to do that?" he asked in anguish.

"Zawada will tell you," said Naog. "She'll know." Then he turned to the head of the clan. "Come with me," he said. "Let's give the warning." Then Naog strode off toward the bank of the canal where his mother and brothers and sisters kept their dragonboats. The men who had come to capture him followed him, unsure who had captured whom.

It was raining again, a steady rainfall whipped by an ever-stronger wind. Naog stood on the bank of the canal and shouted against the wind, crying out for his family to join him. "There's not much time!" he cried. "Hurry, come to my seedboat!"

"Don't listen to the enemy of the god!" cried the head of the clan.

Naog looked down into the water of the canal. "Look, you fools! Can't you see that the canal is rising?"

"The canal always rises in a storm."

Naog knelt down and dipped his hand into the canal and tasted the



water. "Salt," he said. "Salt!" he shouted. "This isn't rising because of rain in the mountains! The water is rising because the Salty Sea is filling with the water of the Heaving Sea. It's rising to cover us! Come with me now, or not at all! When the door of my seedboat closes, we'll open it for no one." Then he turned and loped off toward the seedboat.

By the time he got there, the water was spilling over the banks of the canals, and he had to splash through several shallow streams where there had been no streams before. Zawada was standing on top of the roof, and screamed at him to hurry as he clambered onto the top of it. He looked in the direction she had been watching, and saw what she had seen. In the distance, but not so very far away, a dark wall rushing toward them. A plug of earth must have broken loose, and a fist of the sea hundreds of feet high was slamming through the gap. It spread at once, of course, and as it spread the wave dropped until it was only fifteen or twenty feet high. But that was high enough. It would do.

"You fool!" cried Zawada. "Do you want to watch it or be saved from it?"

Naog followed Zawada down into the boat. Two of the servants smeared

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on a thick swatch of tar on the fourth side of the doorway. Then Naog, who was the only one tall enough to reach outside the hole, drew the door into place, snugging it down tight. At once it became perfectly dark inside the seedboat, and silent, too, except for the breathing. "This time for real," said Naog softly. He could hear the other men working at the lashings. They could feel the floor moving under them--the canals had spilled over so far now that the raft was rising and floating.

Suddenly they heard a noise. Someone was pounding on the wall of the seedboat. And there was shouting. They couldn't hear the words, the walls were too thick. But they knew what was being said all the same. Save us. Let us in. Save us.

Kormo's voice was filled with anguish. "Naog, can't we--"

"If we open it now we'll never close it again in time. We'd all die.

They had every chance and every warning. My lashing is done."

"Mine too," answered one of the servants.

The silence of the others said they were still working hard.

"Everyone hold onto the side posts," said Naog. "There's so much room here. We could have taken on so many more."

The pounding outside was in earnest now. They were using axes to hack at the wood. Or at the lashings. And someone was on top of the seedboat now, many someones, trying to pry at the door.

"Now, O God, if you mean to save us at all, send the water now."

"Done," said another of the servants. So three of the four corners were fully lashed.



Suddenly the boat lurched and rocked upward, then spun crazily in every direction at once. Everyone screamed, and few were able to keep their handhold, such was the force of the flood. They plunged to one side of the seedboat, a jumble of humans and spilling baskets and water bottles. Then they struck something--a tree? The side of a mountain?--and lurched in another direction entirely, and in the darkness it was impossible to tell anymore whether they were on the floor or the roof or one of the walls.

Did it go on for days, or merely hours? Finally the awful turbulence gave way to a spinning all in one plane. The flood was still rising; they were still caught in the twisting currents; but they were no longer caught in that wall of water, in the great wave that the god had sent. They were on top of the flood.

Gradually they sorted themselves out. Mothers found their children, husbands found their wives. Many were crying, but as the fear subsided they were able to find the ones who were genuinely in pain. But what could they do in the darkness to deal with bleeding injuries, or possible broken bones? They could only plead with the god to be merciful and let them know when it was safe to open the door.

After a while, though, it became plain that it wasn't safe NOT to open it. The air was musty and hot and they were beginning to pant. "I can't breathe," said Zawada. "Open the door," said Kormo. Naog spoke aloud to the god. "We have no air in here," he said. "I have to open the door. Make it safe. Let no other wave wash over us with the door open."

But when he went to open the door, he couldn't find it in the darkness. For a sickening moment he thought: What if we turned completely upside down, and the door is now under us? I never thought of that. We'll die in here.

Then he found it, and began fussing with the lashings. But it was hard in the darkness. They had tied so hurriedly, and he wasn't thinking all that well. But soon he heard the servants also at work, muttering softly, and one by one they got their lashings loose and Naog shoved upward on the door.

It took forever before the door budged, or so it seemed, but when at last it rocked upward, a bit of faint light and a rush of air came

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into the boat and everyone cried out at once in relief and gratitude. Naog pushed the door upward and then maneuvered it to lie across the opening at an angle, so that the heavy rain outside wouldn't inundate them. He stood there holding the door in place, even though the wind wanted to pick it up and blow it away--a slab of wood as heavy as that one was!--while in twos and threes they came to the opening and breathed, or lifted children to catch a breath of air. There was enough light to bind up some bleeding



injuries, and to realize that no bones were broken after all.

The rain went on forever, or so it seemed, the rain and the wind. And then it stopped, and they were able to come out onto the roof of the seedboat and look at the sunlight and stare at the distant horizon. There was no land at all, just water. "The whole earth is gone," said Kormo. "Just as you said.

"The Heaving Sea has taken over this place," said Naog. "But we'll come to try land. The current will take us there."

There was much debris floating on the water--torn-up trees and bushes, for the flood had scraped the whole face of the land. A few rotting bodies of animals. If anyone saw a human body floating by, they said nothing about it.

After days, a week, perhaps longer of floating without sight of land, they finally began skirting a shoreline. Once they saw the smoke of someone's fire--people who lived high above the great valley of the Salty Sea had been untouched by the flood. But there was no way to steer the boat toward shore. Like a true seedboat, it drifted unless something drew it another way. Naog cursed himself for his foolishness in not including dragonboats in the cargo of the boat. He and the other men and women might have tied lines to the seedboat and to themselves and paddled the boat to shore. As it was, they would last only as long as their water lasted.

It was long enough. The boat fetched up against a grassy shore. Naog sent several of the servants ashore and they used a rope to tie the boat to a tree. But it was useless--the current was still too strong, and the boat tore free. They almost lost the servants, stranding them on the shore, forever separated from their families, but they had the presence of mind to swim for the end of the rope. The next day they did better--more lines, all the men on shore, drawing the boat further into a cove that protected it from the current. They lost no time in unloading the precious cargo of seeds, and searching for a source of fresh water. Then they began the unaccustomed task of hauling all the baskets of grain by hand. There were no canals to ease the labor.

"Perhaps we can find a place to dig canals again," said Kormo.

"No!" said Zawada vehemently. "We will never build such a place again. Do you want the god to send another flood?"

"There will be no other flood," said Naog. "The Heaving Sea has had its victory. But we will also build no canals. We will keep no crocodile, or any other animal as our god. We will never sacrifice forbidden fruit to any god, because the true god hates those who do that. And we will tell our story to anyone who will listen to it, so that others will learn how to avoid the wrath of the true god, the god of power."

Kemal watched as Naog and his people came to shore not far from Gibeil and set up farming in the El Qa' Valley in the shadows of the mountains of Sinai. The fact of the flood was well known, and many



travelers came to see this vast new sea where once there had been dry land. More and more of them also came to the new village that Naog and his people built, and word of his story also spread. Kemal's work was done. He had found Atlantis. He had found Noah, and Gilgamesh. Many of the stories that had collected around those names came from other cultures and other times, but the core was true, and Kemal had found them and brought them back to the knowledge of humankind.

But what did it mean? Naog gave warning, but no one listened. His
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story remained in people's minds, but what difference did it make? As far as Kemal was concerned, all old-world civilizations after Atlantis were dependent on that first civilization. The IDEA of the city was already with the Egyptians and the Sumerians and the people of the Indus and even the Chinese, because the story of the Derku people, under one name or another, had spread far and wide--the Golden Age. People remembered well that once there was a great land that was blessed by the gods until the sea rose up and swallowed their land. People who lived in different landscapes tried to make sense of the story. To the island-hopping Greeks Atlantis became an island that sank into the sea. To the plains-dwelling Sumerians the flood was caused by rain, not by the sea leaping out of its bed to swallow the earth. Someone wondered how, if all the land was covered, the animals survived, and thus the account of animals two by two was added to the story of Naog. At some point, when people still remembered that the name meant "naked," a story was added about his sons covering his nakedness as he lay in a drunken stupor. All of this was decoration, however. People remembered both the Derku people and the one man who led his family through the flood. But they would have remembered Atlantis with or without Naog, Kemal knew that. What difference did his saga make, to anyone but himself and his household? As others studied the culture of the Derku, Kemal remained focused on Naog himself. If anything, Naog's life was proof that one person makes no difference at all in history. He saw the flood coming, he warned his people about it when there was plenty of time, he showed them how to save themselves, and yet nothing changed outside his own immediate family group. That was the way history worked. Great forces sweep people along, and now and then somebody floats to the surface and becomes famous but it means nothing, it amounts to nothing.

Yet Kemal could not believe it. Naog may not have accomplished what he THOUGHT his goal was--to save his people--but he did accomplish something. He never lived to see the result of it, but because of his survival the Atlantis stories were tinged with something else.

It was not just a golden age, not just a time of greatness and wealth and leisure and city life, a land of giants and gods. Naog's



version of the story also penetrated the public consciousness and remained. The people were destroyed because the greatest of gods was offended by their sins. The list of sins shifted and changed over time, but certain ideas remained: That it was wrong to live in a city, where people get lifted up in the pride of their hearts and think that they are too powerful for the gods to destroy. That the one who seems to be crazy may in fact be the only one who sees the truth. That the greatest of gods is the one you can't see, the one who has power over the earth and the sea and the sky, all at once. And, above all, this: That it was wrong to sacrifice human beings to the gods.

It took thousands of years, and there were places where Naog's passionate doctrine did not penetrate until modern times, but the root of it was there in the day he came home and found that his father had been fed to the Dragon. Those who thought that it was right to offer human beings to the Dragon were all dead, and the one who had long proclaimed that it was wrong was still alive. The god had preserved him and killed all of them. Wherever the idea of Atlantis spread, some version of this story came with it, and in the end all the great civilizations that were descended from Atlantis learned not to offer the forbidden fruit to the gods.

In the Americas, though, no society grew up that owed a debt to Atlantis, for the same rising of the world ocean that closed the land bridge between Yemen and Djibouti also broke the land bridge between America and the old world. The story of Naog did not touch there, and it seemed to Kemal absolutely clear what the cost of that was. Because they had no memory of Atlantis, it took the people of the Americas thousands of years longer to develop civilization--the

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city. Egypt was already ancient when the Olmecs first built amid the swampy land of the bay of Campeche. And because they had no story of Naog, warning that the most powerful of gods rejected killing human beings, the old ethos of human sacrifice remained in full force, virtually unquestioned. The carnage of the Mexica--the Aztecs--took it to the extreme, but it was there already, throughout the Caribbean basin, a tradition of human blood being shed to feed the hunger of the gods.

Kemal could hardly say that the bloody warfare of the old world was much of an improvement over this. But it was different, and in his mind, at least, it was different specifically because of Naog. If he had not ridden out the flood to tell his story of the true God who forbade sacrifice, the old world would not have been the same. New civilizations might have risen more quickly, with no stories warning of the danger of city life. And those new civilizations might all have worshiped the same Dragon, or some other, as hungry for human flesh as the gods of the new world were hungry for human blood.



On the day that Kemal became sure that his Noah had actually changed the world, he was satisfied. He said little and wrote nothing about his conclusion. This surprised even him, for in all the months and years that he had searched hungrily for Atlantis, and then for Noah, and then for the meaning of Noah's saga, Kemal had assumed that, like Schliemann, he would publish everything, he would tell the world the great truth that he had found. But to his surprise he discovered that he must not have searched so far for the sake of science, or for fame, or for any other motive than simply to know, for himself, that one person's life amounted to something. Naog changed the world, but then so did Zawada, and so did Kormo, and so did the servant who skinned his elbows running down the hill, and so did Naog's father and mother, and ... and in the end, so did they all. The great forces of history were real, after a fashion. But when you examined them closely, those great forces always came down to the dreams and hungers and judgments of individuals. The choices they made were real. They mattered.

Apparently that was all that Kemal had needed to know. The next day he could think of no reason to go to work. He resigned from his position at the head of the Atlantis project. Let others do the detail work. Kemal was well over thirty now, and he had found the answer to his great question, and it was time to get down to the business of living.

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FAT FARM

by

Orson Scott Card

The receptionist was surprised that he was back so soon.

"Why, Mr. Barth, how glad I am to see you," she said.

"Surprised, you mean," Barth answered. His voice rumbled from the rolls of fat under his chin.

"Delighted."

"How long has it been?" Barth asked.

"Three years. How time flies."

The receptionist smiled, but Barth saw the awe and revulsion on her face as she glanced over his immense body. In her job she saw fat people every day. But Barth knew he was unusual. He was proud of being unusual.

"Back to the fat farm," he said, laughing.

The effort of laughing made him short of breath, and he gasped for air as she pushed a button and said, "Mr. Barth is back."



He did not bother to look for a chair. No chair could hold him. He did lean against a wall, however. Standing was a labour he preferred to avoid.

Yet it was not shortness of breath or exhaustion at the slightest effort that had brought him back to Anderson's Fitness

Centre. He had often been fat before, and he rather relished the sensation of bulk, the impression he made as crowds parted

for him. He pitied those who could only be slightly fat – short people, who were not able to bear the weight. At well over

two meters, Barth could get gloriously fat, stunningly fat. He owned thirty wardrobes and took delight in changing from

one to another as his belly and buttocks and thighs grew. At times he felt that if he grew large enough, he could take over

the world, be the world. At the dinner table he was a conqueror to rival Genghis Khan.

It was not his fatness, then, that had brought him in. It was that at last the fat was interfering with his other pleasures.

The girl he had been with the night before had tried and tried, but he was incapable – a sign that it was time to renew, refresh, reduce.

"I am a man of pleasure," he wheezed to the receptionist, whose name he had never bothered to learn. She smiled back.

"Mr. Anderson will be here in a moment."

"Isn't it ironic," he said, "that a man such as I, who is capable of fulfilling every one of his desires, is never satisfied!"

He gasped with laughter again. "Why haven't we ever slept together?" he asked.

She looked at him, irritation crossing her face. "You always ask that, Mr. Barth, on your way in. But you never ask it on your way out."

True enough. When he was on his way out of the Anderson Fitness Centre, she never seemed as attractive as she had on his way in.

Anderson came in, effusively handsome, gushingly warm, taking Barth's fleshy hand in his and pumping it with enthusiasm.

"One of my best customers," he said.

"The usual," Barth said.

"Of course," Anderson answered. "But the price has gone up."

"If you ever go out of business," Barth said, following Anderson into the inner rooms, "give me plenty of warning. I

only let myself go this much because I know you're here."

"Oh," Anderson chuckled. "We'll never go out of business."

"I have no doubt you could support your whole organisation on what you charge me."

"You're paying for much more than the simple service we perform. You're also paying for privacy. Our, shall we say, lack of government intervention."

"How many of the bastards do you bribe?"

"Very few, very few. Partly because so many high officials also need our service."



“No doubt.”

“It isn’t just weight gains that bring people to us, you know. It’s cancer and aging and accidental disfigurement. You’d be surprised to learn who has had our service.”

Barth doubted that he would. The couch was ready for him, immense and soft and angled so that it would be easy for him to get up again.

“Damn near got married this time,” Barth said, by way of conversation.

Anderson turned to him in surprise.

“But you didn’t?”

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“Of course not. Started getting fat, and she couldn’t cope.”

“Did you tell her?”

“That I was getting fat? It was obvious.”

“About us, I mean.”

“I’m not a fool.”

Anderson looked relieved. “Can’t have rumours getting around among the thin and young, you know.”

“Still, I think I’ll look her up again, afterward. She did things to me a woman shouldn’t be able to do. And I thought I was jaded.”

Anderson placed a tight-fitting rubber cap over Barth’s head.

“Think your key thought,” Anderson reminded him.

Key thought. At first that had been such a comfort, to make sure that not one iota of his memory would be lost. Now it

was boring, almost juvenile. Key thought. Do you have your own Captain Aardvark secret decoder ring? Be the first on

your block. The only thing Barth had been the first on his block to do was reach puberty.

He had also been the first on his

block to reach on hundred and fifty kilos.

How many times have I been here? he wondered as the tingling in his scalp began. This is the eighth time. Eight times,

and my fortune is larger than ever, the kind of wealth that takes on a life of its own. I can keep this up forever, he

thought, with relish. Forever at the supper table with neither worries nor restraints. “It’s dangerous to gain so much

weight,” Lynette had said. “Heart attacks, you know.” But the only things that Barth worried about were haemorrhoids and

impotence. The former was a nuisance, but the latter made life unbearable and drove him back to Anderson.

Key thought. What else? Lynette, standing naked on the edge of a cliff with the wind blowing. She was courting

death, and he admired her for it, almost hoped that she would find it. She despised safety precautions. Like clothing, they

were restrictions to be cast aside. She had once talked him into playing tag with her on a construction site, racing along the



girders in the darkness, until the police came and made them leave. That had been when Barth was still thin from his last time at Anderson's. But it was not Lynette on the girders that he held in his mind. It was Lynette, fragile and beautiful Lynette, daring the wind to snatch her from the cliff and break up her body on the rocks by the river.

Even that, Barth thought, would be a kind of pleasure. A new kind of pleasure, to taste a grief so magnificently, so admirably earned.

And then the tingling in his head stopped. Anderson came back in.

"Already?" Barth asked.

"We've streamlined the process." Anderson carefully peeled the cap from Barth's head, helped the immense man lift himself from the couch.

"I can't understand why it's illegal," Barth said. "Such a simple thing."

"Oh, there are reasons. Population control, that sort of thing. This is a kind of immortality, you know. But it's mostly the repugnance most people feel. They can't face the thought. You're a man of rare courage."

But it was not courage, Barth knew. It was pleasure. He eagerly anticipated seeing, and they did not make him wait.

"Mr. Barth, meet Mr. Barth."

It nearly broke his heart to see his own body young and strong and beautiful again, as it never had been the first time

through his life. It was unquestionably himself, however, that they led into the room.

Except that the belly was firm, the

thighs well muscled but slender enough that they did not meet, even at the crotch. They brought him in naked, of course.

Barth insisted on it.

He tried to remember the last time. Then he had been the one coming from the learning room, emerging to see the

immense fat man that all his memories told him was himself. Barth remembered that it had been a double pleasure, to see the

mountain he had made of himself, yet to view it from inside this beautiful young body.

"Come here," Barth said, his own voice arousing echoes of the last time, when it had been the other Barth who had said

it. And just as that other had done the last time, he touched the naked young Barth, stroked the smooth and lovely skin, and finally embraced him.

And the young Barth embraced him back, for that was the way of it. No one loved Barth as much as Barth did, thin or

fat, young or old. Life was a celebration of Barth; the sight of himself was his strongest nostalgia.

"What did I think of?" Barth asked.

The young Barth smiled into his eyes. "Lynette," he said. "Naked on a cliff. The wind blowing. And the thought of her thrown to her death."



“Will you go back to her?” Barth asked his young self eagerly.

“Perhaps. Or to someone like her.” And Barth saw with delight that the mere thought of it had aroused his young self more than a little.

“He’ll do,” Barth said, and Anderson handed him the simple papers to sign – papers that would never be seen in a court of law because they attested to Barth’s own compliance in and initiation of an act that was second only to murder in the lawbooks of every state.

“That’s it, then,” Anderson said, turning from the fat Barth to the young, thin one. “You’re Mr. Barth now, in control of his wealth and his life. Your clothing is in the next room.”

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“I know where it is,” the young Barth said with a smile, and his footsteps were buoyant as he left the room. He would dress quickly and leave the Fitness Centre briskly, hardly noticing the rather plain-looking receptionist, except to take note of her wistful look after him, a tall, slender, beautiful man who had, only moments before, been lying mindless in storage, waiting to be given a mind and a memory, waiting for a fat man to move out of the way so he could fill his space.

In the memory room Barth sat on the edge of the couch, looking at the door, and then realised, with surprise, that he had no idea what came next.

“My memories run out here,” Barth said to Anderson. “The agreement was – what was the agreement?”

“The agreement was tender care of you until you passed away.”

“Ah, yes.”

“The agreement isn’t worth a damn thing,” Anderson said, smiling.

Barth looked at him with surprise. “What do you mean?”

“There are two options, Barth. A needle within the next fifteen minutes. Or employment.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You didn’t think we’d waste time and effort feeding you the ridiculous amounts of food you require, did you?”

Barth felt himself sink inside. This was not what he had expected, though he had not honestly expected anything. Barth was not the kind to anticipate trouble. Life had never given him much trouble.

“A needle?”

“Cyanide, if you insist, though we’d rather be able to vivisect you and get as many useful parts as we can. Your body’s still fairly young. We can get incredible amounts of money for your pelvis and your glands, but they have to be taken from you alive.”

“What are you talking about? This isn’t what we agreed.”

“I agreed to nothing with you, my friend,” Anderson said, smiling. “I agreed with Barth. And Barth just left the room.”



“Call him back! I insist –”

“Barth doesn’t give a damn what happens to you.”

And he knew that it was true.

“You said something about employment.”

“Indeed.”

“What kind of employment?”

Anderson shook his head. “It all depends,” he said.

“On what?”

“On what kind of work turns up. There are several assignments every year that must be performed by a living human being, for which no volunteer can be found. No person, not even a criminal, can be compelled to do them.”

“And I?”

“Will do them. Or one of them, rather, since you rarely get a second job.”

“How can you do this? I’m a human being.”

Anderson shook his head. “The law says that there is only one possible Barth in all the world. And you aren’t it.

You’re just a number. And a letter. The letter H.”

“Why H?”

“Because you’re such a disgusting glutton, my friend. Even our first customers haven’t go past C yet.”

Anderson left then, and Barth was alone in the room. Why hadn’t he anticipated this? Of course, of course, he shouted

to himself now. Of course they wouldn’t keep him pleasantly alive. He wanted to get up

and try to run. But walking was

difficult for him; running would be impossible. He sat there, his belly pressing heavily on his thighs, which were spread

wide by the fat. He stood, with great effort, and could only waddle because his legs were so far apart, so constrained in

their movement.

This has happened every time, Barth thought. Every damn time I’ve walked out of this place young and thin, I’ve left

behind someone like me, and they’ve had their way, haven’t they? His hands trembled badly.

He wondered what he had decided before and knew immediately that there was no decision to make at all. Some fat

people might hate themselves and choose death for the sake of having a thin version of themselves live on. But not Barth.

Barth could never choose to cause himself any pain. And to obliterate even an illegal, clandestine version of himself –

impossible. Whatever else he might be, he was still Barth. The man who walked out of the memory room a few minutes

before had not taken over Barth’s identity. He had only duplicated it. They’ve stolen my soul with mirrors, Barth told

himself. I have to get it back.

“Anderson!” Barth shouted. “Anderson! I’ve made up my mind.”



It was not Anderson who entered, of course. Barth would never see Anderson again. It would have been too tempting to try to kill him.

“Get to work, H!” the old man shouted from the other side of the field.

Barth leaned on his hoe a moment more, then got back to work, scraping weeds from between the potato plants. The calluses on his hands had long since shaped themselves to fit the wooden handle, and his muscles knew how to perform the work without Barth’s having to think about it at all. Yet that made the labour no easier. When he first realised that they

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meant him to be a potato farmer, he had asked, “Is this my assignment? Is this all?” And they had laughed and told him

no. “It’s just preparation,” they said, “to get you in shape.” So for two years he had worked in the potato fields, and now

he began to doubt that they would ever come back, that the potatoes would ever end.

The old man was watching, he knew. His gaze always burned worse than the sun. The old man was watching, and if

Barth rested too long or too often, the old man would come to him, whip in hand, to scar him deeply, to hurt him to the soul.

He dug into the ground, chopping at a stubborn plant whose root seemed to cling to the foundation of the world.

“Come up, damn you,” he muttered. He thought his arms were too weak to strike harder, but he struck harder anyway. The root split, and the impact shattered him to the bone.

He was naked and brown to the point of blackness from the sun. The flesh hung loosely on him in great folds, a memory

of the mountain he had been. Under the loose skin, however, he was tight and hard. It might have given him pleasure, for

every muscle had been earned by hard labour and the pain of the lash. But there was no pleasure in it. The price was too high.

I’ll kill myself, he often thought and thought again now with his arms trembling with exhaustion. I’ll kill myself so they

can’t use my body and can’t use my soul.

But he would never kill himself. Even now, Barth was incapable of ending it.

The farm he worked on was unfenced, but the time he had gotten away he had walked and walked and walked for three

days and had not once seen any sign of human habitation other than an occasional jeep track in the sagebrush-and-grass

desert. Then they had found him and brought him back, weary and despairing, and forced him to finish a day’s work in the

field before letting him rest. And even then the lash had bitten deep, the old man laying it on with a relish that spoke of

sadism or a deep, personal hatred.



But why should the old man hate me? Barth wondered. I don't know him. He finally decided that it was because he had been so fat, so obviously soft, while the old man was wiry to the point of being gaunt, his face pinched by years of exposure to the sunlight. Yet the old man's hatred had not diminished as the months went by and the fat melted away in the sweat and sunlight of the potato field.

A sharp sting across his back, the sound of slapping leather on skin, and then an excruciating pain deep in his muscles.

He had paused too long. The old man had come to him.

The old man said nothing. Just raised the lash again, ready to strike. Barth lifted the hoe out of the ground, to start

work again. It occurred to him, as it had a hundred times before, that the hoe could reach as far as the whip, with as good

effect. But, as a hundred times before, Barth looked into the old man's eyes, and what he saw there, while he did not

understand it, was enough to stop him. He could not strike back. He could only endure.

The lash did not fall again. Instead he and the old man just looked at each other. The sun burned where blood was

coming from his back. Flies buzzed near him. He did not bother to brush them away.

Finally the old man broke the silence.

"H," he said.

Barth did not answer. Just waited.

"They've come for you. First job," said the old man.

First job. It took Barth a moment to realise the implications. The end of the potato fields.

The end of the sunlight. The

end of the old man with the whip. The end of the loneliness or, at least, of the boredom.

"Thank God," Barth said. His throat was dry.

"Go wash," the old man said.

Barth carried the hoe back to the shed. He remembered how heavy the hoe had seemed when he first arrived. How ten

minutes in the sunlight had made him faint. Yet they had revived him in the field, and the old man had said, "Carry it back."

So he had carried back the heavy, heavy hoe, feeling for all the world like Christ bearing his cross. Soon enough the others

had gone, and the old man and he had been alone together, but the ritual with the hoe never changed. They got to the

shed, and the old man carefully took the hoe from him and locked it away, so that Barth couldn't get it in the night and kill

him with it.

And then into the house, where Barth bathed painfully and the old man put an excruciating disinfectant on his back.

Barth had long since given up on the idea of an anaesthetic. It wasn't in the old man's nature to use an anaesthetic.

Clean clothes. A few minutes' wait. And then the helicopter. A young, businesslike man emerged from it, looking



unfamiliar in detail but very familiar in general. He was an echo of all the businesslike young men and women who had dealt with him before. The young man came to him, unsmiling, and said, "H?" Barth nodded. It was the only name they used for him.

"You have an assignment."

"What is it?" Barth asked.

The young man did not answer. The old man, behind him, whispered, "They'll tell you soon enough. And then you'll

wish you were back here, H. They'll tell you, and you'll pray for the potato fields."

But Barth doubted it. In two years there had not been a moment's pleasure. The food was hideous, and there was never

enough. There were no women, and he was usually too tired to amuse himself. Just pain and labour and loneliness, all

excruciating. He would leave that now. Anything would be better, anything at all.

"Whatever they assign you, though," the old man said, "it can't be any worse than my assignment."

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Barth would have asked him what his assignment had been, but there was nothing in the old man's voice that invited the

question, and there was nothing in their relationship in the past that would allow the question to be asked. Instead, they

stood in silence as the young man reached into the helicopter and helped a man get out.

An immensely fat man, stark-naked

and white as the flesh of a potato, looking petrified. The old man strode purposefully toward him.

"Hello, I," the old man said.

"My name's Barth," the fat man answered, petulantly. The old man struck him hard across the mouth, hard enough that

the tender lip split and blood dripped from where his teeth had cut into the skin.

"I," said the old man. "Your name is I."

The fat man nodded pitifully, but Barth – H – felt no pity for him. Two years this time.

Only two damnable years and he

was already in this condition. Barth could vaguely remember being proud of the mountain he had made of himself. But now

he felt only contempt. Only a desire to go to the fat man, to scream in his face, "Why did you do it? Why did you let it

happen again?"

It would have meant nothing. To I, as to H, it was the first time, the first betrayal. There had been no others in his

memory.

Barth watched as the old man put a hoe in the fat man's hands and drove him out into the field. Two more young men

got out of the helicopter. Barth knew what they would do, could almost see them helping the old man for a few days, until I

finally learned the hopelessness of resistance and delay.



But Barth did not get to watch the replay of his own torture of two years before. The young man who had first emerged from the copter now led him to it, put him in a seat by a window, and sat beside him. The pilot speeded up the engines, and the copter began to rise.

“The bastard,” Barth said, looking out the window at the old man as he slapped I across the face brutally.

The young man chuckled. Then he told Barth his assignment.

Barth clung to the window, looking out, feeling his life slip away from him even as the ground receded slowly. “I can’t do it.”

“There are worse assignments,” the young man said.

Barth did not believe it.

“If I live,” he said, “if I live, I want to come back here.”

“Love it that much?”

“To kill him.”

The young man looked at him blankly.

“The old man,” Barth explained, then realised that the young man was ultimately incapable of understanding anything.

He looked back out the window. The old man looked very small next to the huge lump of white flesh beside him. Barth felt a

terrible loathing for I. A terrible despair in knowing that nothing could possibly be learned, that again and again his selves would replay this hideous scenario.

Somewhere, the man who would be J was dancing, was playing polo, was seducing and perverting and being delighted

by every woman and boy and, God knows, sheep that he could find; somewhere the man who would be J dined.

I bent immensely in the sunlight and tried, clumsily, to use the hoe. Then, losing his balance, he fell over into the dirt, writhing. The old man raised his whip.

The helicopter turned then, so that Barth could see nothing but sky from his window. He never saw the whip fall. But

he imagined the whip falling. Imagined and relished it, longed to feel the heaviness of the blow flowing from his own arm.

Hit him again! he cried out inside himself. Hit him for me! And inside himself he made the whip fall a dozen times more.

“What are you thinking?” the young man asked, smiling, as if he knew the punch line of a joke.

“I was thinking,” Barth said, “that the old man can’t possibly hate him as much as I do.”

Apparently that was the punch line. The young man laughed uproariously. Barth did not understand the joke, but

somehow he was certain that he was the butt of it. He wanted to strike out but dared not.

Perhaps the young man saw the tension in Barth’s body, or perhaps he merely wanted to explain. He stopped laughing,

but could not repress his smile, which penetrated Barth far more deeply than the laugh.

“But don’t you see?” the young man asked. “Don’t you know who the old man is?”



Barth didn't know.

"What do you think we did with A?" And the young man laughed again.

There are worse assignments than mine, Barth realised. And the worst of all would be to spend day after day, month

after month, supervising that contemptible animal that he could not deny was himself.

The scar on his back bled a little, and the blood stuck to the seat when it dried.

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HEAL THYSELF

by Orson Scott Card

v1.0 (18-nov-2000)

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There's a limit to how much you can shield your children from the harsh realities of life. But you can't blame parents who try. Especially when it's something you have to go out of your way to discuss. My parents assure me that they would have talked about it someday, but it's not like the birds and the bees-there's not a certain age when you have to know. They were letting it slide. I was a curious kid. I had already asked questions that could have led there. They dodged. They waffled. I understand.

But then my childhood friend, Elizio, died of complications from his leukemia vaccination. I had been given mine on the same day, right after him, after jostling in line for twenty-minutes with the rest of our class of ten-year-olds. Nobody else got sick. We didn't know anything was wrong with Elizio, either, not for months. And then the radiation and the chemotherapy; primitive holdovers from an era when medicine was almost indistinguishable from the tortures of the Inquisition. Nothing worked. Elizio died. He was eleven by then. A slow passage into the grave. And I demanded to know why.

They started to talk about God, but I told them I knew about heaven and I wasn't worried about Elizio's soul. I wanted to know why there wasn't some better way to prevent diseases than infecting us with semi-killed pseudoviruses mixed with antigen stimulants. Was this the best the human race could do? Didn't God give us brains so we could solve these things? Oh, I was full of righteous wrath.

That was when they told me that it was time for me to take a trip to the North American Wild Animal Park What did that have to do with my question?

It will all become clear, they said. But I should see with my own eyes. Thus they turned from telling me nothing to telling me everything. Were they wise? I know this much: I was angry at the universe, a deep anger that was born of fear. My dear friend Elizio had been taken from me because our medicine was so primitive. Therefore anyone could die. My parents. My little sisters.

My own children someday. Nothing was secure. And it pissed me off. The way I felt, the way I was acting, I think they believed that nothing but a complete answer, a visual experience, could restore my sense that this was, if not a perfect world, then at least the best one possible.



We left Saltillo that weekend, taking the high-speed train that connected Monterrey to Los Angeles. We got off in El Paso, the southern gateway to the park. During the half-hour trip, I tried to make sense of the brochures about the park, all the pictures, the guidebooks. But it was dear to me, even at the age of eleven, that something was being left out. That I was getting the child's version of what the park contained. All that the brochures described was a vast tract of savannas, filled with wild animals living in their natural habitat, though it was an odd mixture of African, South American, European, and American fauna that they pictured. Of course, to protect the animals against the dangers of straying and the far greater menace of poaching, the park was fenced about with an impenetrable barrier—not illustrated in the brochures—of fences, ditches, wires, walls. The thing that made no sense at all, however, was the warning about absolute biosecurity. All observations of the park inside the boundaries were to take place from within completely biosealed buses, and anyone who tried to circumvent the bioseal would be ejected from the park and prosecuted. They did not say what would happen to anyone who succeeded in getting out into the open air.

Biosealed buses suggested a serious biohazard. And yet there was nothing in the brochures to indicate what that biohazard might be. It's not as if herds

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of bison could sneak onto the buses if you cracked the seal.

The answer to this mystery was no doubt the answer to my question about why Elizio died, and I impatiently demanded that my parents explain.

They urged me to be patient, and then took me right past the regular buses and on to a nondescript door with the words --in small letters-- "Special Tours." "What's so special?" I asked.

They ignored me. The clerk seemed to know without explanation exactly what my parents wanted. Then I understood that my parents must have called ahead.

It was a private tour. And not on a bus. We were taken down an elevator into a deep basement, and then put aboard a train on which we rode for more than an hour—longer than the trip from Saltillo to El Paso, though I suspect we were going much slower. Underground, who can tell?

We came up another elevator, and, like the underground train, this one had no trappings of tourism. This was a place where people worked; gawking was only a secondary concern.

We were led by a slightly impatient-looking woman to a smallish room with windows on four sides and dozens of sets of binoculars in a couple of boxes. There were also chairs, some stacked, some scattered about almost randomly. As if someone hadn't bothered to straighten up after a meeting.

"Are they close?" asked Mother.

"We're here because the water is nearby," said the woman. "If they aren't close now, they will be soon."

"Where's the water?" asked Father.

The woman pointed vaguely in a direction. It's clear she didn't want us there. But Mother and Father had the gift of patience. They were here for me, and



bore the disdain of the scientist. If that's what she was.

The woman went away.

My parents picked up binoculars and searched. I also picked out a set and tried to figure out how to focus it.

"It senses your vision automatically," Father explained. "Just look, and it will come into focus."

"Bacana," I said. I looked.

There was a lot of dry grassy land, interspersed with drier, sagebrushy land. In one direction were some trees. That must be where the water was.

"Spotted them yet?" Mother asked.

"To the left of the trees?" asked Father.

"There too?"

"Where did you see them?"

"In the shade of that rock"

I searched and finally found what they were looking at.

Men and women. Long-haired. Filthy. Naked.

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My straitlaced parents brought me here to see naked people?

Then I looked again, more closely. They weren't exactly people after all.

"Neanderthals," I said.

"Homo neanderthalensis," said Father.

"They've been extinct forever!"

"For about twenty thousand years, most conservative guess," said Father.

"Maybe longer."

"But there they are," I said.

"There was a long debate," said Father. "About how the Neanderthals died out."

"I thought that Homo sapiens wiped them out."

"It wasn't so simple. There was plain evidence of communities of sapiens and neanderthalensis living in close proximity for centuries. It wasn't just a case of 'kill-the-monsters.' So there were several theories. One was that the two species interbred, but Neanderthal traits were discouraged to such a degree that they faded out. Like round eyes in China."

"How could they interbreed?" I asked. I was proud of my scientific erudition, as only eleven-year-olds can be. "Look at how different they are from humans."

"Not so different," said Mother. "They had rudimentary language. Not the complicated grammar we have now basically just imperative verbs and labeling nouns. But they could call out to each other across a large expanse and give warning. They could greet each other by name."

"I was talking about how they look."

"But I was talking about brain function," said Mother, "which is much more to the point, don't you think?"

"Another theory" said Father, "was that Homo sapiens evolved from the Neanderthals. That one was discredited and then revived several times. It turns out that was the closest theory to being right."

"You know, none of this explains why there are Neanderthals out here in the North American Wild Animal Park."



"You surprise me, Son," said my father. "I thought you would have leaped to at least some conclusion. Instead you seem to be passively awaiting our explanation."

I hated it when Father patronized me. He knew that, so he did it whenever he wanted to goad me into thinking. It always worked. I hated that, too.

"You brought me here because of the way I reacted to Elizio's death," I said.

"And because you're famous scientists yourselves, you got to pull strings and get me a special tour. Not everybody sees this, right?"

"Actually, anybody can, but few want to," said Father.

"And the biohazard stuff-that suggests some kind of disease agent. What you said about the evolved-from-Neanderthals scenario being close to correct suggests ... there's some disease loose in the wild here that causes regular people to turn into cavemen?"

Father smiled wanly at Mother. "Smart boy," he said.

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I looked at Mother. She was crying.

"Just tell me," I demanded. "No more guessing games."

Father sighed, put his arm around Mother, and began to talk. It didn't take long to explain.

"The greatest breakthrough in the medical treatment of disease was the germ theory, but it took an astonishingly long time for doctors to realize that almost all human ailments were caused by infectious agents. A few were genetic-such as cystic fibrosis and sickle-cell anemia but those all seemed to be recessive genes that conferred a benefit when you had one of them, and killed you only if you had two. All the others--heart disease, dementia, schizophrenia, strokes, nontraumatic cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, most cancers, even some crimes-all were actually diseases. What disguised them from researchers for so long was the fact that these diseases were passed along in the womb, across the placenta, mostly by disease agents composed of proteins smaller than DNA. Some were passed along in the ovum. So we had no way to compare a clean, healthy organism with an infected one until we finished mapping the human genetic code and realized that these diseases weren't there. When we finally tracked them down as loose proteins in the cells, we--"

"We?" I asked.

"I speak of our forebears, of course," said Father. "Our predecessors."

"You aren't in medical research."

"Our colleagues in science," said Father. "We've come a long way to have you quibble about my choice of pronouns. And anthropology is the science of which medicine is merely a subset."

I had a snappy retort about how nobody ever asks if there's an anthropologist in the house, but I kept it to myself, mostly because I didn't want to win points here, I wanted to hear the story.

"How do you inoculate an organism against in utero infection?" asked Mother rhetorically. "How do you cleanse an ovum that has already been infected?"

"What we developed," Father began, then interrupted himself. "What was



developed."

"What emerged from the development process," said Mother helpfully.

"Was," said Father, "an elegant little counterinfection. Learning from the way these protein bits worked, the researchers came up with a protein complex that hijacked the cell's DNA just the way these infectious agents did. Only, instead of destroying the host cell, our little counterinfection caused the human DNA to check aggressively inside the cell for proteins that didn't belong there. There are already mechanisms that do bits and parts of that, but this one worked damn near perfectly. Nothing was in that cell that didn't belong there. It even detected and threw out the wrong-handed proteins that caused spongiform encephalopathies."

"Now you're showing off, my love," said Mother.

"It was perfect," said Father. "And best of all, self-replicating yet nondestructive. Once you introduced it into a mother, it was in every egg in her body after a matter of days. Any child she bore would have this protection within it."

"It was perfect," said Mother. "The early tests showed that it not only

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prevented diseases, it cured all but the most advanced cases. It was the ultimate panacea."

"But they hadn't tested it for very long," said Father.

"There was enormous pressure," said Mother. "Not from outside, from inside the research community. When you have a cure for everything, how can you withhold it from the human race for ten years of longitudinal studies, while people die or have their lives wrecked by diseases that could be prevented with a simple inoculation?"

"It had side effects," I said, guessing the end.

"Technically, no," said Father. "It did exactly what it was supposed to do. It eradicated diseases with smaller-than-bacteria agents. Period. Nothing else. The only reason that they didn't immediately spread the counterinfection throughout the world to save as many lives as possible was because of the one foreseeable hitch. Can you think of it? It's obvious, really."

I thought. I wish I could say I came up with it quickly, but my parents were nothing if not patient. And I did come up with it after a few false tries, which I can't remember now. The correct answer: "Aging is a disease. You get this counterinfection, you don't die."

"We were concerned about a population explosion," said Mother. "Even if people completely stopped having children, we weren't sure that the existing ecosphere could sustain a population in which all the existing children grew up to be adults while none of the adults died off to make room for them. Imagine all the children entering the workforce, while the older generation, newly vigorous and extremely unlikely to die, refused to retire. It was a nightmare. So, by the mercy of God, the counterinfection was restricted to a large longitudinal study centered on Manhattan, a smallish college town in Kansas."

"There was a quarantine of sorts," said Father. "The participants accepted



the rules-no physical contact with anyone outside the city during the two years of the stud: In exchange, nobody dies of any kind of disease. They jumped at it."

"The counterinfection got loose!" I said.

"No. Everybody kept to the rules. This was science, not the movies," said Father. "But in the Manhattan Project, as we inevitably called it, for the first time the test included infants, newborns, children born after the study began, children conceived after the study began. We were so interested in the result with the aging population that it had never crossed our minds that ... well, it did cure aging. The people who have it would never die of old age. The trouble was, the children were born--"

"As Neanderthals," I said, making the obvious guess.

"And over time," said Father, "as cells were replaced, the adult bodies also tried to reshape themselves. It was fatal for them. You can't take an existing body and make it into something else like that. You had a few years of perfect health, and then your bones destroyed themselves in the frantic effort to grow into new shapes. The little ones, the ones who were changed in the womb, only they survived."

"And that's who I'm seeing out there," I said.

Father nodded. "It took fifteen years to find a way to sterilize them all without our counterinfection undoing the sterilization. By then there were so many, of them that to keep them all in their natural habitat required a vast reserve. It really wasn't all that hard to get the citizens of this area

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to evacuate. Nobody wanted to be anywhere near Manhattan, Kansas. So once again, Homo neanderthalensis has a plot of ground here on Earth. Homo neanderthalensis, the most intelligent toolmaking species ever to evolve naturally."

"But how could the counteragent cause us to revert to an earlier stage of evolution?" I asked.

"You weren't listening," said Father.

I thought for a moment. "Homo neanderthalensis isn't an earlier stage," I said. "There was no more evolution after that."

"Only a disease," said Father.

It seemed too incredible to me, as an eleven-year-old who prided himself on understanding the world. "Human intelligence is an infection?"

"Passed from mother to child through the ovum," said Mother. "By a disease agent that alters the DNA in order to replicate itself. We should have realized it from the fact that in utero development recapitulates evolution, but there is no stage in which the fetus passes through a habiline form.

We did not evolve past it. The DNA is hijacked and we are born prematurely, grossly deformed by the disease. Neotenic, erectstanding, language-mad, lacking in sense of smell, too feeble to survive on our own even as adults, in need of clothing and shelter and community to a degree that the Neanderthals never were. But ... smart."

"So now," said Father, "do you understand why medical science has to rely



on inoculation to fight off cancer, so that a small percentage-far smaller than ever before in human history, but not zero-a small percentage dies? Elizio died because the only alternative we've found is for this race of perfectly healthy, immortal, dim-wilted beings to inherit the Earth." I stood there for a long time in silence, watching the Neanderthals, trying to see how their behavior was different from ours. In the years since then, I have come to realize that there was no important difference. Being smarter hasn't made us act any differently from the Neanderthals. We make better tools. We have a longer, more thorough collective memory in the form of libraries. We can talk much more fluently about the things we do. But we still do basically the same things. We are Neanderthals, at heart. But I did not understand this at the time. I was, after all, only eleven. I had a much more practical -- and heartless -- question. "Why do we keep this park at all?" I asked. "I mean, they're going to live forever. And all the time they're alive, they pose a danger of this counterinfection getting loose outside the fence. Why haven't they all been killed and their bodies nuked or something so that the counteragent is eliminated?"

Mother looked appalled at my ruthlessness, but Father only patted her arm and said, "Of course he thought of that, my love."

"But so young, to be so--"

"Practical?" prompted Father. "There was a long debate over exactly this issue, and it resurfaced from time to time, though not for decades now: The ones who argued for keeping the park talked about the necessity of studying our ancestors, and some people talked about the rights of these citizens who, after all, can't help their medical condition and have committed no crime, but it was all a smoke screen. The real reason we didn't destroy them all, as you suggested, was because we didn't have the heart."

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"They were our children," said Mother, crying again.

"At first," said Father. "And later, when they weren't children anymore, we still couldn't kill them. Because they had become our ancient parents." Now, though, I have come to think that while they were both right, the answer is even deeper. We didn't kill them, and we continue not to kill them, despite the reality of all those dangers, because they are not "they" at all. There, but for the fact that we happen to be the tiniest bit ill, go we.

I had troubling dreams for months afterward. I had mood swings, alternating between aggression and despair. At times, my parents wished they had just answered my questions about Elizio by taking me to the priest and getting me on the roster of altar boys.

But they were not wrong to take me there, any more than they had been wrong not to tell me up till then. I needed to know before my education was complete. Those who do not know, who continue through adulthood oblivious, in a sense remain children, forever naive. Within the fence of the North American Wild Animal Park is the Garden of Eden, and the people there eat



freely of the Tree of Life. Here, outside, in this world of thorns, we dwell in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, madly eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, as much of it as we can get before we die. You cannot straddle the boundary. If you bring children into the world on this side of the fence, you must take them to eat the fruit of the tree not too young, not before they're able to bear it. But don't wait too long, either. Let them see, before you die, that death is truly the gift of a merciful God.

* * * * *

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ST. AMY'S TALE

By Orson Scott Card

Mother could kill with her hands. Father could fly. These are miracles. But they were not miracles then. Mother Elouise taught me that there were no miracles then. I am the child of Wreckers, born while the angel was in them. This is why I am called Saint Amy, though I perceive nothing in me that should make me holier than any other old woman. Yet Mother Elouise denied the angel in her, too, and it was no less there.

Sift your fingers through the soil, all you who read my words. Take your spades of iron and your picks of stone. Dig deep. You will find no ancient works of man hidden there. For the Wreckers passed through the world, and all the vanity was consumed in fire; all the pride broke in pieces when it was smitten by God's shining hand.

Elouise leaned on the rim of the computer keyboard. All around her the machinery was alive, the screens displaying information. Elouise felt nothing but weariness. She was leaning because, for a moment, she had felt a frightening vertigo. As if the world underneath the airplane had dissolved and slipped away into a rapidly receding star and she would never be able to land.

True enough, she thought. I'll never be able to land, not in the world I knew.

"Getting sentimental about the old computers?"

Elouise, startled, turned in her chair and faced her husband, Charlie. At that moment the airplane lurched, but like sailors accustomed to the shifting of the sea, they adjusted unconsciously and did not notice the imbalance.

"Is it noon already?" she asked.

"It's the mortal equivalent of noon. I'm too tired to fly this thing anymore, and it's a good thing Bill's at the controls."

"Hungry?"

Charlie shook his head. "But Amy probably is," he said.

"Voyeur," said Elouise.

Charlie liked to watch Elouise nurse their daughter. But despite her accusation, Elouise knew there was nothing sexual in it. Charlie liked the idea of Elouise being Amy's mother. He liked the way Amy's sucking resembled the sucking of a calf or a lamb or a puppy. He had said, "It's the best thing we kept from the



animals. The best thing we didn't throw away."

"Better than sex?" Elouise had asked. And Charlie had only smiled.

Amy was playing with a rag doll in the only large clear space in the airplane, near the exit door. "Mommy Mommy Mamommy Mommyo," Amy said. The child stood and reached

to be picked up. Then she saw Charlie. "Daddy Addy Addy."

"Hi," Charlie said.

"Hi," Amy answered. "Ha-ee." She had only just learned to close the diphthong, and she exaggerated it. Amy played with the buttons on Elouise's shirt, trying to undo them.

"Greedy," Elouise said, laughing.

Charlie unbuttoned the shirt for her, and Amy seized on the nipple after only one false grab. She sucked noisily, tapping her hand gently against Elouise's breast as she ate.

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"I'm glad we're so near finished," Elouise said. "She's too old to be nursing now."

"That's right. Throw the little bird out of the nest."

"Go to bed," Elouise said.

Amy recognized the phrase. She pulled away. "La-lo," she said.

"That's right. Daddy's going to sleep," Elouise said.

Elouise watched as Charlie stripped off most of his clothing and lay down on the pad. He smiled once, then turned over, and was immediately asleep. He was in tune with his body. Elouise knew that he would awaken in exactly six hours, when it was time for him to take the controls again.

Amy's sucking was a subtle pleasure now, though it had been agonizing the first few months, and painful again when Amy's first teeth had come in and she had learned to her delight that by nipping she could make her mother scream. But better to nurse her than ever have her eat the predigested pap that was served as food on the airplane. Elouise thought wryly that it was even worse than the microwaved veal cordon bleu that they used to inflict on commercial passengers. Only eight years ago. And they had calibrated their fuel so exactly that when they took the last draft of fuel from the last of their storage tanks, the tank registered empty; they would burn the last of the processed petroleum, instead of putting it back into the earth. All their caches were gone now, and they would be at the tender mercies of the world that they themselves had created.

Still, there was work to do; the final work, in the final checks. Elouise held Amy with one arm while she used her free hand slowly to key in the last program that her role as commander required her to use. Elouise Private, she typed. Teacher teacher I declare I see someone's underwear, she typed. On the screen appeared the warning she had put there: "You may think you're lucky finding this program, but unless you know the magic words, an alarm is going to go off all over this airplane and you'll be had. No way out of it, sucker. Love, Elouise."

Elouise, of course, knew the magic words. Einstein sucks, she typed. The screen went blank, and the alarm did not go off.

Malfunction? she queried. "None," answered the computer.



Tamper? she queried, and the computer answered, "None."

Nonreport? she queried, and the computer flashed, "AFscanP7bb55."

Elouise had not really been dozing. But still she was startled, and she lurched forward, disturbing Amy, who really had fallen asleep. "No no no," said Amy, and Elouise forced herself to be patient; she soothed her -daughter back to sleep before pursuing whatever it was that her guardian program had caught. Whatever it was? Oh, she knew what it was. It was treachery. The one thing she had been sure her group, her airplane would never have. Other groups of Rectifiers-wreckers, they called themselves, having adopted their enemies' name for them - other groups had had their spies or their faint hearts, but not Bill or Heather or Ugly-Bugly.

Specify, she typed.

The computer was specific.

Over northern Virginia, as the airplane followed its careful route to find and destroy everything made of metal, glass, and plastic; somewhere over northern Virginia, the airplane's path bent slightly to the south, and on the return, at the same place, the airplane's path bent slightly to the north, so that a strip of

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northern Virginia two kilometers long and a few dozen meters wide could contain some nonbiodegradable artifact, hidden from the airplane, and if Elouise had not queried this program,

she would never have known it.

But she should have known it. When the plane's course bent, alarms should have sounded. Someone had penetrated the first line of defense. But Bill could not have done that, nor could Heather, really-they didn't have the sophistication to break up a bubble program. Ugly-Bugly?

She knew it wasn't faithful old Ugly-Bugly. No, not her.

The computer voluntarily flashed, "Override M577b, commandmo4, intwis CtTttT." It was an apology. Someone aboard ship had found the alarm override program and the overrides for the alarm overrides. Not my fault, the computer was saying.

Elouise hesitated for a moment. She looked down at her daughter and moved a curl of red hair away from Amy's eye. Elouise's hand trembled. But she was a woman of ice, yes, all frozen where compassion made other women warm. She prided herself on that, on having frozen the last warm places in her-frozen so goddamn rigid that it was only a moment's hesitation. And then she reached out and asked for the access code used to perform the treachery, asked for the name of the traitor.

The computer was even less compassionate than Elouise. It hesitated not at all.

The computer did not underline; the letters on the screen were no larger than normal. Yet Elouise felt the words as a shout, and she answered them silently with a scream.

Charles Evan Hardy, b24ag61-richlandWA.

It was Charlie who was the traitor-Charlie, her sweet, soft, hard-bodied husband, Charlie who secretly was trying to undo the end of the world.

God has destroyed the world before. Once in a flood, when Noah rode it out in the Ark. And once the tower of the world's pride was destroyed in the confusion of tongues. The other times, if there were any other times, those times are all forgotten.



The world will probably be destroyed again, unless we repent. And don't think you can hide from the angels. They start out as ordinary people, and you never know which ones. Suddenly God puts the power of destruction in their hands, and they destroy. And just as suddenly, when all the destruction is done, the angel leaves them, and they're ordinary people. Just my mother and my father.

I can't remember Father Charlie's face. I was too young.

Mother Elouise told me often about Father Charlie. He was born far to the west in a land where water only comes to the crops in ditches, almost never from the sky. It was a land unblessed by God. Men lived there, they believed, only by the strength of their own hands. Men made their ditches and forgot about God and became scientists. Father Charlie became a scientist. He worked on tiny animals, breaking their heart of hearts and combining it in new ways. Hearts were broken too often where he worked, and one of the little animals escaped and killed people until they lay in great heaps like fish in the ship's hold.

But this was not the destruction of the world.

Oh, they were giants in those days, and they forgot the Lord, but when their people lay in piles of moldering flesh and brittle bone, they remembered they were weak. Mother Elouise said, "Charlie came weeping." This is how Father Charlie became an angel. He saw what the giants had done, by thinking they were greater than God. At first he sinned in his grief. Once he cut his own throat. They put Mother Elouise's

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blood in him to save his life. This is how they met: In the forest where he had gone to die privately, Father Charlie woke up from a sleep he thought would be forever to see a woman lying next to him in the tent and a doctor bending over them both. When he saw that this woman gave her blood to him whole and unstintingly, he forgot his wish to die. He loved her forever. Mother Elouise said he loved her right up to the day she killed him.

When they were finished, they had a sort of ceremony, a sort of party. "A benediction," said Bill, solemnly sipping at the gin. "Amen and amen."

"My shift," Charlie said, stepping into the cockpit. Then he noticed that everyone was there and that they were drinking the last of the gin, the bottle that had been saved for the end. "Well, happy us," Charlie said, smiling.

Bill got up from the controls of the 787. "Any preferences on where we set down?" he asked. Charlie took his place.

The others looked at one another. UglyBugly shrugged. "God, who ever thought about it?"

"Come on, we're all futurists," Heather said. "You must know where you want to live."

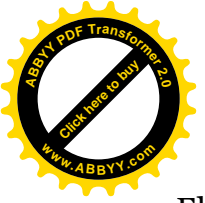
"Two thousand years from now," UglyBugly said. "I want to live in the world the way it'll be two thousand years from now."

"Ugly-Bugly opts for resurrection," Bill said. "I, however, long for the bosom of Abraham."

"Virginia," said Elouise. They turned to face her. Heather laughed.

"Resurrection," Bill intoned, "the bosom of Abraham, and Virginia. You have no poetry, Elouise."

"I've written down the coordinates of the place where we are supposed-to land,"



Elouise said. She handed them to Charlie. He did not avoid her gaze. She watched him read the paper. He showed no sign of recognition. For a moment she hoped that it had all been a mistake, but no. She would not let herself be misled by her desires.

"Why Virginia?" Heather asked.

Charlie looked up. "It's central."

"It's east coast," Heather said.

"It's central in the high survival area. There isn't much of a living to be had in the western mountains or on the plains. It's not so far south as to be in hunter gatherer country and not so far north as to be unsurvivable for a high proportion of the people. Barring a hard winter. "

"All very good reasons," Elouise said. "Fly us there, Charlie."

Did his hands tremble as he touched the controls? Elouise watched very carefully, but he did not tremble. Indeed, he was the only one who did not.

Ugly-Bugly suddenly began to cry, tears coming from her good eye and streaming down her good cheek. Thank God she doesn't cry out of the other side, Elouise thought; then she was angry at herself, for she had thought Ugly-Bugly's deformed face didn't bother her anymore. Elouise was angry at herself, but it only made her cold inside, determined that there would be no failure. Her mission would be complete. No allowances made for personal cost.

Elouise suddenly started out of her contemplative mood to find that the two other women had left the cockpit-their sleep shift, though it was doubtful they would sleep. Charlie silently flew the plane, while Bill sat in the copilot's seat, pouring himself the last drop from the bottle. He was looking at Elouise.

"Cheers," Elouise said to him.

He smiled sadly back at her. "Amen," he said. Then he leaned back and sang

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softly:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.

Praise him, ye creatures here below.

Praise him, who slew the wicked host.

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Then he reached for Elouise's hand. She was surprised, but let him take it.

He bent to her and kissed her palm tenderly. "For many have entertained angels unaware," he said to her.

A few moments later he was asleep. Charlie and Elouise sat in silence. The plane flew on south as darkness overtook them from the east. At first their silence was almost affectionate. But as Elouise sat and sat, saying nothing, she felt the silence grow cold and terrible, and for the first time she realized that when the airplane landed, Charlie would be her-Charlie, who had been half her life for these last few years, whom she had never lied to and who had never lied to her-would be her enemy.

y

I have watched the little children do a dance called Charlie-El. They sing a little song to it, and if I remember the words, it goes like this:

I am made of bones and glass.

Let me pass, let me pass.



I am made of brick and steel. Take my heel, take my heel.

I was killed just yesterday.

Kneel and pray, kneel and pray. Dig a hole where I can sleep.

Dig it deep, dig it deep. -

Will I go to heaven or hell?

Charlie-El. Charlie-El.

I think they are already nonsense words to the children. But the poem first got passed word

of mouth around Richmond when I was little,

and living in Father Michael's house. The

children do not try to answer their song. They

just sing it and do a very clever little dance

while they sing. They always end the song with

all the children falling down on the ground, _

laughing. That is the best way for the song to end.

Charlie brought the airplane straight down into a field, great hot winds pushing against the ground as if to shove it back from the plane. The field caught fire, but when the plane had settled upon its three wheels, foam streaked out from the belly of the machine and overtook the flames. Elouise watched from the cockpit, thinking, Wherever the foam has touched, nothing will grow for years. It seemed symmetrical to her. Even in the last moments of the last machine, it must poison the earth. Elouise held Amy on her lap and thought of trying to explain it to the child. But Elouise knew Amy would not understand or remember.

"Last one dressed is a sissy-wissy," said Ugly-Bugly in her husky, ancient-sounding voice. They had dressed and undressed in front of each other for years now, but today as the old plastic-polluted clothing came off and the homespun went on, they felt and acted like school kids on their first day in coed gym. Amy caught the spirit of it and kept yelling at the top of her lungs. No one thought to quiet her.

There was no need. This was a celebration.

But Elouise, long accustomed to self-examination, forced herself to realize that there was a strain to her frolicking. She did not believe it, not really. Today was not a happy day, and it was not just from knowing the confrontation that lay ahead.

There was something so final about the death of the last of the engines of mankind. Surely something could be-but she forced the thought from her, forced the coldness in her to overtake that sentiment. Surely she could not be seduced by the beauty of the airplane. Surely she must remember that it was not the machines but what they inevitably did to mankind that was evil.

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They looked and felt a little awkward, almost silly, as they left the plane and stood around in the blackened field. They had not yet lost their feel for stylish clothing, and the homespun was so lumpy and awkward and rough. It didn't look right on any of them.

Amy clung to her doll, awed by the strange scenery. In her life she had been out of the airplane only once, and that was when she was an infant. She watched as the trees moved unpredictably. She winced at the wind in her eyes. She touched her cheek, where her hair moved back and forth in the breeze, and hunted through her



vocabulary for a word to name the strange invisible touch of her skin. "Mommy," she said. "Uh! Uh! Uh!"

Elouise understood. "Wind," she said. The sounds were still too hard for Amy, and the child did not attempt to say the word. Wind, thought Elouise, and immediately thought of Charlie. Her best memory of Charlie was in the wind. It was during his death-wish time, not long after his suicide. He had insisted on climbing a mountain, and she knew that he meant to fall. So she had climbed with him, even though there was a storm coming up. Charlie was angry all the way. She remembered a terrible hour clinging to the face of a cliff, held only by small bits of metal forced into cracks in the rock. She had insisted on remaining tied to Charlie. "If one of us fell, it would only drag the other down, too," he kept saying. "I know," she kept answering. And so Charlie had not fallen, and they made love for the first time in a shallow cave, with the wind howling outside and occasional sprays of rain coming in to dampen them. They refused to be dampened. Wind. Damn.

And Elouise felt herself go cold and unemotional, and they stood on the edge of the field in the shade of the first trees. Elouise had left the Rectifier near the plane, set on 360 degrees. In a few minutes the Rectifier would go off, and they had to watch, to witness the end of their work.

Suddenly Bill shouted, laughed, held up his wrist. "My watch!" he cried.

"Hurry," Charlie said. "There's time."

Bill unbuckled his watch and ran toward the Rectifier. He tossed the watch. It landed within a few meters of the small machine. Then Bill returned to the group, jogging and shaking his head. "Jesus, what a moron! Three years wiping out everything east of the Mississippi, and I almost save a digital chronograph."

"Dixie Instruments?" Heather asked.

"Yeah."

"That's not high technology," she said, and they all laughed. Then they fell silent, and Elouise wondered whether they were all thinking the same thing: that jokes about brand names would be dead within a generation, if they were not already dead. They watched the Rectifier in silence, waiting for the timer to finish its delay. Suddenly there was a shining in the air, a dazzling not-light that made them squint. They had seen this many times before, from the air and from the ground, but this was the last time, and so they saw it as if it were the first.

The airplane corroded as if a thousand years were passing in seconds. But it wasn't a true corrosion. There was no rust-only dissolution as molecules separated and seeped down into the loosened earth. Glass became sand; plastic corrupted to oil; the metal also drifted down into the ground and came to rest in a vein at the bottom of the Rectifier field. Whatever else the metal might look like to a future geologist, it wouldn't look like an artifact. It would look like iron. And with so many similar pockets of iron and copper and aluminum and tin spread all over the once-civilized world, it was not likely that they would suspect human interference. Elouise was amused, thinking of the treatises that would someday be written, about the two states of workable metals-the ore state and the pure-metal vein. She hoped it would retard their progress a little.

The airplane shivered into nothing, and the Rectifier also died in the



field. A few minutes after the Rectifier disappeared, the field also faded.

"Amen and amen," said Bill, maudlin again.

"All clean now."

Elouise only smiled. She said nothing of the other Rectifier, which was in her knapsack. Let the others think all the work was done.

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Amy poked her finger in Charlie's eye. Charlie swore and set her down. Amy started to cry, and Charlie knelt by her and hugged her. Amy's arms went tightly around his neck. "Give Daddy a kiss," Elouise said.

"Well, time to go," Ugly-Bugly's voice rasped. "Why the hell did you pick this particular spot?"

Elouise cocked her head. "Ask Charlie."

Charlie flushed. Elouise watched him grimly. "Elouise and I once came here," he said. "Before Rectification began. Nostalgia, you know." He smiled shyly, and the others laughed. Except Elouise. She was helping Amy to urinate. She felt the weight of the small Rectifier in her knapsack and did not tell anyone the truth: that she had never been in Virginia before in her life.

"Good a spot as any," Heather said. "Well, bye."

Well, bye. That was all, that was the end of it, and Heather walked away to the west, toward the Shenandoah Valley.

"See ya," Bill said.

"Like hell," Ugly-Bugly added.

Impulsively Ugly-Bugly hugged Elouise; and Bill cried, and then they took off northeast, toward the Potomac, where they would doubtlessly find a community growing up along the clean and fish-filled river.

Just Charlie, Amy, and Elouise left in the empty, blackened field where the airplane had died. Elouise tried to feel some great pain at the separation from the others, but she could not. They had been together every day for years now, going from supply dump to supply dump, wrecking cities and towns, destroying and using up the artificial world. But had they been friends? If it had not been for their task, they would never have been friends. They were not the same kind of people.

And then Elouise was ashamed of her feelings. Not her kind of people? Because Heather liked what grass did to her and had never owned a car or had a driver's license in her life? Because Ugly-Bugly had a face hideously deformed by cancer surgery? Because Bill always worked Jesus into the conversation, even though half the time he was an atheist? Because they just weren't in the same social circles? There were no social circles now. Just people trying to survive in a bitter world they weren't bred for. There were only two classes now: those who would make it and those who wouldn't.

Which class am I? thought Elouise.

"Where should we go?" Charlie asked.

Elouise picked Amy up and handed her to Charlie. "Where's the capsule, Charlie?"

Charlie took Amy and said, "Hey, Amy, baby, I'll bet we find some farming community between here and the Rappahannock."

"Doesn't matter if you tell me, Charlie. The instruments found it before we landed.

You did



a damn good job on the computer program." She didn't have to say, Not good enough. Charlie only smiled crookedly. "Here I was hoping you were forgetful." He reached out to touch her knapsack. She pulled abruptly away. He lost his smile. "Don't you know me?" he asked softly.

He would never try to take the Rectifier from her by force. But still. This was the last of the artifacts they were talking about. Was anyone really predictable at such
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a time? Elouise was not sure. She had thought she knew him well before, yet the time capsule existed to prove that her understanding of Charlie was far from complete.

"I know you, Charlie," she said, "but not as well as I thought. Does it matter?

Don't try to stop me."

"I hope you're not too angry," he said.

Elouise couldn't think of anything to say to that. Anyone could be fooled by a traitor, but only I am fool enough to marry one. She turned from him and walked into the forest. He took Amy and followed.

All the way through the underbrush Elouise kept expecting him to say something. A threat, for instance: You'll have to kill me to destroy that time capsule. Or a plea: You have to leave it, Elouise, please, please. Or reason, or argument, or anger, or something.

But instead it was just his silent footfalls behind her. Just his occasional play talk with Amy. Just his singing as he put Amy to sleep on his shoulder.

The capsule had been hidden well. There was no surface sign that men had ever been here. Yet, from the Rectifier's emphatic response, it was obvious that the time capsule was quite large. There must have been heavy, earthmoving equipment. Or was it all done by hand?

"When did you ever find the time?" Elouise asked when they reached the spot.

"Long lunch hours," he said.

She set down her knapsack and then stood there, looking at him.

Like a condemned man who insists on keeping his composure, Charlie smiled wryly and said, "Get on with it, please."

After Father Charlie died, Mother Elouise brought me here to Richmond. She didn't tell anyone that she was a Wrecker. The angel had already left her, and she wanted to blend into the town, be an ordinary person in the world she and her fellow angels had created.

Yet she was incapable of blending in. Once the angel touches you, you cannot go back, even when the angel's work is done. She first attracted attention by talking against the stockade. There was once a stockade around the town of Richmond, when there were only a thousand people here. The reason was simple: People still weren't used to the hard way life was without the old machines. They had not yet learned to depend on the miracle of Christ. They still trusted in their hands, yet their hands could work no more magic. So there were tribes in the winter that didn't know how to

find
game, that had no reserves of grain, that had no shelter adequate to hold the head of a fire.

"Bring them all in," said Mother Elouise. "There's room for all. There's food for all. Teach them how to build ships and make tools and sail and farm, and we'll all



be richer for it."

But Father Michael and Uncle Avram knew more than Mother Elouise. Father Michael had been a Catholic priest before the destruction, and Uncle Avram had been a professor at a university. They had been nobody. But when the angels of destruction finished their work, the angels of life began to work in the hearts of men. Father Michael threw off his old allegiance to Rome and taught Christ simple, from his memory of the Holy Book. Uncle Avram plunged into his memory of ancient metallurgy and taught the people who gathered at Richmond how to make iron hard enough to use for tools. And weapons.

Father Michael forbade the making of guns and forbade that anyone teach children

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what guns were. But for hunting there had to be arrows, and what will kill a deer will also kill a man.

Many people agreed with Mother Elouise about the stockade. But then in the worst of winter a tribe came from the mountains and threw fire against the stockade and against the ships that kept trade alive along the whole coast. The archers of Richmond killed most of them, and people said to Mother Elouise, "Now you must agree we need the stockade."

Mother Elouise said, "Would they have come with fire if there had been no wall?" How can anyone judge the greatest need? Just as the angel of death had come to plant the seeds of a better life, so that angle of life had to be hard and endure death so the many could live. Father Michael and Uncle Avram held to the laws of Christ simple, for did not the Holy Book say, "Love your enemies, and smite them only when they attack you; chase them not out into the forest, but let them live as long as they leave you alone"?

I remember that winter. I remember watching while they buried the dead tribesmen. Their bodies had stiffened quickly, but Mother Elouise brought me to see them and said, "This is death, remember it, remember it." What did Mother Elouise know? Death is our passage from flesh into the living wind, until Christ brings us forth into flesh again. Mother Elouise will find Father Charlie again, and every wound will be made whole.

Elouise knelt by the Rectifier and carefully set it to go off in half an hour, destroying itself and the time capsule buried thirty meters under the ground. Charlie stood near her, watching, his face nearly expressionless; only a faint smile broke his perfect repose. Amy was in his arms, laughing and trying to reach up to pinch his nose.

"This Rectifier responds only to me," Elouise said quietly. "Alive. If you try to move it, it will go off early and kill us all."

"I won't move it," Charlie said.

And Elouise was finished. She stood up and reached for Amy. Amy reached back, holding out her arms to her mother. "Mommy," she said.

Because I couldn't remember Father Charlie's face, Mother Elouise thought I had forgotten everything about him, but that is not true. I remember very clearly one picture of him, but he is not in the picture.

This is very hard for me to explain. I see a small clearing in the trees, with Mother Elouise standing in front of me. I see her at my eye level, which tells



me that I am being held. I cannot see Father Charlie, but I know that he is holding me. I can feel his arms around me, but I cannot see his face.

This vision has come to me often. It is not like other dreams. It is very clear, and I am always very afraid, and I don't know why. They are talking, but I do not understand their words. Mother Elouise reaches for me, but Father Charlie will not let me go. I feel afraid that Father Charlie will not let me go with Mother Elouise. But why should I be afraid? I love Father Charlie, and I never want to leave him. Still I reach out, reach out, reach out, and still the arms hold me and I cannot go.

Mother Elouise is crying. I see her face twisted in pain. I want to comfort her. "Mommy is hurt," I say again and again.

And then, suddenly, at the end of this vision I am in my mother's arms and we are running, running up a hill, into the trees. I am looking back over her shoulder. I see Father Charlie then. I see him, but I do not see him. I know exactly where he is, in my vision. I could tell you his height. I could tell you where his left foot is and where his right foot is, but still I can't see him. He has no face, no color; he is just a man-shaped emptiness in the clearing, and then the trees are in the way and he is gone.

Elouise stopped only a little way into the woods. She turned around, as if

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to go back to Charlie. But she would not go back. If she returned to him, it would be to disconnect the Rectifier. There would be no other reason to do it.

"Charlie, you son of a bitch!" she shouted.

There was no answer. She stood, waiting. Surely he could come to her. He would see that she would never go back, never turn off the machine. Once he realized it was inevitable, he would come running from the machine, into the forest, back to the clearing where the 787 had landed. Why would he want to give his life so meaninglessly? What was in the time capsule, after all? Just history—that's what he said, wasn't it? Just history, just films and metal plates engraved with words and microdots and other ways of preserving the story of mankind. "How can they learn from our mistakes, unless we tell them what they were?" Charlie had asked.

Sweet, simple, naive Charlie. It is one thing to preserve a hatred for the killing machines and the soul-destroying machines and the garbagemaking machines. It was another to leave behind detailed, accurate, unquestionable descriptions. History was not a way of preventing the repetition of mistakes. It was a way of guaranteeing them. Wasn't it?

She turned and walked on, not very quickly, out of the range of the Rectifier, carrying Amy and listening, all the way, for the sound of Charlie running after her. What was Mother Elouise like? She was a woman of contradictions. Even with me, she would work for hours teaching me to read, helping me make tablets out of river clay and write on them with a shaped stick. And then, when I had written the words she taught me, she would weep and say, "Lies, all lies," Sometimes she would break the tablets I had made. But whenever part of her words was broken, she would make me write it again.

She called the collection of words The Book of the Golden Age. I have named it The Book of the Lies of the Angel Elouise, for it is important for us to know that the



greatest truths we have seem like lies to those who have been touched by the angel. She told many stories to me, and often I asked her why they must be written down. "For Father Charlie," she would always say.

"Is he coming back, then?" I would ask.

But she shook her head, and finally one time she said, "It is not for Father Charlie to read. It is because Father Charlie wanted it written."

"Then why didn't he write it himself?" I asked.

And Mother Elouise grew very cold with me, and all she would say was, "Father Charlie bought these stories. He paid more for them than I am willing to pay to have them left unwritten." I wondered then whether Father Charlie was rich, but other things she said told me that he wasn't. So I do not understand except that Mother Elouise did not want to tell the stories, and Father Charlie, though he was not there, constrained her to tell them.

There are many of Mother Elouise's lies that I love, but I will say now which of them she said 3 were most important:

3

1. In the Golden Age for ten times a thousand years men lived in peace and love and joy, 9 and no one did evil one to another. They shared -r all things in common, and no man was hungry while another was full, and no man had a home while another stood in the rain, and no wife wept for her husband, killed before his time.

2. The great serpent seems to come with great power. He has many names: Satan, Hitler, Lucifer, Nimrod, Napoleon. He seems to be beautiful, and he promises power to his friends and death to his enemies. He says he will right all wrongs. But

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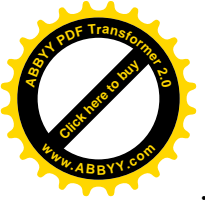
really he is weak, until people believe in him and give him the power of a their bodies. If you refuse to believe in the 3 serpent, if no one serves him, he will go away.

3. There are many cycles of the world. In every cycle the great serpent has arisen and the world has been destroyed to make way for the return of the Golden Age. Christ comes again in every cycle, also. One day when He comes men will believe in Christ and doubt the great serpent, and that time the Golden Age will never end, and God will dwell among men forever. And all the angels will say. "Come not to heaven but to Earth, for Earth is heaven now."

These are the most important lies of Mother Elouise. Believe them all, and remember them, for they are true.

All the way to the airplane clearing, Elouise deliberately broke branches and let them dangle so that Charlie would have no trouble finding a straight path out of the range of the Rectifier, even if he left his flight to the last second. She was sure Charlie would follow her. Charlie would bend to her as he had always bent, resilient and accommodating. He loved Elouise, and Amy he loved even more. What was in the metal under his feet that would weigh in the balance against his love for them?

So Elouise broke the last branch and stepped into the clearing and then sat down and let Amy play in the unburnt grass at the edge while she waited. It is Charlie who will bend, she said to herself, for I will never bend on this. Later 1



will make it up to him, but he must know that on this I will never bend. The cold place in her grew larger and colder until she burned inside, waiting for the sound of feet crashing through the underbrush. The damnable birds kept singing, so that she could not hear the footsteps.

Mother Elouise never hit me, or anyone else so far as I knew. She fought only with her words and silent acts, though she could have killed easily with her hands. I saw her physical power only once. We were in the forest, to gather firewood. We stumbled upon a wild hog. Apparently it felt cornered, though we were weaponless; perhaps it was just mean. I have not studied the ways of wild hogs. It charged, not Mother Elouise, but me. I was five at the time, and terrified, I ran to Mother Elouise, tried to cling to her, but she threw me out of the way and went into a crouch. I was screaming She paid no attention to me. The hog continued rushing, but seeing I was down and Mother Elouise erect, it changed its path. When it came near, she leaped to the side. It was not nimble enough to turn to face her. As it lumbered past, Mother Elouise kicked it just behind the head. The kick broke the hog's neck so violently that its head dropped and the hog rolled over and over, and when it was through rolling, it was already dead.

Mother Elouise did not have to die.

She died in the winter when I was seven. I should tell you how life was then, in Richmond We were only two thousand souls by then, not the large city of ten thousand we are now. We had only six finished ships trading the coast, and they had not yet gone so far north as Manhattan, though we had run one voyage all the way to Savannah in the south. Richmond

already ruled and protected from the Potomac to Dismal Swamp. But it was a very hard winter, and the town's leaders insisted on hoarding all the stored grain and fruits and vegetables and meat for our protected towns, and let the distant tribes trade or travel where they would, they would get no food from Richmond.

It was then that my mother, who claimed she did not believe in God, and Uncle Avram, who was a Jew, and Father Michael, who was a priest, all argued the same side of the question. It's better to feed them than to kill them, they all said. But when the tribes from west of the mountains and north of the Potomac came into Richmond lands, pleading for help, the leaders of Richmond turned them away and closed the gates of the towns. An army marched then, to put the fear of God, as they said, into the hearts of the tribesmen. They did not know which side God was on.

Father Michael argued and Uncle Avram stormed and fumed, but Mother Elouise silently went to the gate at moonrise one night and alone overpowered the guards. Silently

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she gagged them and bound them and opened the gates to the hungry tribesmen. They came through weaponless, as she had insisted. They quietly went to the storehouses and carried off as much food as they could. They were found only as the last few fled. No one was killed.

But there was an uproar, a cry of treason, a trial, and an execution. They decided on beheading, because they thought it would be quick and merciful. They had never seen a beheading.

It was Jack Woods who used the ax. He practiced all afternoon with pumpkins.



Pumpkins have no bones.

In the evening they all gathered to watch, some because they hated Mother Elouise, some because they loved her, and the rest because they could not stay away. I went also, and Father Michael held my head and would not let me see. But I heard. Father Michael prayed for Mother Elouise. Mother Elouise damned his and everyone else's soul to hell. She said, "If you kill me for bringing life, you will only bring death on your own heads."

"That's true," said the men around her. "We will all die. But you will die first."

"Then I'm the luckier," said Mother Elouise. It was the last of her lies, for she was telling the truth, and yet she did not believe it herself, for I heard her weep. With her last breaths she wept and cried out, "Charlie! Charlie!" There are those who claim she saw a vision of Charlie waiting for her on the right hand of God, but I doubt it. She would have said so. I think she only wished to see him. Or wished for his forgiveness. It doesn't matter. The angel had long since left her, and she was alone.

Jack swung the ax and it fell, more with a smack than a thud. He had missed her neck and struck deep in her back and shoulder. She screamed. He struck again and this time silenced her. But he did not break through her spine until the third blow. Then he turned away splattered with blood, and vomited and wept and pleaded with Father Michael to forgive him.

Amy stood a few meters away from Elouise, who sat on the grass of the clearing, looking toward a broken branch on the nearest tree. Amy called, "Mommy! Mommy!" Then

she bounced up and down, bending and unbending her knees. "Dal Da!" she cried. "La la la la la." She was dancing and wanted her mother to dance and sing, too. But Elouise only looked toward the tree, waiting for Charlie to appear. Any minute, she thought. He will be angry. He will be ashamed, she thought. But he will be alive. In the distance, however, the air all at once was shining. Elouise could see it clearing because they were not far from the edge of the Rectifier field. It shimmered in the trees, where it caused no harm to plants. Any vertebrates within the field, any animals that lived by electricity passing along nerves, were instantly dead, their brains stilled. Birds dropped from tree limbs. Only insects droned on.

The Rectifier field lasted only minutes.

Amy watched the shining air. It was as if the empty sky itself were dancing with her. She was transfixed. She would soon forget the airplane, and already her father's face was disappearing from her memories. But she would remember the shining. She would see it forever in her dreams, a vast thickening of the air, dancing and vibrating up and down, up and down. In her dreams it would always be the same, a terrible shining light that would grow and grow and grow and press against her in her bed. And always with it would come the sound of a voice she loved, saying, "Jesus. Jesus. Jesus." This dream would come so clearly when she was twelve that she would tell it to her adopted father, the priest named Michael. He told her that it was the voice of an angel, speaking

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the name of the source of all light. "You must not fear the light," he said. "You



must embrace it." It satisfied her.

But at the moment she first heard the voice, in fact and not in dream, she had no trouble recognizing it, it was the voice of her mother, Elouise, saying, "Jesus." It was full of grief that only a child could fail to understand. Amy did not understand. She only tried to repeat the word, "Deeah-zah."

"God," said Elouise, rocking back and forth, her face turned up toward a heaven she was sure was unoccupied.

"Dog," Amy repeated, "Dog dog doggie." In vain she looked around for the four-footed beast.

"Charlie!" Elouise screamed as the Rectifier field faded.

"Daddy," Amy cried, and because of her mother's tears she also wept. Elouise took her daughter in her arms and held her, rocking back and forth. Elouise discovered that there were some things that could not be frozen in her.

Some things that must burn: Sunlight. And lightning. And everlasting, inextinguishable regret.

My mother, Mother Elouise, often told me about my father. She described Father Charlie in detail, so I would not forget. She refused to let me forget anything. "It's what Father Charlie died for," she told me, over and over. "He died so you would remember. You cannot forget."

So I still remember, even today, every word she told me about him. His hair was red, as mine was. His body was lean and hard. His smile was quick, like mine, and he had gentle hands. When his hair was long or sweaty, it kinked tightly at his forehead, ears, and neck. Ibis touch was so delicate he could cut in half an animal so tiny it could not be seen without a machine; so sensitive that he could fly-an art that Mother Elouise said was a not a miracle, since it could be done by many giants of the Golden Age, and they took with them many others who could not fly alone. This was Charlie's gift. Mother Elouise said. She also told me that I loved him dearly.

But for all the words that she taught me, I still have no picture of my father in my mind. It is as if the words drove out the vision, as so often happens. Yet I still hold that one memory of my father, so deeply hidden that I can neither lose it nor fully find it again. Sometimes I wake up weeping. Sometimes I wake up with my arms in

the air, curved just so, and I remember that I was dreaming of embracing that large man who loved me. My arms remember how it feels to hold Father Charlie tight around the neck and cling to him as he carries his child. And when I cannot sleep, and the pillow seems to be always the wrong shape, it is because I am hunting for the shape of Father Charlie's shoulder, which my heart remembers, though my mind cannot.

God put angels into Mother Elouise and Father Charlie, and they destroyed the world, for the cup of God's indignation was full, and all the works of men become dust, but out of dust God makes men, and out of men and women, angels.

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UNACCOMPANIED SONATA

by Orson Scott Card

When Christian Haroldsen was six months old, preliminary tests showed a predisposition toward rhythm and a keen awareness of pitch. There were other tests, of course, and many possible routes still open to him. But rhythm and pitch were the governing signs of his own private zodiac, and already the reinforcement began. Mr. and Mrs. Haroldsen were provided with tapes of many kinds of sound and instructed to play them constantly, whether Christian was awake or asleep.

When Christian Haroldsen was two years old, his seventh battery of tests pinpointed the path he would inevitably follow. His creativity was exceptional; his curiosity, insatiable; his understanding of music, so intense that on top of all the tests was written "Prodigy."

Prodigy was the word that took him from his parents' home to a house in deep deciduous forests where winter was savage and violent and summer, a brief, desperate eruption of green. He grew up, cared for by unsinging servants, and the only music he was allowed to hear was bird song and wind song and the crackling of winter wood; thunder and the faint cry of golden leaves as they broke free and tumbled to the earth; rain on the roof and the drip of water from icicles; the chatter of squirrels and the deep silence of snow falling on a moonless night.

These sounds were Christian's only conscious music. He grew up with the symphonies of his early years only distant and impossible-to-retrieve memories. And so he learned to hear music in unmusical things—for he had to find music, even when there was none to find.

He found that colors made sounds in his mind: Sunlight in summer was a blaring chord; moonlight in winter a thin, mournful wail; new green in spring, a low murmur in almost (but not quite) random rhythms; the flash of a red fox in the leaves, a gasp of sudden startlement.

And he learned to play all those sounds on his Instrument. In the world were violins, trumpets, and clarinets, as there had been for centuries. Christian knew nothing of that. Only his Instrument was available. It was enough.

Christian lived in one room in his house, which he had to himself most of the time. He had a bed (not too soft), a chair and table, a silent machine that cleaned him and his clothing, and an electric light.

The other room contained only his Instrument. It was a console with many keys and strips and levers and bars, and when he touched any part of it; a sound came out. Every key made a different sound; every point on the strips made a different pitch; every lever modified the tone; every bar altered the structure of the sound.

When he first came to the house, Christian played (as children will) with the Instrument, making strange and funny noises. It was his only playmate; he learned it well, could produce any sound he wanted to. At first he delighted in loud, blaring tones. Later he began to learn the pleasure of silences and rhythms. And soon he began to play with soft and loud and to play two sounds at once and to change those two sounds together to make a new sound and to play again a sequence of sounds he had played before.

Gradually, the sounds of the forest outside his house found their way into the music he played. He learned to make winds sing through his instrument; he learned to make



summer one of the songs he could play at will. Green with its infinite variations was his most subtle harmony; the birds cried out from his Instrument with all the passion of Christian's loneliness.

And the word spread to the licensed Listeners:

"There's a new sound north of here, east of here: Christian Haroldsen, and he'll tear out your heart with his songs."

The Listeners came, a few to whom variety was everything first, then those to whom novelty and vogue mattered most, and at last those who valued beauty and passion above everything else. They came and stayed out in Christian's woods and listened as his music was played through perfect speakers on the roof of his house. When the music stopped and Christian came out of his house, he could see the Listeners moving away. He asked and was told why they came; he marveled that the things he did for love on his Instrument could be of interest to other people.

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He felt, strangely, even more lonely to know that he could sing to the Listeners and yet never be able to hear their songs.

"But they have no songs," said the woman who came to bring him food every day. "They are Listeners. You are a Maker. You have songs, and they listen."

"Why?" asked Christian, innocently.

The woman looked puzzled. "Because that's what they want most to do. They've been tested, and they are happiest as Listeners. You are happiest as a Maker. Aren't you happy?"

"Yes," Christian answered, and he was telling the truth. His life was perfect, and he wouldn't change anything, not even the sweet sadness of the backs of the Listeners as they walked away at the end of his songs.

Christian was seven years old.

FIRST MOVEMENT

For the third time the short man with glasses and a strangely inappropriate mustache dared to wait in the underbrush for Christian to come out. For the third time he was overcome by the beauty of the song that had just ended, a mournful symphony that made the short man with glasses feel the pressure of the leaves above him, even though it was summer and they had months left before they would fall. The fall was still inevitable, said Christian's song; through all their life the leaves hold within them the power to die, and that must color their life. The short man with glasses wept-but when the song ended and the other Listeners moved away, he hid in the brush and waited.

This time his wait was rewarded. Christian came out of his house, walked among the trees, and came toward where the short man with glasses waited. The man admired the easy, unpostured way that Christian walked. The composer looked to be about thirty, yet there was something childish in the way he looked around him, the way his walk was aimless and prone to stop so he would just touch (and not break) a fallen twig with his bare toes.

"Christian," said the short man with glasses.

Christian turned, startled. In all these years, no Listener had ever spoken to him.

It was forbidden. Christian knew the law.

"It's forbidden," Christian said.



"Here," the short man with glasses said, holding out a small black object.

"What is it?"

The short man grimaced. "Just take it. Push the button and it plays."

"Plays?"

"Music."

Christian's eyes opened wide. "But that's forbidden. I can't have my creativity polluted by hearing other musicians work. That would make me imitative and derivative, instead of original."

"Reciting," the man said. "You're just reciting that. This is Bach's music." There was reverence in his voice.

"I can't," Christian said.

And then the short man shook his head. "You don't know. You don't know what you're missing. But I heard it in your song when I came here years ago, Christian. You want this."

"It's forbidden," Christian answered, for to him the very fact that a man who knew an act was forbidden still wanted to perform it was astounding, and he couldn't get past the novelty of it to realize that some action was expected of him.

There were footsteps, and words being spoken in the distance, and the short man's face became frightened. He ran at Christian, forced the recorder into his hands, then took off toward the gate of the preserve.

Christian took the recorder and held it in a spot of sunlight coming through the leaves. It gleamed dully. "Bach," Christian said. Then, "Who the hell is Bach?"

But he didn't throw the recorder down. Nor did he give the recorder to the woman who came to ask him what the short man with glasses had stayed for. "He stayed for at least ten minutes.-

"I only saw him for thirty seconds," Christian answered.

"And?"

"He wanted me to hear some other music. He had a recorder."

"Did he give it to you?"

"No," Christian said. "Doesn't he still have it?"

"He must have dropped it in the woods."

"He said it was Bach."

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"It's forbidden. That's all you need to know. If you should find the recorder, Christian, you know the law."

"I'll give it to you."

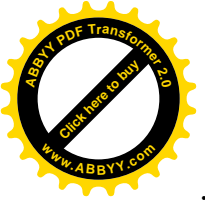
She looked at him carefully. "You know what would happen if you listened to such a thing."

Christian nodded.

"Very well. We'll be looking for it, too. I'll see you tomorrow, Christian. And next time somebody stays after, don't talk to him. Just come back in and lock the doors."

"I'll do that," Christian said.

There was a summer rainstorm that night, wind and rain and thunder, and Christian found that he could not sleep. Not because of the music of the weather-he'd slept through a thousand such storms. It was the recorder that lay against the wall behind the Instrument. Christian had lived for nearly thirty years surrounded only by this



wild, beautiful place and the music he himself made. But now...

Now he could not stop wondering. Who was Bach? Who is Bach? What is his music? How is it different from mine? Has he discovered things that I don't know?

What is his music? What is his music? What is his music?

Wondering. Until dawn, when the storm was abating and the wind had died. Christian got out of his bed, where he had not slept but only tossed back and forth all night, and took the recorder from its hiding place and played it.

At first it sounded strange, like noise; odd sounds that had nothing to do with the sounds of Christian's life. But the patterns were clear, and by the end of the recording, which was not even a half-hour long, Christian had mastered the idea of fugue, and the sound of the harpsichord preyed on his mind.

Yet he knew that if he let these things show up in his music, he would be discovered. So he did not try a fugue. He did not attempt to imitate the harpsichord's sound.

And every night he listened to the recording, learning more and more until finally the Watcher came.

The Watcher was blind, and a dog led him. He came to the door, and because he was a Watcher, the door opened for him without his even knocking.

"Christian Haroldsen," where is the recorder?" the Watcher asked.

"Recorder?" Christian asked, then knew it was hopeless. So he took the machine and gave it to the Watcher.

"Oh, Christian," said the Watcher, and his voice was mild and sorrowful. "Why didn't you turn it in without listening to it?"

"I meant to," Christian said. "But how did you know?"

"Because suddenly there are no fugues in your work. Suddenly your songs have lost the only Bach-like thing about them. And you've stopped experimenting with new sounds. What were you trying to avoid?"

"This," Christian said, and he sat down and on his first try duplicated the sound of the harpsichord.

"Yet you've never tried to do that until now, have you?"

"I thought you'd notice."

"Fugues and harpsichord, the two things you noticed first-and the only things you didn't absorb into your music. All your other songs for these last weeks have been tinted and colored and influenced by Bach. Except that there was no fugue, and there was no harpsichord. You have broken the law. You were put here because you were a genius, creating new things with only nature for your inspiration. Now, of course, you're derivative, and truly new creation is impossible for you. You'll have to leave."

"I know," Christian said, afraid, yet not really understanding what life outside his house would be like.

"We'll train you for the kinds of jobs you can pursue now. You won't starve. You won't die of boredom. But because you broke the law, one thing is forbidden to you now"

"Music;

"Not all music. There is music of a sort, Christian, that the common people, the ones who aren't Listeners, can



have. Radio and television and record music. But live music and new music-those are forbidden to you. You may not sing. You may not play an instrument. You may not tap out a rhythm."

"Why not?"

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The Watcher shook his head. "The world is too perfect, too at peace, too happy, for us to permit a misfit who broke the law to go about spreading discontent. And if you make more music, Christian, you will be punished drastically. Drastically."

Christian nodded, and when the Watcher told him to come, he came, leaving behind the house and the woods and his Instrument. At first he took it calmly, as the inevitable punishment for his infraction; but he had little concept of punishment, or of what exile from his Instrument would mean.

Within five hours he was shouting and striking out at anyone who came near him, because his fingers craved the touch of the Instrument's keys and levers and strips and bars, and he could not have them, and now he knew that he had never been lonely before.

It took six months before he was ready for normal life. And when he left the Retraining Center (a small building, because it was so rarely used), he looked tired and years older, and he didn't smile at anyone. He became a delivery truck driver, because the tests said that this was a job that would least grieve him and least remind him of his loss and most engage his few remaining aptitudes and interests. He delivered doughnuts to grocery stores.

And at night he discovered the mysteries of alcohol; and the alcohol and the doughnuts and the truck and his dreams were enough that he was, in his way, content. He had no anger in him. He could live the rest of his life, without bitterness. He delivered fresh doughnuts and took the stale ones away with him.

SECOND MOVEMENT

"With a name like Joe," Joe always said, "I had to open a bar and grill, just so I could put up a sign saying `Joe's Bar and Grill: " And he laughed and laughed, because, after all, Joe's Bar and Grill was a funny name these days.

But Joe was a good bartender, and the Watchers had put him in the right kind of place. Not in a big city but in a small town; a town just off the freeway, where truck drivers often came; a town not far from a large city, so that interesting things were nearby to be talked about and worried about and bitched about and loved.

Joe's Bar and Grill was, therefore, a nice place to come, and many people came there. Not fashionable people, and not drunks, but lonely people and friendly people in just the right mixture. "My clients are like a good drink. Just enough of this and that to make a new flavor that tastes better than any of the ingredients." Oh, Joe was a poet; he was a poet of alcohol, and like many another person these days, he often said, "My father was a lawyer, and in the old days I would have probably ended up a lawyer, too. And I never would have known what I was missing."

Joe was right. And he was a damn good bartender, and he didn't wish he were anything else, so he was happy.

One night, however, a new man came in, a man with a doughnut delivery truck and a doughnut brand name on his uniform. Joe noticed him because silence clung to the man like a smell-wherever he walked, people sensed it, and though they scarcely looked



at him, they lowered their voices or stopped talking at all, and they got reflective and looked at the walls and the mirror behind the bar. The doughnut deliveryman sat in a corner and had a watered down drink that meant he intended to stay a long time and didn't want his alcohol intake to be so rapid that he was forced to leave early.

Joe noticed things about people, and he noticed that this man kept looking off in the dark corner where the piano stood. It was an old, out-of-tune monstrosity from the old days (for this had been a bar for a long time), and Joe wondered why the man was fascinated by it. True, a lot of Joe's customers had been interested, but they had always walked over and plunked on the keys, trying to find a melody, failing with the out-of-tune keys, and finally giving up. This man, however, seemed almost afraid of the piano, and didn't go near it.

At closing time, the man was still there, and, on a whim, instead of making the man leave, Joe turned off the piped in music, turned off most of the lights, and went over and lifted the lid and exposed the gray keys.

The deliveryman came over to the piano. Chris, his name tag said. He sat and touched a single key. The sound was not pretty. But the man touched all the keys one by one and then touched them in different orders, and all the time Joe watched, wondering why the man was so intense about it.

"Chris," Joe said.

Chris looked up at him.

"Do you know any songs?"

Chris's face went funny.

"I mean, some of those old-time songs, not those fancy ass-twitchers on the radio,

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but songs. "In a Little Spanish Town: My mother sang that one to me." And Joe began to sing, "In a little Spanish town, 'twas on a night like this. Stars were peek-a-booming down, 'twas on a night like this."

Chris began to play as Joe's weak and toneless baritone. went on with the song. But his playing wasn't an accompaniment, not anything Joe could call an accompaniment. It was, instead, an opponent to his melody, an enemy to it, and the sounds coming out of the piano were strange and unharmonious and, by God, beautiful. Joe stopped singing and listened. For two hours he listened, and when it was over he soberly poured the man a drink and poured one for himself and clinked glasses with Chris the doughnut deliveryman who could take that rotten old piano and make the damn thing sing.

Three nights later, Chris came back, looking harried and afraid. But this time Joe knew what would happen (had to happen), and instead of waiting until closing time, Joe turned off the piped-in music ten minutes early. Chris looked up at him pleadingly. Joe misunderstood-he went over and lifted the lid to the keyboard and smiled. Chris walked stiffly, perhaps reluctantly, to the stool and sat.

"Hey, Joe," one of the last five customers shouted, "closing early?"

Joe didn't answer. Just watched as Chris began to play. No preliminaries this time; no scales and wanderings over the keys. Just power, and the piano was played as pianos aren't meant to be played; the bad notes, the out-of-tune notes, were fit into the music so that they sounded right, and Chris's fingers, ignoring the strictures of the twelve-tone scale, played, it seemed to Joe, in the cracks.



None of the customers left until Chris finished an hour and a half later. They all shared that final drink and went home, shaken by the experience.

The next night Chris came again, and the next, and the next. Whatever private battle had kept him away for the first few days after his first night of playing, he had apparently won it or lost it. None of Joe's business. What Joe cared about was the fact that when Chris played the piano, it did things to him that music had never done, and he wanted it.

The customers apparently wanted it, too. Near closing time people began showing up, apparently just to hear Chris play. Joe began starting the piano music earlier and earlier, and he had to discontinue the free drinks after the playing, because there were so many people it would have put him out of business.

It went on for two long, strange months. The delivery van pulled up outside, and people stood aside for Chris to enter. No one said anything to him. No one said anything at all, but everyone waited until he began to play the piano.

He drank nothing at all. Just played. And between songs the hundreds of people in Joe's Bar and Grill ate and drank.

But the merriment was gone. The laughter and the chatter and the camaraderie were missing, and after a while Joe grew tired of the music and wanted to have his bar back the way it was. He toyed with the idea of getting rid of the piano, but the customers would have been angry at him. He thought of asking Chris not to come any more, but he could not bring himself to speak to the strange, silent man.

And so finally he did what he knew he should have done in the first place. He called the Watchers.

They came in the middle of a performance, a blind Watcher with a dog on a leash, and an earless Watcher who walked unsteadily, holding on to things for balance. They came in the middle of a song and did not wait for it to end. They walked to the piano and closed the lid gently, and Chris withdrew his fingers and looked at the closed lid.

"Oh, Christian," said the man with the seeing-eye dog.

"I'm sorry," Christian answered. "I tried not to."

"Oh, Christian, how can I bear doing to you what must be done?"

"Do it," Christian said.

And so the man with no ears took a laser knife from his coat pocket and cut off Christian's fingers and thumbs, right where they rooted into his hands. The laser cauterized and sterilized the wound even as it cut, but still some blood spattered on Christian's uniform. And, his hands now meaningless palms and useless knuckles, Christian stood and walked out of Joe's Bar and Grill. The people made way for him again, and they listened intently as the blind Watcher said, "That was a man who broke the law and was forbidden to be a Maker. He broke the law a second time, and the law insists that he be stopped from breaking down the system that makes all of you so happy."

The people understood. It grieved them; it made them

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uncomfortable for a few hours, but once they toad returned home to their exactly right homes and got back to their exactly right jobs, the sheer contentment of their lives overwhelmed their momentary sorrow for Chris. After all, Chris had broken the



law. And it was the law that kept them all safe and happy.

Even Joe. Even Joe soon forgot Chris and his music. He knew he had done the right thing. He couldn't figure out, though, why a man like Chris would have broken the law in the first place, or what law he would have broken. There wasn't a law in the world that wasn't designed to make people happy-and there wasn't a law Joe could think of that he was even mildly interested in breaking.

Yet. Once, Joe went to the piano and lifted the lid and played every key on the piano. And when he had done that he put his head down on the piano and cried, because he knew that when Chris lost that piano, lost even his fingers so he could never play again-it was like Joe's losing his bar. And if Joe ever lost his bar, his life wouldn't be worth living.

As for Chris, someone else began coming to the bar driving the same doughnut delivery van, and no one ever saw Chris again in that part of the world.

THIRD MOVEMENT

"Oh, what a beautiful morning!" sang the road-crew man who had seen Oklahoma! four times in his home town.

"Rock my soul in the bosom of Abraham!" sang the road-crew man who had learned to sing when his family got together with guitars.

"Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom!" sang the road-crew man who believed.

But the road-crew man without hands, who held the signs telling the traffic to Stop or Go Slow, listened but never sang.

"Whyn't you never sing?" asked the man who liked Rogers and Hammerstein; asked all of them, at one time or another.

And the man they called Sugar just shrugged. "Don't feel like singin'," he'd say, when he said anything at all.

"Why they call him Sugar?" a new guy once asked. "He don't look sweet to me."

And the man who believed said, "His initials are CH. Like the sugar, C & H, you know." And the new guy laughed. A stupid joke, but the kind of gag that makes life easier on the road building crew.

Not that life was that hard. For these men, too, had been tested, and they were in the job that made them happiest. They took pride in the pain of sunburn and pulled muscles, and the road growing long and thin behind them was the most beautiful thing in the world. And so they sang all day at their work, knowing that they could not possibly be happier than they were this day.

Except Sugar.

Then Guillermo came. A short Mexican who spoke with an accent, Guillermo told everyone who asked, "I may come from Sonora, but my heart belongs in Milano!" And when anyone asked why (and often when no one asked anything), he'd explain: "I'm an Italian tenor in a Mexican body," and he proved it by singing every note that Puccini and Verdi ever wrote. "Caruso was nothing," Guillermo boasted. "Listen to this! "

Guillermo had records, and he sang along with them, and at work on the road crew he'd join in with any man's song and harmonize with it or sing an obbligato high above the melody, a soaring tenor that took the roof off his head and filled the clouds. "I can sing," Guillermo would say, and soon the other road-crew men



answered, "Damn right, Guillermo! Sing it again!"

But one night Guillermo was honest and told the truth. "Ah, my friends, I'm no singer."

"What do you mean? Of course you are!" came the unanimous answer.

"Nonsense!" Guillermo cried, his voice theatrical. "If I am this great singer, why do you never see me going off to record songs? Hey? This is a great singer?

Nonsense! Great singers they raise to be great singers. I'm just a man who loves to sing but has no talent! I'm a man who loves to work on the road crew with men like you and sing his guts out, but in the opera I could never be! Never! "

He did not say it sadly. He said it fervently, confidently. "Here is where I belong! I can sing to you who like to hear me sing! I can harmonize with you when I feel a harmony in my heart. But don't be thinking that Guillermo is a great singer, because he's not!"

It was an evening of honesty, and every man there explained why it was he was happy
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on the road crew and didn't wish to be anywhere else. Everyone, that is, except Sugar.

"Come on, Sugar. Aren't you happy here?"

Sugar smiled. "I'm happy. I like it here. This is good work for me. And I love to hear you sing."

"Then why don't you sing with us?"

Sugar shook his head. "I'm not a singer."

But Guillermo looked at him knowingly. "Not a singer, ha! Not a singer. A man without hands who refuses to sing is not a man who is not a singer. Hey?"

"What the hell did that mean?" asked the man who sang folk songs.

"It means that this man you call Sugar, he's a fraud. Not a singer! Look at his hands. All his fingers gone! Who is it who cuts off men's fingers?"

The road crew didn't try to guess. There were many ways a man could lose fingers, and none of them were anyone's business.

"He loses his fingers because he breaks the law and the Watchers cut them off!

That's how a man loses fingers. What was he doing with his fingers that the Watchers wanted him to stop? He was breaking the law, wasn't he?"

"Stop," Sugar said.

"If you want," Guillermo said, but the others would not respect Sugar's privacy.

"Tell us," they said.

Sugar left the room.

"Tell us," and Guillermo told them. That Sugar must have been a Maker who broke the law and was forbidden to make music any more. The very thought that a Maker even a lawbreaker-was working on the road crew with them filled the men with awe. Makers were rare, and they were the most esteemed of men and women.

"But why his fingers?"

"Because," Guillermo said, "he must have tried to make music again afterward. And when you break the law a second time, the power to break it a third time is taken away from you." Guillermo spoke seriously, and so to the road-crew men Sugar's story sounded as majestic and terrible as an opera. They crowded into Sugar's room and found the man staring at the wall.



"Sugar, is it true?" asked the man who loved Rogers and Hammerstein.

"Were you a Maker?" asked the man who believed.

"Yes," Sugar said.

"But Sugar," the man who believed said, "God can't mean for a man to stop making music, even if he broke the law."

Sugar smiled. "No one asked God."

"Sugar," Guillermo finally said, "There are nine of us on the crew, nine of us, and we're miles from any other human beings. You know us, Sugar. We swear on our mother's graves, every one of us, that we'll never tell a soul. Why should we?

You're one of us. But sing, dammit man, sing! "

"I can't," Sugar said.

"It isn't what God intended," said the man who believed. "We're all doing what we love best, and here you are, loving music and not able to sing a note. Sing for us! Sing with us! And only you and us and God will know!"

They all promised. They all pleaded.

And the next day as the man who loved Rogers and Hammerstein sang "Love, Look Away," Sugar began to hum. As the man who believed sang "God of Our Fathers," Sugar sang softly along. And as the man who loved folk songs sang, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," Sugar joined in with a strange, piping voice, and all the men laughed and cheered and welcomed Sugar's voice to the songs.

Inevitably Sugar began inventing. First harmonies, of course, strange harmonies that made Guillermo frown and then, after a while, grin as he joined in, sensing as best he could what Sugar was doing to the music.

And after harmonies, Sugar began singing his own melodies, with his own words. He made them repetitive, the words simple and the melodies simpler still. And yet he shaped them into odd shapes and built them into songs that had never been heard of before, that sounded wrong and yet were absolutely right. It was not long before the man who loved Rogers and Hammerstein and the man who sang folk songs and the man who

believed were learning Sugar's songs and singing them joyously or mournfully or angrily or gaily as they worked along the road.

Even Guillermo learned the songs, and his strong tenor was changed by them until his voice, which had, after all, been ordinary, became something unusual' and fine.

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Guillermor finally said to Sugar one day, "Hey, Sugar, your music is all wrong, man. But I like the way it feels in my nose! Hey, you know? I like the way it feels in my mouth! "

Some of the songs were hymns: "Keep me hungry, Lord; ' Sugar sang, and the road crew sang it too.

Some of the songs were love songs: "Put your hands in someone else's pockets," Sugar sang angrily; "I hear your voice in the morning," Sugar sang tenderly; "Is it summer yet?" Sugar sang sadly; and the road crew sang them, too.

Over the months, the road crew changed, one man leaving on Wednesday and a new man taking his place on Thursday, as different skills were needed in different places. Sugar was silent when each newcomer arrived, until



the man had given his word and the secret was sure to be kept.

What finally destroyed Sugar was the fact that his songs were so unforgettable. The men who left would sing the songs with their new crews, and those crews would learn them and teach them to others. Crew men taught the songs in bars and on the road; people learned them quickly and loved them; and one day a blind Watcher heard the songs and knew, instantly, who had first sung them. They were Christian Haroldsen's music, because in those melodies, simple as they were, the wind of the north woods still whistled and the fall of leaves still hung oppressively over every note and-and the Watcher sighed. He took a specialized tool from his file of tools and boarded an airplane and flew to the city closest to where a certain road crew worked. And the blind Watcher took a company car with a company driver up the road, and at the end of it, where the road was just beginning to swallow a strip of wilderness, he got out of the car and heard singing. Heard a piping voice singing a song that made even an eyeless man weep.

"Christian," the Watcher said, and the song stopped.

"You," said Christian.

"Christian, even after you lost your fingers?"

The other men didn't understand-all the other men, that is, except Guillermo.

"Watcher," said Guillermo. "Watcher, he done no harm."

The Watcher smiled wryly. "No one said he did. But he broke the law. You, Guillermo, how would you like to work as a servant in a rich man's house? How would you like to be a bank teller?"

"Don't take me from the road crew, man," Guillermo said.

"It's the law that finds where people will be happy. But

Christian Haroldsen broke the law. And he's gone around ever since, making people hear music they were never meant to hear."

Guillermo knew he had lost the battle before it began, but he couldn't stop himself.

"Don't hurt him, man. I was meant to hear his music. Swear to God, it's made me happier."

The Watcher shook his head sadly. "Be honest, Guillermo. You're an honest man. His music's made you miserable, hasn't it? You've got everything you could want in life, and yet his music makes you sad. All the time, sad."

Guillermo tried to argue, but he was honest, and he looked into his own heart. And he knew that the music was full of grief. Even the happy songs mourned for something; even the angry songs wept; even the love songs seemed to say that everything dies and contentment is the most fleeting of things. Guillermo looked in his own heart, and all Sugar's music stared back up at him; and Guillermo wept.

"Just don't hurt him, please," Guillermo murmured as he cried.

"I won't," the blind Watcher said. Then he walked to Christian, who stood passively waiting, and he held the special tool up to Christian's throat. Christian gasped.

"No," Christian said, but the word only formed with his lips and tongue. No sound came out. Just a hiss of air. No.

"Yes," the Watcher said.

The road crew watched silently as the Watcher led Christian away. They did not sing for days. But then Guillermo forgot his grief one day and sang an aria from La Boheme, and the songs went on from there. Now and then they sang one of Sugar's songs, because the songs could not be forgotten.



In the city, the blind Watcher furnished Christian with a pad of paper and a pen. Christian immediately gripped the pencil in the crease of his palm and wrote: "What do I do now?"

The blind Watcher laughed. "Have we got a job for you! Oh, Christian, have we got a job for you! "

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APPLAUSE

In all the world there were only two dozen Watchers. They were secretive men who supervised a system that needed little supervision because it actually made nearly everybody happy. It was a good system, but like even the most perfect of machines, here and there it broke down. Here and there someone acted madly and damaged himself, and to protect everyone and the person himself, a Watcher had to notice the madness and go to fix it.

For many years the best of the Watchers was a man with no fingers, a man with no voice. He would come silently, wearing the uniform that named him with the only name he needed-Authority: And he would find the kindest, easiest, yet most thorough way of solving the problem and curing the madness and preserving the system that made the world, for the first time in history, a very good place to live. For practically everyone.

For there were still a few people-one or two each year who were caught in a circle of their own devising, who could neither adjust to the system nor bear to harm it, people who kept breaking the law despite their knowledge that it would destroy them. Eventually, when the gentle maimings and deprivations did not cure their madness and set them back into the system, they were given uniforms, and they, too, went out. Watching.

The keys of power were placed in the hands of those who had most cause to hate the system they had to preserve. Were they sorrowful?

"I am," Christian answered in the moments when he dared to ask himself that question.

In sorrow he did his duty. In sorrow he grew old. And finally the other Watchers, who revered the silent man (for they knew he had once sung magnificent songs), told him he was free. "You've served your time," said the Watcher with no legs, and he smiled.

Christian raised an eyebrow, as if to say, "And?"

"So wander."

Christian wandered. He took off his uniform, but lacking neither money nor time he found few doors closed to him. He wandered where in his former lives he had once lived. A road in the mountains. A city where he had once known the loading entrance of every restaurant and coffee shop and grocery store. And, at last, a place in the woods where a house was falling apart in the weather because it had not been used in forty years.

Christian was old. The thunder roared, and it only made him realize that it was about to rain. All the old songs. All the old songs, he mourned inside himself, more because he couldn't remember them than because he thought his life had been particularly sad.



As he sat in a coffee shop in a nearby town to stay out of the rain, he heard four teenagers who played the guitar very badly singing a song that he knew. It was a song he had invented while the asphalt poured on a hot summer day. The teenagers were not musicians and certainly were not Makers. But they sang the song from their hearts, and even though the words were happy, the song made everyone who heard it cry.

Christian wrote on the pad he always carried, and showed his question to the boys.

"Where did that song come from?"

"It's a Sugar song," the leader of the group answered. "It's a song by Sugar."

Christian raised an eyebrow, making a shrugging motion.

"Sugar was a guy who worked on a road crew and made up songs. He's dead now, though," the boy answered.

Christian smiled. Then he wrote (and the boys waited impatiently for this speechless old man to go away): "Aren't you happy? Why sing sad songs?"

The boys were at a loss for an answer. The leader spoke up, though, and said, "Sure, I'm happy. I've got a good job, a girl I like, and man, I couldn't ask for more. I got my guitar. I got my songs. And my friends."

And another boy said, "These songs aren't sad, mister. Sure, they make people cry, but they aren't sad."

"Yeah," said another. "It's just that they were written by a man who knows."

Christian scribbled on his paper. "Knows what?"

"He just knows. Just knows, that's all."

And then the teenagers turned back to their clumsy guitars and their young untrained voices, and Christian walked to the door to leave because the rain had stopped and

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because he knew when to leave the stage. He turned and bowed just a little toward the singers. They didn't notice him, but their voices were all the applause he needed. He left the ovation and went outside where the leaves were just turning color and would soon, with a slight inaudible sound, break free and fall to the earth.

For a moment he thought he heard himself singing. But it was just the last of the wind, coasting madly through the wires over the street. It was a frenzied song, and Christian thought he had recognized his voice.

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