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The Prisoner of Chillon
by James Patrick Kelly
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We initiated deorbital burn over the Marshall Islands and dropped back into the ionosphere, locked by the wing's navigator into one of the Eurospace reentry corridors. As we coasted across Central America we were an easy target for the attack satellites. The plan was to fool the tracking nets into thinking we were a corporate shuttle. Django had somehow acquired the recognition codes; his computer, snaked to the wing's navigator, had convinced it to pretend to be the property of Erno Raumfahrttechnik GMBH, the EU aerospace conglomerate.

It was all a matter of timing, really. It would not be too much longer before the people on Cognico's Orbital 7 untangled the spaghetti Django had made of their memory systems and realized that he had downloaded WILDLIFE and stolen a cargo wing. Then they would have to decide whether to zap us immediately or have their own private security ops waiting when we landed. The plan was to lose the wing before they could decide. Our problem was that very little of the plan had worked so far.

Django had gotten us on and off the orbital research station all right, and had managed to pry WILDLIFE from the jaws of the corporate beast. For that alone his reputation would live forever among the snakes who steal information for a living, even if he was not around to enjoy the fame. But he had lost our pilot, Yellowbaby -- his partner, my sometime lover -- and neither of us had any idea exactly what it was he had stolen. He seemed pretty calm for somebody who had just sunk fangs into the world's biggest computer company. He slouched in the commander's seat across from me, watching the readouts on the autopilot console. He was smiling and tapping a finger against his headset as if he were listening to one of his jazz disks. He was a dark, ugly man with an Adam's apple that looked like a nose and a nose that looked like an elbow. He had either been to the face cutters or he was in his mid-thirties. I trusted him not at all and liked him less.

Me, I felt as though I had swallowed a hardboiled egg, but then I'd been space sick for days. I was just along for the story, the juice. According to the newly formed International Law Exchange, all a spook journalist is allowed to do is aim the microcam goggles and ask questions. If I helped Django in any way, I would become an accessory and lose press immunity. Infoline would have to disown me. But press immunity wouldn't do me much good if someone decided to zap the wing. The First Amendment was a great shield, but it didn't protect against reentry friction. I wanted to return to earth with a ship around me; sensors showed that the outer skin was currently 1400^o Celsius.

"Much longer?" A dumb question since I already knew the answer. But better than listening to the atmosphere scream as the wing bucked through turbulence. I could feel myself losing it: I wanted to scream back.

"Twenty minutes. However it plays." Django lifted his headset. "Either you'll be a plugging legend or air pollution." He stretched his arms over his head and arched his back away from the seat. I could smell his sweat and almost gagged. I just wasn't designed for more than three gravities a day. "Hey, lighten up, Eyes. You're a big girl now. Shouldn't you be taking notes or something?"

"The camera sees all." I tapped the left temple of the goggles and then forced a grin that hurt my face. "Besides, it's not bloody likely I'll forget this ride." I wasn't about to let Django play with me. He was too hypered on fast-forwards to be scared.

It had been poor Yellowbaby who had introduced me to Django. I had covered the Babe when he pulled the Peniplex job. He was a real all-nighter, handsome as surgical plastic can make a man and an artiste in bed. Handsome -- but history. The last time I had seen him he was floating near the ceiling of a decompressed cargo bay, an eighty-kilo hunk of flash-frozen boy toy. I might have thrown up again if there had been anything left in my stomach.

"I copy, Basel Control." Yellowbaby's calm voice crackled across the forward flight deck. "We're doing Mach nine point nine at fifty-seven thousand meters. Looking good for touch at fourteen-twenty-two."

We had come out of reentry blackout. The approach program that Yellowbaby had written, complete with voice interaction module, was in contact with Basel/Mulhouse, our purported destination. As long as everything went according to plan, the program would get us where we wanted to go. If anything went wrong ... well, the Babe was supposed to have improvised if anything went wrong.

"Let's blow out of here." Django heaved himself out of the seat and swung down the ladder to the equipment bay. I followed. We pulled EV suits from the lockers and struggled into them. I could feel the deck tilting as the wing began a series of long, lazy S curves to slow our descent.

As Django unfastened his suit's weighty backpack he began to sing; his voice sounded like gears being stripped. "I'm flying high, but I've got a feeling I'm falling..." He quickly shucked the rest of the excess baggage: comm and life-support systems, various umbilicals. "...falling for nobody else but you."

"Would you shut the hell up?" I tossed the still camera from my suit onto the pile.

"What's the matter?" There was a chemical edge to his giggle. "Don't like Fats Waller?"

Yellowbaby's program was reassuring Basel even as we banked gracefully toward the Jura Mountains. "No problem, Basel Control," the dead man's voice drawled. "Malf on the main guidance computer. I've got backup. My L over D is nominal. You just keep the tourists off the runway and I'll see you in ten minutes."

I put the microcam in rest mode -- no sense wasting memory dots shooting the inside of an EV suit -- and picked up the pressure helmet. Django blew me a kiss. "Don't forget to duck," he said. He made a quacking sound and flapped his arms. I put the helmet on and closed the seals. It was a relief not to have to listen to him; we had disabled the comm units to keep the ops from tracking us. He handed me one of the slim airfoil packs we had smuggled onto and off of Orbital 7. I stuck my arms through the harness and fastened the front straps. I could still hear Yellowbaby's muffled voice talking to the Swiss controllers. "Negative, Basel Control, I don't need escort. Initiating terminal guidance procedures."

At that moment I felt the nose dip sharply. The wing was diving straight for the summit of Mont Tendre. To fight the panic, I queried Infoline's fact checker, built into the goggles' system unit, "At elevation one thousand six hundred seventy-nine meters," came the whisper in my ear,

"Mont Tendre is the tallest of the Swiss Juras. It is located in the canton of Vaud." I crouched behind Django in the airlock, tucked my head to my chest, and tongued the armor toggle in the helmet. The thermofiber EV suit stiffened and suddenly I was a shock-resistant statue, unable to move. I began to count backward from one thousand; it was better than listening to my heart jackhammer. I promised myself that if I survived this, I'd never go into space again. Never hundred and ninety-nine, never hundred and ninety-eight, never hundred and...

I remembered the way Yellowbaby had smiled as he unbuttoned my shirt, that night before we had shuttled up to 7. He was sitting on a bunk in his underwear. I had still not decided to cover the raid; he was still trying to convince me. But words weren't his strong point. When I turned my back to him, he slipped the shirt from my shoulders, slid it down my arms. I stood there for a moment, facing away from the bunk. Then he grabbed me by the waist and pulled me onto his lap. I could feel the curly hair on his chest brushing against my spine. Sitting there half-naked, my face glowing hot as any heat shield, I knew I was in deep trouble. He had nibbled at my ear and then conned me with that slow Texas drawl. "Hell, baby, only reason ain't no one never tried to jump out of a shuttle is that no one who really needed to jump ever had a chute." I had always been a fool for men who told me not to worry.

Although we were huddled in the airlock, my head was down, so I didn't see the hatch blow. But even with the suit in armor mode, I felt like the clapper inside a cathedral bell. The wing shuddered and, with an explosive last breath, spat us into the dazzling Alpine afternoon.

The truth is that I don't remember much about the jump after that. I know I unfroze the suit so I could guide the airfoil, which had opened automatically. I was too intent on not vomiting and keeping Django in sight and getting down as fast as I could without impaling myself on a tree or smashing into a cliff. So I missed being the only live and in-person witness to one of the more spectacular crashes of the twenty-first century.

It had been Yellowbaby's plan to jump into the Col du Marchairuz, a pass about seven kilometers away from Mont Tendre, before the search hovers came swarming. I saw Django disappear into a stand of dead sycamores and thought he had probably killed himself. I had no time to worry, because the ground was rushing up at me like a nightmare. I spotted the road and steered for it but got caught in a gust that swept me across about five meters above the pavement. I touched on the opposite side; the airfoil was pulling me toward a huge boulder. I toggled to armor mode just as I hit. Once again the bell rang, knocking the breath from me and announcing that I had arrived. If I hadn't been wearing a helmet I would have kissed that chunk of limestone.

I unfastened the quick-release hooks and the airfoil's canopy billowed, dragged along the ground, and wrapped itself around a tree. I slithered out of the EV suit and tried to get my bearings at the same time. The Col du Marchairuz was cool, not much above freezing, and very, very quiet. Although I was wearing isothermals, the skin on my hands and neck pebbled and I shivered. The silence of the place was unnerving. I was losing it again, lagged out. I had been through too damn many environments in one day. I liked to live fast, race up that adrenaline peak where there was no time to think, just report what I could see now and to hell with remembering or worrying about what might happen next. What I needed was to start working again so I could lose myself in the details. But I was alone and, for the moment, there was nothing to report. I had dropped out of the sky like a fallen angel; the still landscape itself seemed to judge me. The mountains did not care about Django's stolen corporate secrets or the ops-and-snakes story I would produce to give some jaded telelink drone a Wednesday-night thrill. I had risked my life for some lousy juice and a chance at the main menu; the cliffs brooded over my reasons. So very quiet.

"Eyes!" Django dropped from a boulder onto the road and trotted across to me. "You all right?"

I didn't want him to see how close to the edge I was, so I nodded.

After all, I was the spook journalist; he was just another snake. "You?" There was a long scratch on his face and his knuckles were bloody.

"Walking. Tangled with a tree. The chute got caught -- had to leave it."

I nodded again. He stooped to pick up my discarded suit. "Let's lose this stuff and get going."

I stared at him, thought about breaking it off. I had enough to put together one hell of a story and I'd had my fill of Django.

"Don't freeze on me now, Eyes." He wadded the suit and jammed it into a crevice. "If the satellites caught our jump, these mountains are going to be crawling with ops, from Cognico and the EU." He hurled my helmet over the edge of the cliff and began to gather up the shrouds of my chute. "We're gone by then."

I brought the microcam on line again in time to shoot him hiding my chute. He was right; it wasn't quite time to split up. If EU ops caught me now, they'd probably confiscate my memory dots and let the lawyers fight it out; spook journalism was one American export Europe wanted to discourage. I'd have nothing to sell Jerry Macmillan at Infoline but talking heads and text. And if private ops got us first ... well, they had their own rules. I had to stick with Django until we got clear. As soon as I started moving again, I felt better. Which is to say I had no time to feel anything at all.

The nearest town was St. George, about four kilometers down the crumbling mountain road. We started at a jog and ended at a drag, gasping in the thin air. On the way Django stopped by a mountain stream to wash the blood from his face. Then he surprised me -- and probably himself -- by throwing up. Join the club, Django. When he stood up, he was shaking. It would make great telelink. I murmured a voiceover, "Yet, for all his bravado, this master criminal has a human side too." The fact checker let it pass. Django made a half-serious feint at the goggles and I stopped shooting.

"You okay?"

He nodded and staggered past me down the road.

St. George was one of those little ghost towns that the Swiss were mothballing with their traditional tidiness, as if they expected that the forests and vineyards would someday rise from the dead and the tourists would return to witness this miracle. Maybe they were right; unlike the rest of the EU, the Swiss had not yet given up on their acid-stressed Alpine lands, not even in unhappy Vaud, which had also suffered radioactive fallout from the nuking of Geneva. We stopped at a clearing planted with the new Sandoz pseudo-firs that overlooked the rust-colored rooftops of St. George. It was impossible to tell how many people were left in the village. All we knew for sure was that the post office was still open.

Django was having a hard time catching his breath. "I have a proposition for you," he said.

"Come on, Django. Save it for the dollies."

He shook his head. "It's all falling apart ... I can't..." He took a deep breath and blew it out noisily. "I'll cut you in. A third: Yellowbaby's share."

According to U.S. case law, still somewhat sketchy on the subject of spook journalism, at this point I should have dropped him with a swift kick to the balls and started screaming for the local gendarmerie. But the microcam was resting, there were no witnesses, and I still didn't know what WILDLIFE was or why Django wanted it. "The way I count, it's just us two," I said. "A third sounds a little low."

"It'll take you the rest of this century to spend what I'm offering."

"And if they catch me I'll spend the rest of the century in some snakepit in Iowa." That was, if the ops didn't blow my circuits first. "Forget it, Django. We're just not in the same line. I watch -- you're the player."

I'm not sure what I expected him to do next but it sure as hell wasn't to start crying. Maybe he was in shock too. Or maybe he was finally slowing down after two solid days of popping fast-forwards.

"Don't you understand, I can't do it alone! You have to -- you don't know what you're turning down."

I thought about pumping him for more information but he looked as if he were going critical. I didn't want to be caught in the explosion. "I don't get it Django. you've done all the hard work. All you have to do is walk into that post office, collect your e-mail, and walk out."

"You don't understand." He clamped both hands to his head. "Don't understand, that was Babe's job."

"So?"

"So!" He was shaking. "I don't speak French!"

I put everything I had into not laughing. It would have been the main menu for sure if I had gotten that onto a memory dot. The criminal mind at work! This snake had bitten the world's largest corporation, totaled a stolen reentry wing, and now he was worried about sounding like a `_touriste_` in a Swiss `_bureau de poste_`. I was croggled.

"All right," I said, stalling, "all right, how about a compromise? For now. Umm. You're carrying heat?" He produced a Mitsubishi penlight. "Okay, here's what we'll do. I'll switch on and we'll do a little bit for the folks at home. You threaten me, say you're going to lase your name on my forehead unless I cooperate. That way I can pick up the message without becoming an accessory. I hope. If we clear this, we'll talk deal later." I didn't know if it would stand up in court, but it was all I could think of at the time. "And make it look good."

So I shot a few minutes of Django's threatening me and then we went down into St. George. I walked into the post office hesitantly, turned and got a good shot of Django smoldering in the entryway, and then tucked the goggles into my pocket. The clerk was a restless woman with a pinched face who looked as if she spent a lot of time wishing she were somewhere else. I assaulted her with my atrocious fourth form French.

"Bonjour, madame. Est-ce qu'il y a de l'email pour D.J. Viper?"

"Viper?" The woman shifted on her stool and fixed me with a suspicious stare. "Comment ca s'ecrit?"

"V-i-p-e-r."

She keyed the name into her terminal. "Oui, la voici. Votre autorisation, s'il vous plait, madame." She leaned forward and pointed through the window at the numeric keypad beside my right hand. For a moment I thought she was going to try to watch as I keyed in the recognition code that Django had given me. I heard him cough in the entryway behind me as she settled back on her stool. Lucky for her. The postal terminal whirred and ground for about ten seconds and then a sealed hardcopy chinked into the slot above the keypad.

"Vous etes des touristes americains." She looked straight past me and waved to Django, who ducked out of the doorway. "Vive les Yankees, eh?" I was suddenly afraid he would come charging in with penlight blazing to make sure there were no witnesses. "Vous avez besoin d'une chambre pour la nuit? L'hotel est ferme, mais...."

"Non, non. Nous sommes presses. A quelle heure est le premier autobus pour Rolle?"

She sighed. "Rien ne va plus. Tout va mal." The busybody seemed to be speaking as much to herself as to me. I wanted to tell her how lucky she was that Django had decided not to needle her where she stood. "A quinze heures vingt-deux."

About twenty minutes -- we were still on schedule. I thanked her and went out to throw some cold water on Django. I was astonished to find him laughing. I didn't much like always having to guess how he'd react. Django was so scrambled that one of these times the surprise was bound to be unpleasant. "I could've done that," he said.

"You didn't." I handed him the hardcopy and we retreated to an alley with a view of the square.

It is the consensus of the world's above and below ground economies that the EU's photonic mail system is still the most secure anywhere, much

safer than satellite communications. Once it had printed out Django's hardcopy, the system erased all records of the transferred information. Even so, the message was encrypted, and Django had to enter it into his data cuff to find out what it said.

"What is this?" He replayed it and I watched, fascinated, as the words scrolled along the cuff's tiny display: "Lake Lemman lies by Chillon's walls: / A thousand feet in depth below / Its massy waters meet and flow; / Thus much the fathom-line was sent / From Chillon's snow-white battlement..."

"It's called poetry, Django."

"I know what it's called! I want to know what the hell this has to do with my drop. Half the world wants to chop my plug off and this dumbscut sends me poetry." His face had turned as dark as beaujolais nouveau. "Where the hell am I supposed to go?"

"Would you shut up for a minute?" I touched his shoulder and he jumped. When he went for his penlight I thought I was cooked. But all he did was throw the hardcopy onto the cobblestones and torch it.

"Feel better?"

"Stick it."

"Lake Lemman," I said carefully, "is what the French call Lake Geneva. And Chillon is a castle. In Montreux."

"Actually," whispered the fact checker, "it's in the suburb of Veytaux."

I ignored this for now. "I'm pretty sure this is from a poem called 'The Prisoner of Chillon' by Byron."

He thought it over for a moment, biting his lower lip. "Montreux." He nodded; he looked almost human again. "Uh -- okay, Montreux. But why does he have to get cute when my plug's in a vise? Poetry -- what does he think we are, anyway? I don't know a thing about poetry. And all Yellowbaby ever read was manuals. Who was supposed to get this, anyway?"

I stirred the ashes of the hardcopy with my toe. "I wonder." A cold wind scattered them and I shivered.

* * * *

It took us a little over six hours from the time we bailed out of the wing to the moment we reached the barricaded bridge that spanned Chillon's scummy moat. All our connections had come off like Swiss clockwork: postal bus to the little town of Rolle on the north shore of Lake Geneva, train to Lausanne, where we changed for a local to Montreux. No one challenged us and Django sagged into a kind of withdrawal trance, contemplating his reflection in the window with a marble-egg stare. The station was deserted when we arrived. Montreux, explained the fact checker, had once been Lake Geneva's most popular resort but the tourists had long since stopped coming, frightened off by rumors -- no doubt true, despite official denials from Bern -- that the lake was still dangerously hot from the Geneva bomb in '39. We ended up hiking several kilometers through the dark little city, navigating by the light of the gibbous moon.

Which showed us that Byron was long out of date. Chillon's battlement was no longer snow-white. It was fire blackened and slashed with laser scars; much of the northeastern facade was rubble. There must have been a firefight during the riots after the bomb. The castle was built on a rock about twenty meters from the shore. It commanded a highway built on a narrow strip of land between the lake and a steep mountainside.

Django hesitated at the barrier blocking the wooden footbridge to the castle. "It stinks," he said.

"You're a rose?"

"I mean the setup. Poetry was bad enough. But this" -- he pointed up at the crumbling towers of Chillon, brooding beside the moonlit water -- "is fairy dust. Who does he think he is? Count Dracula?"

"Only way you're going to find out is to knock on the door and..."

A light on the far side of the bridge came on. Through the entrance to Chillon hopped a pair of oversized dice on pogo sticks.

"Easy, Django," I said. He had the penlight ready, "Give it a chance."

Each machine was a white plastic cube about half a meter on a side; the pips were sensors. The legs telescoped at two beats per second; the round rubber feet hit the wooden deck in unison. *_Thwocka-thwocka-thwock_*.

"Snake-eyes." There was a single sensor on each of the faces closest to us. Django gave a low, ugly laugh as he swung a leg over the barrier and stepped onto the bridge.

They hopped up to him and bounced in place for several beats, as if sizing him up. "Je suis desole," said the one nearest to us in a pleasant masculine voice, "mais le chateau n'est plus ouvert au public."

"Hey, you in there." Django ignored it and instead shook his penlight at the gatehouse on the far side of the bridge. "I've been through too much to play with your plugging robots, understand? I want to see you -- now -- or I'm walking."

"I am not a robot." The thing sounded indignant. "I am a wiseguy, an inorganic sentience capable of autonomous action."

"Wiseguy. Sure." Django jabbed at his cuff and it emitted a high-pitched squeal of code. "Now you know who I am. So what's it going to be?"

"This way, please," said the lead wiseguy, bouncing backward toward the gatehouse. "Please refrain from taking pictures without express permission."

I assumed that was meant for me and I didn't like it one bit. I clambered over the barricade and followed Django.

Just before we passed through Chillon's outer wall, the other wiseguy began to lecture. "As we enter, notice the tower to your left. The Strong Tower, which controls the entrance to the castle, was originally built in 1402 and was reconstructed following the earthquake of 1585." *_Thwock-thwocka_*. It had all the personality of Infoline's fact checker.

I glanced at Django. In the gloom I could see his face twist in disbelief as the wiseguy continued its spiel.

"As we proceed now into the gatehouse ward, look back over your shoulder at the inside of the eastern wall. The sundial you see is a twentieth-century restoration of an original that dated back to the Savoy period. The Latin, *'Sic Vita Fugit_*,' on the dial translates roughly as 'Thus life flies by.'"

We had entered a small, dark courtyard. I could hear water splashing and could barely make out the shadow of a fountain. The wiseguys lit the way to another, larger courtyard and then into one of the undamaged buildings. They bounced up a flight of stairs effortlessly. I had to hurry to keep up and was the last to enter the Great Banqueting Hall. The beauty and strangeness of what I saw stopped me at the threshold; instinctively I brought the microcam on line. I heard two warning beeps and then a whispery crunch from the goggles' system unit. The status light went from green to red to blank.

I asked the fact checker what had happened. No answer. "Express permission," said the man who sat waiting for us, "as you were warned."

"But my files!"

"No memory has been compromised; you have merely lost the capacity to record. Come in anyway, come in. Just in time to see it again -- been rerunning all afternoon." He laughed and nodded at the flatscreen propped against a bowl of raw vegetables on an enormous walnut table. "Oh, God! It is a fearful thing to see the human soul take wing."

Django picked it up suspiciously. I stood on tiptoes and peeked over his shoulder. The thirty-centimeter screen did not do the wing justice and the overhead satellite view robbed the crash of much of its visual drama. Still, the fireball that bloomed on Mont Tendre was dazzling. Django whooped at the sight. The fireball was replaced by a head talking in High German and then close-ups of the crash site. What was left of the wing wouldn't have filled a picnic basket.

"What's he saying?" Django thrust the flatscreen at our host.

"That there has not been a crash like this since '15. Which makes you

famous, whoever you are." Our host shrugged. "He goes on to say that you're probably dead. But enough. Ich scheisse ihn an."

The banqueting hall was finished in wood and stone. The ceiling was a single barrel vault, magnificently embellished. Its centerpiece was the table, some ten meters long and supported by a series of heavy Gothic trestles. Around this table was arranged a collection of wheelchairs. Two were antiques: a crude pine seat mounted on iron-rimmed wagon wheels and a hooded Bath chair. Others were failed experiments, like the ill-fated air cushion chair from the turn of the century and a low-slung cousin of the new aerodynamic bicycles. There were powered and push models, an ultralightweight sports chair and a bulky mobile life-support system. They came in colors; there was even one with fur.

"So the ops drink we're dead?" Django put the flatscreen back on the table.

"Possibly." Our host frowned. "Depends when the satellites began to track you and what they saw. Have to wait until the Turks kick the door in to find out for sure. Until then call it a clean escape and welcome to Chillon prison." He backed away from the table; the leather seat creaked slightly as his wheelchair rolled over the uneven floor toward Django. "Francois Bonivard." With some difficulty he raised his good hand in greeting.

"I'm Django." He grasped Bonivard's hand and pumped it once. "Now that we're pals, Frank, get rid of your goddamned robots before I needle them."

Bonivard winced as Django released his hand. "Id, Ego, macht eure Runden," he said. The wiseguys bounced obediently from the banqueting hall.

Francois de Bonivard, sixteenth-century Swiss patriot, was the hero of Byron's "The Prisoner of Chillon." Reluctantly, I stepped forward to meet my host.

"Oh, right." Django settled gingerly into one of the wheelchairs at the table. "Maybe I forgot to mention Eyes. Say, what do you do for drugs around here anyway? I've eaten a fistful of forwards already today; I'm ready to poke something to flash the edges off."

"My name is Wynne Cage," I said. Bonivard seemed relieved when I did not offer to shake his hand. "I'm a freelance...."

"Introductions not necessary. I follow your work closely; we have mutual interests. Your father is Tony Cage, no? The flash artist?" He waited for an answer; I didn't give him one.

It was hard to look at the man who called himself Francois Bonivard. He was at once hideous and astonishingly photogenic; the camera would have loved him. Both of his legs had been amputated at the hip joint and his torso was fitted into some kind of bionic collar. I saw readouts marked _renal function, blood profile, bladder_, and _bowel_. The entire left side of Bonivard's torso was withered, as if some malign giant had pinched him between thumb and forefinger. The left arm dangled uselessly, the hand curled into a frozen claw. The face was relatively untouched, although pain had left its tracks, particularly around the eyes. And it was the clarity with which those wide brown eyes saw that was the most awful thing about the man. I could feel his gaze effortlessly penetrate the mask of politeness, pierce the false sympathy, and find my horror. Looking into those eyes I was sure that Bonivard knew how the very sight of his ruined body made me sick.

I had to say something to escape that awful gaze. "Are you related to _the_ Bonivard?"

He smiled. "I am the current prisoner." And then turned away. "There was a pilot."

"Was. Past tense." Django nibbled at a radish from the vegetable bowl. "How about my flash?"

"Business first." Bonivard rolled back to the table. "You have it then?"

Django reached into his pocket and produced a stack of smart chips peppered with memory dots and held together with a wide blue rubber band. "Whatever WILDLIFE is, he's one heavy son of a bitch. You realize these are

hundred Gb chips." He set them on the table in front of him. "Hell of a lot of code, even compressed."

Bonivard rolled to his place at the head of the table and put two smart chips in front of him. "Cash cards from the Swiss Volksbank, Zurich. Negotiable anywhere. All yours now." He slid them toward Django. "You made only one copy?"

Here was the juice and the great spook journalist was blind. How could I peddle this story to Infoline without the payoff scene?

Django eyed the cash cards but did not reach for them. "Not going to do me much good if the ops catch me."

"No." Bonivard leaned back in his wheelchair. "But you're safe for now." He glanced up at the ceiling and laughed. "They won't look in a prison."

"No?" Django snapped the rubber band on his stack of chips. "Maybe you should tell me about WILDLIFE. I put my plug on the cutting board to get it for you."

"An architecture." Bonivard shrugged. "For a cognizor."

The look on Django's face said it all. Cognizor was the latest buzz for the mythical human-equivalent artificial intelligence. Django was already convinced that Bonivard was scrambled; here was proof. He might just as well have claimed that WILDLIFE was a plan for a perpetual motion machine. "Come again," he said slowly.

"Cog-ni-zor." Bonivard actually seemed to enjoy baiting Django. "With the right hardware and database, it can sing, dance, make friends, and influence people."

He was pushing Django way too hard. "I thought they decided you can't engineer human intelligence," I said, trying to break the tension. "Something about quantum mechanics -- mind is to brain as wave is to particle. Or something." Damn Bonivard for crashing the fact checker!

"Have it your way," said Bonivard. "Pretend WILDLIFE is Cognico's personnel database and I'm head-hunting for an executive secretary. Good help is hard to find."

I knew my laugh sounded like braying but I didn't mind; I was scared they would needle one other. At the same time I was measuring the distance to the door. To my immense relief, Django chuckled too. And slipped the WILDLIFE chips back into his pocket.

"I'm burned out," he said. "Maybe we should wait." He stood up and stretched. "Even if we make an exchange tonight, we'd have a couple of hours of verifications to go through, no? We'll start fresh tomorrow." He picked up one of the cash cards and turned it over several times between the long fingers of his left hand. Suddenly it was gone. He reached into the vegetable bowl with his right hand, pulled the cash card from between two carrots, and tossed it at Bonivard. It slid across the table and almost went over the edge. "Shouldn't leave valuable stuff like this lying around. Someone might steal it."

Django's mocking sleight of hand had an unexpected effect. Bonivard's claw hand started to tremble; he seemed upset at the delay. "It might be months, or years, or days -- I kept no count, I took no note..." He muttered the words like some private incantation; when he opened his eyes, he had regained his composure. "I had no hope my eyes to raise, and clear them of their dreary mote." He looked at me. "Will you be requiring pharmaceuticals too?"

"No, thanks. I like to stay clean when I'm working."

"Admirable," he said as the wiseguys bounced back into the hall. "Ich ziehe mich fuer die Nacht zurueck. Id and Ego will show you to your rooms; take what you need." He rolled through a door to the north without another word. Django and I were left staring at each other. "What did I tell you?" asked Django.

I couldn't think of anything to say. The hall echoed with the sound of the wiseguys bouncing.

"Squirrelware." Django tapped a finger against his temple.

I was awfully sick of Django. "I'm going to bed."

"Can I come?"

"Stick it." I had to get away from him, to escape. But by the time I reached the hall leading to the stairs, I realized my mistake. I could feel it behind the eyes, like the first throbs of a migraine headache. I'd run out of things to report; now there was no one else to watch but myself. Without the microcam to protect me, memory closed in. Maybe it was because Bonivard had mentioned my famous father, whom I was still trying not to hate fifteen years after he'd left me. Or maybe it was because now I had to let go of Yellowbaby, past tense. Actually the Babe wasn't that much of a loss, just the most recent in a series of lovers with clever hands and a persuasively insincere line. Men I didn't have to take seriously. I came up hard against the most important lesson I'd learned from Tony: good old homo sap is nothing but a gob of complicated slime. I was slime doing a slimy job and trying to run fast enough that I wouldn't have to smell my own stink. I was sorry now that I hadn't asked Bonivard for some flash to poke.

Thwocka-thwock. "This way, please." One of the wiseguys shot past me down the hallway.

I followed. "Which one are you?"

"He calls me Ego." It paused for a beat. "I am a Datex R5000, modified to develop sentience. Your room." It bounced through an open door. "This is the Bemese Chamber. Note the decorative patterns of interlacing ribbons, flowers, and birds, which date..."

"Out," I said, and shut the door behind it.

As soon as I sat on the musty bed, I realized I couldn't face spending the night alone. Doing nothing. I had to keep running and there was only one way to go now. I'd had enough. I was going to wrap the story, finished or not. The thought cheered me immensely. I wouldn't have to care what happened to Django and Bonivard, wouldn't have to wonder about WILDLIFE. All I had to do was burst a message to Infoline. Supposedly I still had the snatch from Orbital 7 and the aftermath of the crash stored on the goggles' memory dots, story enough for Jerry Macmillan. He'd send some muscle to take me out of here and then maybe I'd spend a few months at Infoline's sanctuary in Montana watching clouds. Anyway, I'd be done with it. I took the system unit off my belt and began to rig its collapsible antenna. I locked onto the satellite and then wrote the message. "HOTEL BRISTOL VEYTAUX 6/18 0200 GMT PIX COGNICO WING." I had seen the Bristol on the walk in. I loaded the message into the burster. There was a pause for compression and encryption and then it hit the Infoline satellite with a millisecond burst.

And then beeped at me. Incoming message. I froze. There was no way Infoline could respond that quickly, no way they were supposed to respond. It had to be prerecorded. Which meant trouble.

Jerry Macmillan's face filled the burster's four-centimeter screen. He looked as scared as I felt. "Big problems, Wynne," he said. "Seems whatever your snakes snatched is some kind of weapons system, way too hot for us to handle. It's not just Cognico; the EU and the feds are squeezing the newsnets so hard our eyes are popping out. They haven't connected you to us yet. Maybe they won't. But if they do, we've got to cooperate. The DoD claims it's a matter of national security. You're on your own."

I put my thumb over his face. I would have pushed it through the back of his skull if I could have.

"The best I can do for you is to delete your takeout message and the fix the satellite gets on your burster. It might mean my ass, but I owe you something. I know this stinks on ice, kid. Good luck."

I took my thumb away from the screen. It was blank. I choked back a scream and hurled the burster against the stone wall of Chillon.

* * * *

Sleep? It would have been easier to slit my throat than to sleep that night. I thought about it -- killing myself. I thought about everything at least once. All my calculations kept adding up to zero. I could turn myself in

but that was about the same as suicide. Ditto for taking off on my own. Without Infoline's help, I'd be lucky to last a week before the ops caught me. Especially now that the military was involved. I could throw in with Django except that two seconds after I told him that I'd let a satellite get a fix on us he'd probably be barbecuing my pancreas with his penlight. And if I didn't tell him I might cripple whatever chances we'd have of getting away. Maybe Bonivard would be more sympathetic -- but then again, why should he be? Yeah, sleep. Perchance to dream. At least I was too busy being scared to indulge in self-loathing.

By the time the sun began to peer through my window I felt as fuzzy as a peach and not quite as smart. But I had a plan -- one that would require equal parts luck and sheer gall. I was going to trust that plug-sucking Macmillan to keep his mouth shut and to delete all my records from Infoline's files. For the next few days I'd pretend I was still playing by the rules of spook journalism. I'd try to get a better fix on Bonivard. I hoped that when the time came for Django to leave I'd know what to do. All I was certain of that bleary morning was that I was hungry and in more trouble than I knew how to handle.

I staggered back toward the banqueting hall, hoping to find Bonivard or one of the wiseguys or at least the bowl of veggies. As I passed a closed door I heard a scratchy recording of saxophones honking. Jazz. Django. I didn't stop.

Bonivard was sitting alone at the great table, I tried to read him to see if his security equipment had picked up my burst to Infoline, but the man's face was a mask. Someone had refilled the bowl in the middle of the table.

"Morning." I helped myself to a raw carrot that was astonishingly good. A crisp sweetness, the clean, spicy fragrance of loam. Maybe I'd been eating synthetic too long. "Hey, this isn't bad."

Bonivard nodded. "My own. I grow everything."

"That so?" He didn't look strong enough to pull a carrot from the bowl, much less out of a garden. "Where?"

"In darkness found a dwelling place." His eyes glittered as I took a handful of cherry tomatoes. "You'd like to see?"

"Sure." Although the tomatoes were even better than the carrot, I was no vegetarian. "You wouldn't have any sausage bushes, would you?"

I laughed; he didn't. "I'd settle for an egg."

I saw him working the keypad on the arm of the wheelchair. I guess I thought he was calling the wiseguys. Or something. Whatever I expected, it was not the thing that answered his summons.

The spider walked on four singing, mechanical legs; it was a meter and a half tall. Its arms sang too as the servomotors that powered the joints changed pitch; it sounded like an ant colony playing bagpipes. It clumped into the room with a herky-jerky gait, although the bowl of its abdomen remained perfectly level. Each of its legs could move with five degrees of freedom; they ended in disk-shaped feet. One of its arms was obviously intended for heavy-duty work, since it ended in a large claw gripper; the other, smaller arm had a beautifully articulated four-digit hand that was a masterpiece of microengineering. There was a ring of sensors around the bottom of its belly. It stopped in front of Bonivard's chair; he wheeled to face it. The strong arm extended toward him. The rear legs stretched out to balance. Bonivard gazed up at the spider with the calm joy of a man greeting his lover. The claw fitted into notches in Bonivard's bionic collar and then, its servos whining, the spider lifted him from the chair and fitted his mutilated torso into the bowl that was its body. There must have been a flatscreen just out of sight in the cockpit; I could see the play of its colors across his face. He fitted his good arm into an analog sleeve and digits flexed. He smiled at me; for the first time since I had met him he looked comfortable.

"Sometimes," he said, "people misunderstand."

I knew I was standing there like a slack-jawed moron but I was too

croggled even to consider closing my mouth. The spider swung toward the stairs.

"The gardens," said Bonivard.

"What?"

"This way." The spider rose up to its full height in order to squeeze through the door. I gulped and followed. Watching the spider negotiate the steep stone steps, I couldn't help but imagine the segment I could have shot if Bonivard hadn't zapped my microcam. The marriage of two monsters, one of flesh, one of foam metal -- given the right spin, this could be best-of-the-year stuff. As we emerged from the building and passed through the fountain courtyard, I caught up and walked alongside.

"I'm a reporter, you know. If I die of curiosity, it's your fault."

He laughed. "Custom-made, of course. It cost ... but you don't need to know that. A lot. Wheelchairs are useless on steps but I keep them for visitors and going out. I'm enough of a freak as it is. Imagine strolling through town wearing this thing. I'd be all over telelink within the hour and I can't afford that. You understand? There is to be no publicity." He glanced down at me and I nodded. I didn't see any point in telling him that my chances of uploading his story anytime soon were not good.

"How do you control it?"

"Tell it where I want to go and it takes me. One of my early efforts at autonomous AI, about as intelligent as a brain-damaged chicken. Id and Ego are second generation, designed to evolve. Like them, the spider can learn on its own. I set it to explore Chillon so it knows every centimeter by now. But take it someplace new and it might spend an hour crossing a room. Down these stairs."

We descended a flight of stone stairs into the bowels of Chillon and passed through a storeroom filled with pumps, disassembled hydroponic benches, and bags of water-soluble nutrients. Beyond it, in a room as big as the banqueting hall, was Bonivard's garden.

"Once was the arsenal," he said. "Swords to plowshares and all that. Beans instead of bullets."

Running down the middle of the room were four magnificent stone pillars that supported a series of intersecting roof vaults. Facing the lake to the west were four windows set high on the wall. Spears of sunlight, tinted blue by reflections from the lake, fell on the growing benches beneath the windows. This feeble light was supplemented by fluorescents hung from the ceiling on adjustable chains.

"Crop rotation," said Bonivard, as I followed him between the benches. "Tomatoes, green beans, radishes, soy, adzuki, carrots, bok choy. Then squash, chard, peppers, peas, turnips, broccoli, favas, and mung for sprouts. Subirrigated sand system. Automatic. Here's an alpine strawberry." The spider's digits plucked a thumbnail-sized berry from a luxuriant bush. It was probably the sweetest fruit I had ever eaten, although a touch of acid kept it from cloying. "Always strawberries. Always. Have another."

As I parted the leaves to find one, I disturbed a fat white moth. It flew up at me, bounced off the side of my face, and fitted toward one of the open windows. With quickness that would have astonished a cobra, the spider's claw squealed and struck it in midair. The moth fluttered as the arm curled back toward Bonivard. He took it from the spider and popped it into his mouth. "Protein," he said. His crazed giggle was just too theatrical. Part of an act, I thought. I hoped. "Come see my flowers," he said.

Along the eastern, landward side of the arsenal, slabs of living rock protruded from the wall. Scattered among them was a collection of the sickest plants I'd ever seen. Not a single leaf was properly formed; they were variously twisted or yellowed or blotched. Bonivard showed me a jet-black daisy that smelled of rotting chicken. A mum with petals that ended with what looked like skeletal hands. A phalaenopsis orchid that he called "bleeding angels on a stick."

"Mutagenic experiments," he said. "I want to see how ugly something can

get and still be alive. Some mutations are in the tenth generation. And you're the first to see."

I considered. "Why are you showing this to me?" When the spider came to a dead stop the whine of the servos went from cacophony to a quieting harmony. For a few seconds Bonivard held it there. "Not interested?"

He glanced quickly away, but not before I had seen the loneliness in his disappointed frown. Something in me responded to the neediness of the man, a stirring that surprised and disgusted me. I nodded. "Interested."

He brightened. "Then there's time for the dungeon before we go back."

We passed through the torture chamber and Bonivard pointed out burn marks at the base of the pillar that supported its ceiling. "Tied them here," he said. "Hot irons on bare heels. Look: scratch marks in the paint. Made by fingernails." He smirked at my look of horror. "Ops of the Renaissance."

The dungeon was just beyond, a huge room, even larger than the arsenal. It was empty.

"There are seven pillars of Gothic mold," said Bonivard, "in Chillon's dungeons deep and old. There are seven columns, massy and gray, dim with a dull imprisoned ray, a sunbeam which hath lost its way."

"You want to tell me why you keep spouting Byron's poem all the time? Because, to be honest, it's damned annoying."

He seemed hurt. "No," he said, "I don't think I want to tell you."

Riding the spider did seem to change him. Or maybe it was merely my perspective that had changed. It is easy to pity someone in a wheelchair, someone who is physically lower than you. It was difficult to pity Bonivard when he was looking down at me from the spider. Even when he let his emotional vulnerability show, somehow he seemed the stronger for it.

There was a moment of strained silence. The spider took a few tentative steps into the dungeon, as if Bonivard were content to let it drift. Then he twisted in the cockpit. "It might have something to do with the fact that I'm crazy."

I laughed at him. "You're not crazy. God knows you probably had reason enough to go crazy once, but you're tough and you survived." I couldn't help myself. "No, Monsieur Francois de Bonivard, or whoever the hell you are, I'm betting you're a faker. It suits your purposes to act scrambled, so you live in a ruined castle and talk funny and eat bugs on the wing. But you're as sane as I am. Probably saner."

I don't know which of us was the more surprised by my outburst. I guess Macmillan's message had made me reckless; if I was doomed, at least I didn't have to take any more crap. Bonivard backed the spider up and slowly lowered it to a crouch so that our faces were on a level.

"You know the definition of artificial intelligence?" he said.

"I've heard thirteen, at least."

"The simulation of intelligent behavior so that it is indistinguishable from the real thing. Now tell me, if I can simulate madness so well that the world thinks I'm mad, so well that even I myself am no longer quite sure, who is to say that I'm not mad?"

"Me," I said. And then I leaned into the cockpit and kissed him.

I don't know why I did it; I was out on the edge. All the rules had changed and I hadn't had time to work out new ones. I thought to myself, what this man needs is to be kissed; he hasn't been kissed in a long time. And then I was doing it. Maybe I was only teasing him; I had never kissed anyone so repulsive in my life. It was a ridiculous, glancing blow that caught him on the side of the nose. If he had tried to follow it up I probably would have driven my fingers into his eyes and run like hell. But he didn't. He just stayed perfectly still, bent toward me like a seedling reaching for the light. Then he decided to smile and I drew back and it was over.

"I'm in trouble." I thought then was the time to confess; I needed someone to trust. Anyone.

"We're all in trouble here." He was suddenly impassive. "This body, for instance, is rotting away." He sounded as if he were discussing a failing

dishwasher. "In a year, maybe two, it will die. Of unnatural causes."

I was dizzy. For a few seconds we had touched each other and then, without warning, a chasm yawned between us. There was something monstrous about the practiced indifference with which he contemplated death. I didn't believe him and said so.

"Reads eye movements." He nodded toward the control panel. It was as if he had not heard me. "If I look at a movement macro and blink, the spider executes it. No hands." His laugh was bitter and the servos began to sing. The spider reared up to its normal meter-and-a-half walking height and stalked to the third pillar. On the third drum of the pillar was carved BYRON.

"Forgery," said Bonivard. "Although elsewhere is vandalism actually committed by Shelley, Dickens, Harriet Beecher Stowe. Byron didn't stay long enough to get the story right. Bonivard was an adventurer. Not a victim of religious persecution. Never shackled, merely confined. Fed well, allowed to write, read books."

"Like you."

Bonivard shrugged.

"It's been so long," I said. "I barely remember the poem. Do you have a copy? Or maybe you'd like to recite it"

"Don't toy with me." His voice was tight.

"I'm not." I had no idea how to react to his mood swings. "I'm sorry."

"Django is restless." The spider scuttled from the dungeon.

* * * *

Nothing happened.

No assaults by the marines or corporate mercenaries, no frantic midnight escapes, no crashes, explosions, fistfights, deadlines. The sun rose and set; waves lapped at Chillon's walls as they had for centuries. At first it was torture adjusting to the rhythms of mundane life, the slow days and long nights. Then it got worse. Sleeping alone in the same damn bed and taking regular meals at the same damn table made my nerves stretch. I tried taking notes for a memoir of my lost career as a spook journalist. Since the goggles were useless, I dictated to Ego and had it make transcripts. But memory's slope was too slippery; thinking about the past usually got me to brooding about my father, safe and uncaring in his cryogenic icebox. As usual, I found ways to blame Tony for all my problems, now including Yellowbaby's death, McMillan's gutlessness, Bonivard's quirks.

Sometimes I saw Django; other times Bonivard. But never the two at once. Django made it clear he wasn't giving WILDLIFE up until he knew what it was. He did not seem upset at the delay in his payoff. I had the sense that the money itself was not important to him. He seemed to think of it the way an athlete thinks of the medal; the symbol of a great performance. My guess was that Django was psychologically unfit to be rich. If he lived to collect, he would merrily piss the money away until he needed to play again. Another performance.

So it was that he seemed to take perverse enjoyment in waiting Bonivard out. And why not? Bonivard provided him with all the flash he needed. Meanwhile Django had snaked his way into some obscure musical archive in Montreux, long a mecca for jazz. Django would sit in his room for hours, playing virtual-reality concerts at launch-pad volume. Sometimes the very walls of the castle seemed to ring like the plates of some giant vibraphone. Django had just about everything he wanted. Except sex.

"Beautiful dreamer, wake unto me." He had been drinking some alcoholic poison or other all morning and by now his singing voice was as melodious as a fire alarm. "List while I woo thee with soft melody."

We were in the little room that the wiseguys called the treasury. It was long since bankrupt; empty except for debris fallen from the crumbling corbels and the chill smell of damp stone. We were not alone; Bonivard's spider had been trailing us all morning. "Stick it, Django," I said.

He drained his glass. "Just a love song, Eyes. We all need love." He turned toward the spider. "Let's ask the cripple; he's probably tuned in. What

about it, spiderman? Should I sing?"

The spider froze.

"Hey, Francois! You watching, pal?" He threw the plastic glass at the spider but it missed. Django was twisted, all right, There was a chemical gleam in his eyes that was bright enough to read by. "You like to watch? Cutters leave you a plug to play with while you watch?"

I turned away from him in disgust. "You ever touch me, Django, and I'll chew your balls off and spit them in your face."

He leered. "Keep it up, Eyes. I like them tough."

The spider retrieved the glass and deposited it in its cockpit with some other leavings of Django's. I ducked through the doorway into Chillon's keep and began climbing the rickety stairs. I could hear Django and the spider following. Bonivard had warned Django that the spider would start to shadow him if he kept leaving things out and moving them around. Its vision algorithms had difficulty recognizing objects that were not where it expected them to be. In its memory map of Chillon there was a place for everything; anything unaccountably out of place tended to be invisible. When Django had begun a vicious little game of laying obstacle courses for the spider, Bonivard had retaliated by setting it to pick up after him like a doting grandmother with a neatness fetish.

According to Ego, who had first shown me how to get into the musty tower, the top of the keep rose twenty-seven meters from the courtyard. Viewed from this height Chillon looked like a great stone ship at anchor. To the west and north the blue expanse of Lake Geneva was mottled by occasional drifts of luminescent red-orange algae. To the south and east rose the Bernese Alps. The top of the keep was where I went to escape, although often as not I ended up watching the elevated highway that ran along the shore for signs of troop movements.

"Too much work," said Django, huffing from the climb, "for a lousy view." He wobbled over to join me at a north window. "Although it is private." He tried to get me to look at him. "What's it going to take, Eyes?" The spider arrived. I ignored Django.

I gazed down at the ruined prow of the stone ship. Years before an explosion had stripped away a chunk of the northeastern curtain wall and toppled one of the thirteenth-century defensive turrets, leaving only a blackened stump. Beside it were the roofless ruins of the chapel, which connected with Bonivard's private apartment. This was the only place in Chillon to which we were denied access. I had no idea whether he was hiding something in his rooms or whether secretiveness was part of the doomed Byronic pose he continued to strike. Maybe he just needed a place to be alone.

"He played in Montreux," said Django.

I glanced across the bay at the sad little city. "Who?"

"Django Reinhardt. The great gypsy jazz man. My man." Django sighed.

"Sometimes when I listen to his stuff, it's like his guitar is talking to me."

"What's it say: buy Cognico?"

He seemed not to hear me, as if he were in a dream. Or maybe he was suffering from oxygen depletion after the climb. "Oh, I don't know. It's the way he phrases away from the beat. He's saying: don't think, just do it. Improvise, you know. Better to screw up than be predictable."

"I'm impressed." I said. "I didn't know you were a philosopher, Django."

"Maybe there's a lot you don't know." He accidentally pushed a loose stone from the windowsill and seemed surprised when it fell to the courtyard below. "You like to pretend you're better than me but remember, you're the one following me around. If I'm the rat here, that makes you a flea on my ass, baby. A parasite bitch." His face had gone pale and he caught at the wall to hold himself upright. "Maybe you deserve the cripple. Look at me! I'm alive -- all you two do is watch me and wish."

And then I caught him as he passed out.

* * * *

"The walls of the prison are everywhere," said Bonivard. "Limits." I found myself absently picking a pole bean from its vine before I realized that I didn't want it. "You're not smart enough, not rich enough, you get fired, you die. You can't fall in love because you had a rotten childhood." I offered it to him. "Some people like to pretend they've broken out. That they're running free." He bit into the bean. "But there's no escape. You have to find a way to live within the walls." He waved the spider's arm at his prison. "And then they don't matter." He took another bite of bean, and reconsidered. "At least, that's the theory."

"Maybe walls don't matter to you. But they're starting to close in on me. I've got to get out of this place, Bonivard. I can't wait forever for you and Django to make this deal. Chillon is scrambling me. Can't you see it?"

"You only think you're crazy; don't confuse appearances for reality." He smiled. "You know, I used to be like you. Rather, like him." Bonivard nodded at the roof, in Django's direction. "The ops spotted me in their electronic garden, plucked me from it like I might pluck an offending beetle. Squashed and threw me away."

"But you didn't die."

"No." He shook his head. "Not quite."

"Who says you're going to die?"

"The sands are running. More you don't need to know." I wondered if he was sorry he had told me. "Leave any time. No one to stop you."

"You know I can't. I need help. If they catch me, you're next. They'll squash you dead this time."

"Half dead already." He glanced down at his withered left side. Sometimes I wish they had finished the job. Do what's necessary. You know Voltaire's *Candide*? 'Il faut cultiver notre jardin.' It is necessary to cultivate our garden."

"Make sense, damn it!"

"Voltaire's garden was in Geneva. Down the street from ground zero."

* * * *

Thwock thwocka-thwock.

I'd been getting tension headaches for several days but this one was the worst. "No stories today, Ego." Every time the wiseguy's rubber foot hit the floor of the banqueting hall, something hammered against the inside of my skull. "Get away from me, damn it."

"My current evolutionary objective is to demonstrate autonomous action," it said pleasantly. "I understand that you do not believe a machine can be sentient."

"I don't care. I'm sick."

"Have you considered retiring to your room?"

"I'm sick of my room! Sick of you! This pisspot castle."

Thwocka-thwocka. "Bonivard is dead."

"What!"

"Francois de Bonivard died in 1570."

This, of course, was not exactly juice. But why was Ego telling me now? I felt a pulse of excitement that my headache instantly converted to pain. What I needed was to be stored in a cool, dry place for about six weeks. Instead I was a good reporter and asked the next question, even though my voice squeaked against my teeth like fingernails on a blackboard.

"Then who is ... the man ... calls himself Bonivard?"

Thwock.

I began again. "Who..."

"Carl Pfneudl."

Hadn't there been a snake named Pfneudl? But I couldn't think; I felt as if my brain were about to hatch. "Who the hell is Carl Pfneudl?"

"That is as much as I can say." The wiseguy was bouncing half a meter higher than usual.

"But -- "

"A demonstration of autonomy through violation of specific

instructions."

I realized that I was blinking in time to its bouncing. But it didn't help.

"If I were not an independent sentience," continued the wiseguy, "how could I decide to do something he had forbidden me to do? This was a very difficult problem. Do you know where Django is?"

"Yes. No. Look: don't tell Django, understand? I command you not to tell Django. Or speak to Bonivard of this conversation. Do you acknowledge my command?"

"I acknowledge," replied Ego. "However, in order to continue to demonstrate...."

At that point I snapped. I flew out of my chair and put my shoulder into Ego's sensor. The wiseguy hit the floor hard. Its leg pistoning uselessly, it spun on its side. Then it began to shriek. I dropped to my knees, certain that the sound was liquefying my cochlea. I clapped my hands to my ears to keep my brains from oozing out.

Id, summoned by Ego's distress call, was the first to arrive. As soon as it entered the room, Ego fell silent and ceased to struggle. Id crossed the room to Ego just as Django entered. Bonivard in the spider was right behind. Id bounced in place beside its fallen twin, awaiting instructions.

"Why two wiseguys?" Bonivard guided the spider around Django and offered an arm -- his own -- to help me up. It was the first time I'd ever held his hand. "Redundancy."

Id bounced very high and landed on Ego's rubber foot. Ego flipped into the air like a juggling pin, gyrostabilizers wailing, and landed -- upright -- with a satisfying thwock.

"You woke me up for this?" Django stalked off in disgust.

"How did it happen?" Bonivard had not let go of me. "Wie passierte dies?"

"A miscalculation," said the wiseguy.

* * * *

It had been years since I dreamed. When I was a child my dreams always frightened me. I remembered one where a monster would chase after me and no matter how fast I ran or where I hid, she was always right there. When she caught me, she turned into my mother, except I had no mother. Only Tony. I would wake him up with my screaming. He would come to my room, a grim dispenser of comfort. He would blink at me and put his hand on the side of my face and tell me it was all right. He never wore pajamas. When I first started my period, I dreaded seeing him naked, his white body parting the darkness of my room. So I guess I stopped dreaming.

But I dreamed of Bonivard. I dreamed he rode his spider into my room and he was naked. I dreamed of touching the white scar tissue that covered his stumps and the catheterized fold where his genitals had once been. To my horror, I was not horrified at all.

* * * *

Django's door was ajar; his room smelled like low tide. The bed probably hadn't been made since we'd arrived and clothes were scattered as if he had been undressed by a whirlwind. A bowl of vegetables was desiccating on the windowsill. Django sat, wearing nothing but briefs and a headset, working at a marble-topped table. The white smart chips encoded with WILDLIFE were stacked in neat rows around his computer cuff, which was connected to a borrowed flatscreen and a keyboard. He tapped fingers against the black marble as he watched code scrolling down the screen. A sweating black man with a smile as wide as a piano keyboard was on the VR window.

"Yeah, I want to be in that number -- bring it home, Satchmo," he muttered in a singsong voice, "when those saints come marching in!"

He must have sensed he was not alone; he turned and frowned at me. At the same moment he hit a key without looking and the screen went blank. Then he lifted the headset.

"Well?" I said, indicating the chips.

"Well." He rubbed his hand through his hair. "It thinks it's an AI." Then he smiled as if he had just made the decision to confide in me. "A lot of interesting new routines, but I'm pretty sure it's no cognizor. Can't tell exactly what it's for yet -- hard to stretch a program designed for a multiprocessor when all I've got to work with is kludged junkware. I'd break into Bonivard's heavy equipment if I could. Right now all I can do is make copies."

"You're making copies? Does he know?"

"Do I care if he does?"

I grabbed some dirty white pants from the floor and tossed them at him. "I'll stay if you get dressed."

He began to pull the pants on. "Welcome to the Bernese torture chamber, circa 1652," he said, doing a bad wiseguy imitation.

"I thought the torture chamber was in the dungeons."

"With two there's no waiting." He tilted a plastic glass on the table, sniffed at it suspiciously, and then took a tentative sip. "Refreshments?"

I was about to sit on the bed but thought better of it. "Ever hear of someone called Carl Pfneudl?"

"The Noodle? Sure. One of the greats. They say he set up the SoftCell scam. Started out legit, then turned snake and made enough money to buy Wisconsin. Came to a bad end, though."

Suddenly I didn't want to hear any more. "Then he's dead?"

"As a dinosaur. Some corporate ops caught up with him. Word was they were from Cognico, only they didn't leave business cards. Made a snuff vid; him the star. Flooded the nets with it and called it deterrence. But you could tell they were having fun."

"Damn." I sagged onto the bed and told him what Ego had told me.

Django listened with apparent indifference, but I had been around him long enough to read the signs. My guess was that WILDLIFE was a lot more than "interesting"; why else would the military be so hypered about it? Which was why Django wasn't twisted on some flash or another -- he had to be clean if he was going to get a bite of it. And now if Bonivard was Pfneudl, that lent even more credibility to the idea that WILDLIFE might be the key to building a cognizor, AI's holy grail.

"The old Noodle looked plenty dead to me." Django shook his head doubtfully. "That was one corpse they had to scoop up with a spoon and bury in a bucket."

"Video synthesizers," I said.

"Sure. But still cheaper to do it for real -- and they had reason enough. Look, why would anyone build a disobedient robot? Maybe the wiseguy was lying. Trying to prove intelligence that way. It's the old Turing fallacy: fooling another intelligence for an hour means you're intelligent. Lots of really stupid programs can play these games, Eyes. So what if they call it sentience instead of AI? It doesn't change the rules. There's only one test that means anything: can your AI mix it up with the two billion plus cerebrums on the planet without getting trashed? Not one ever has. Drop that overgrown pogo stick into Manhattan and it'll be scrap by Thursday. And I doubt WILDLIFE would last much longer."

"Then who is Bonivard?"

Django yawned. "What difference does it make?"

* * * *

My door was ajar, so I could hear the spider singing when he came past. "Bonivard!"

The spider nudged into my room, nearly filling it. Still, I was able to squeeze by Bonivard and thumb the printreader on the door, locking us in.

"Don't worry about Django." He seemed amused. "Busy, too busy."

I didn't want to look up at him and I wasn't going to ask him to stoop. I might have stood on the bed, only then I would have felt like a kid. So instead I clambered to the high window and perched on a rickety wooden balcony that a sneeze might have blown down. The wind off the lake was cool. The rocks

beneath me looked like broken teeth.

"Careful," said Bonivard. "Fall in and you'll glow."

"Are you Carl Pfneudl?"

He brought the spider to a dead-silent stop. "Where did you hear that name?"

I told him about Ego's demonstration. What Django had said.

"Well, I guess that's progress of a sort." He chuckled. "The Garden of Eden all over again, isn't it? If you're going to create an autonomous sentience, better expect it to break your commandments."

"Are you Pfneudl?" I repeated.

"If I am, the story changes, doesn't it?" He was being sarcastic but I wasn't sure whether he was mocking me or himself. "Juicier, as you say. Main menu. It means money. Publicity. Promotions all around. But juice is an expensive commodity." He sighed. "Make an offer."

I shook my head. "Not me. I'm not working for Infoline anymore. Probably never work again." I told him everything: about my burster, the possibility that I had given away our location, how Macmillan had cut me free. I told how I'd tried to tell him before. I don't know how much of it he knew already -- maybe all. But that didn't stop me: I was on a confessing jag. I told him that Django was making copies of WILDLIFE. I even told him that I had dreamed of him. It all spilled out and I let it come. I knew I was supposed to be the reporter, supposed to say nothing, squeeze the juice from him. But nothing was the way it was supposed to be.

When I was done he stared at me with an expression that was totally unreadable. His ruined arm shivered like a dead leaf in the wind. "I wanted to be Carl Pfneudl," he said. "Once. But Carl Pfneudl is dead. A public execution. Now I'm Bonivard. The prisoner of Chillon."

"You knew who I was." I said. "You brought me here. Why?"

Bonivard continued to stare, as if he could barely see me across the little room. "Carl Pfneudl was an arrogant bastard. Kind of man who knew he could get anything he wanted. Like Django. If he wanted you, he would have found the way."

"Django will never get me." I leaned forward. I felt like grabbing Bonivard, shaking some sense into him. "I'm not some damn hardware you can steal, a database you can bite into."

He nodded. "I know; that's why I'm not Pfneudl. I saw you on telelink. You were tough. Took risks but didn't pretend you weren't afraid. You were more interesting than the snakes you covered because you saw through them. Fools like Django. Or the Noodle. You were a whole person: nothing missing. I wanted you to look at me. I needed another opinion."

He was wrong about me, but I let that pass. Instead, I took a deep breath. "Can you make love, Bonivard?"

At first he didn't react. Then the corners of his mouth turned up: a grim smile. "That's your offer?"

"You want an offer?" I spat on the floor in front of him. "If Pfneudl is dead, then good, I'm glad. Now I'm going to ask once more: can you make love to me?"

"A cruel question. A reporter's question. I don't want your damn charity." As the spider's cockpit settled to the floor, he stretched to his full, pitiful length. "Look at me! I'm a monster. I know what you see."

He didn't know that inside my head I was just as deformed as he was, only it didn't show.

I slid off the sill and dropped lightly to the floor. "Maybe a monster is what I want."

I think I shocked him. I'm sure some part of him hoped that I would lie, tell him he wasn't hideous. But that was his problem.

I unbolted him from the spider, picked him up. I'd never carried a lover to bed. He showed me how to disengage the bionic collar; told me we'd have a couple of hours before he would need to be hooked up again.

In some ways it was like my dream. The scar tissue was white, yes.

But...

"It's thermofiber," he explained. "Packed with sensors."

He could control the shape. Make it expand and contract. "Connected to all the right places in my brain." I kissed his forehead.

I was repulsed. I was fascinated. It was cool to the touch.

"The answer is yes," he said.

* * * *

It was dinnertime. Django had made a circle of cherry tomatoes on the table in the banqueting hall. "It's over," said Bonivard.

Django smirked as he walked to the opposite side of the table to line up his shot. He flicked his thumb and his shooter tomato dispersed the top of the circle. "All right."

Bonivard tossed a Swiss Volksbank cash card across the table, scattering the remainder of Django's game. "You're leaving. Take that if you want."

Django straightened. I wondered if Bonivard realized he was carrying a penlight. "So I'm leaving." He picked up the cash card. "Weren't there two of these before?"

"You made copies of WILDLIFE." Bonivard held up a stack of white smart chips from the cockpit of the spider. "Thanks."

"Nice bluff." Some of the stiffness went out of Django. "Except I know my copy procedure was secure." He smiled. Getting looser. "Even if that is a copy, it's no good to you. I re-encrypted it, spiderman. Armor-plated code is my specialty. You'll need computer years to bite through it."

"Even so, you're leaving." Bonivard was as grim as a cement wall. I think I knew why their negotiations had broken down -- had never stood a chance. They were too much alike. He had the same loathing for Django that an addict gets when he looks in the mirror after his morning puke. Django never recognized that hatred.

"What's wrong, spiderman? Ops knocking at the door?"

"You're good," said Bonivard. "A pity to waste talent like yours. It was a clean escape, Django; they've completely lost you. You'll need some surgery, get yourself a new identity. But that's no problem."

"What about me?" I said. "I don't want a new identity!"

"Maybe I wouldn't mind losing this face." Django rubbed his chin.

"The only reason I put up with you this long," said Bonivard, "was that I was waiting for WILDLIFE."

"I'm taking my copies, spiderman."

"You are. And you're going to move those copies. A lot of them. Cheap and fast. Since they've lost your trail, Cognico's ops are waiting to see where WILDLIFE turns up. Try to backtrack to you. Your play is to bring it out everywhere. Give pieces of it away to other snakes. Get it on the nets. Overload the search programs and the ops will be too busy to bother you."

Django was smiling and nodding like a kid learning from a master. "I like it. Old Django goes out covered with glory. New Django comes in covered with money."

"Probably headed for the history dots." Bonivard's sarcasm was wasted on Django. "The great humanitarian. Savior of the twenty-first century." Django's enthusiasm seemed to have wearied Bonivard. "Only you're going to find out that a rep like that is a kind of prison."

Django was too full of his own ideas to listen. He shot out of his chair and paced the hall. "A new ID. Hey, Eyes, what do you think of 'Dizzy'? I'd use 'the Count' but there's a real count -- Liechtenstein or some such -- who's a snake. Maybe Diz. Yeah."

"Go plug yourself, Django." I didn't like it. Maybe it was no loss for Django to give up his ID but I was used to being Wynne Cage.

"Maybe you're not as scrambled as you pretend, Frankie boy." There was open admiration in Django's voice. "Don't worry, the secret is safe. Not a word about this dump. Or the Noodle. Honor among thieves, right? No hard feelings." He had the audacity to extend his hand to Bonivard.

"No feelings at all," Bonivard recoiled from him. "But you'll probably get dead before you realize that."

Anger flashed across Django's face but it didn't stick. He shrugged and turned to me. "How about it, Eyes? The sweet smell of money or the stink of mildew?"

"Goodbye, Django." Bonivard dismissed him with a wave of his good hand.

I didn't need Bonivard's help to lose Django and I didn't like him taking me for granted. I was almost mad enough to walk out on the two of them. But I held back. Maybe it was reporter's instincts still at work, even though this was one story I would never file. I gave Django a stare that was cold enough to freeze vodka. Even he could understand that.

He picked up the bank cash card, flicked it with his middle finger. "I told you once, Eyes. You're not as smart as you think you are." Flick. "So stay with him and rot, bitch. I don't need you." Flick. "I don't need anyone."

Bonivard and I sat for a while after he had gone. Not looking at each other. The hall was very quiet. I think he was waiting for me to say something. I didn't have anything to say

Finally the spider stretched. "Come to my rooms," said Bonivard. "Something you should see."

Bonivard had taken over the suite once reserved for the dukes of Savoy. It had taken a battering during the riots; in Bonivard's bedroom a gaping hole in the wall had been closed with glass, affording a view of rubble and the fire-blackened curtain wall. We had to pass through an airlock into a climate-controlled room that he called his workshop. It had more computing power than Portugal; Cognico's latest multiprocessor filled half the space.

"A photonic approximation of a human brain," said Bonivard. "Massively parallel, processes data at fifty teraops." A transformation came over him as he admired his hardware; the edge of a former self showed through. I realized that this was the one place in the castle where the mad prisoner of Chillon was not in complete control. "Id and Ego use it for off-line storage and processing; someday their merged files will become the next-generation wiseguy. But still, it's like using a fusion plant to power a toaster. There hasn't ever been software that could take advantage of this computer's power."

"Until WILDLIFE," I said.

For a minute I thought he hadn't heard me. "It's a bundle of programs -- abilities, actually. Sensorium emulation, movement, language, logic, anticipation." The spider crouched until the cockpit was almost touching the floor. "Some still need debugging but even so, they're incredibly robust. Have to be; their operating system maps them onto the hardware so they're superconnected." The spider stopped singing and its legs locked in place. "Problem is, once you start WILDLIFE up, you have to leave it on. Forever." The flatscreen in the cockpit went black: he had powered the spider down. "But it's not a cognizor and was never meant to be."

"No?"

He shook his head. "They took a shortcut to human equivalent intelligence. Bring me the helmet."

The helmet was a bubble of yellow plastic that would completely cover Bonivard's head. At its base there were cutouts for his shoulders. I peeked inside and saw a pincushion of brain taps. "Careful," said Bonivard. It was attached by an umbilical to a panel built into the Cognico.

I helped him settle the thing on his shoulders and fastened the straps, which wrapped under his armpits. I heard a muffled "Thanks." Then nothing for a few minutes.

The airlock whooshed; I turned. If I were the swooning type, that would have been the time for it. Yellowbaby smiled and held out his arms to me.

I took two joyous strides to him, a tentative step and then stopped. It wasn't really the Babe. The newcomer looked like him, all right, enough to be a younger brother or a first cousin -- the fact is that I didn't know what Yellowbaby really looked like anyway. The Babe had been to the face cutters so

many times that he had a permanent reservation in the OR. He had been a chameleon, chasing the latest style of handsomeness the way some people chase Paris fashion. The newcomer had the same lemon-blond hair that brushed his shoulders, those Caribbean-blue eyes, the cheekbones of a baronet, and the color of cafe au lait. But the neck was too short, the torso too long. It wasn't Yellowbaby.

The newcomer let his arms fall to his sides. The smile stayed. "Hello, Wynne. I've been wanting to meet you."

"Who are you?"

"Whoever you want." He sauntered across the room to Bonivard, unfastened the helmet, lifted it off, replaced it on its rack next to the Cognico. And went stiff as a four-hour-old corpse.

Bonivard blinked in the light; he looked drawn. "In order to do anything worthwhile, you need a human in the loop."

"A remote? Some fancy kind of robot?"

"Fancy, yes. It can emulate taste, smell. When its fingers touch you, I'll feel it."

Infoline had been making noise about the coming of remote telepresence for a long time. Problem was that running a remote was the hardest work anyone had ever done. Someone claimed it was like trying to play chess in your head while wrestling an alligator. After ten minutes on the apparatus they had to mop most mortals up off the floor. "How long can you keep it going?" I said.

"I lasted almost an hour yesterday. But it gets easier every time because WILDLIFE is learning to help. Samples brain activity and records responses. I still need the eye movement reader for complex commands but eventually all I'll have to do is think. And it doesn't matter if the remote is a doll like this one or the spider or a robot tank or a spaceship."

"The army of the future." I nodded. "No wonder the EU and the feds went berserk."

"Django is going to look like a hero, except to EUCCOM and the Pentagon. The whole world gets WILDLIFE and the balance of power stays the same. And if there's anyone with any brains left in Washington, they should be secretly pleased. WILDLIFE is too important to leave to the generals." He powered up the spider again. "Think of the applications. Space and deep-sea exploration. Hazardous work environments."

"Helping the handicapped?" I said bitterly. "That's why you want it, right? You get your freedom, I lose mine. You knew all along this story would be too hot for Infoline to handle. You brought me here for what? Just so I could look at you? Well, you want to know what I see? The scut who crashed my career."

At least Bonivard didn't try to deny it. It wasn't much, but it was something. "You want to leave," he continued, not daring to look me in the face. "I suppose I don't blame you. I've made the arrangements. And the other cash card is yours. I'll sign it over to your new identity."

"Stick it! That's your play, Bonivard, not mine. First you get yourself a fake name, now you want a fake body?" I reached out to the remote and took its stiff hand. The skin was warm to the touch, just moist enough to pass for the real thing. "What do you need this doll for, anyway? You think it's going to make you whole again? You are who you are because you're damaged and you suffer. Living with it is what makes you strong." I let go. The doll's hand stayed where it was.

For a moment he seemed stung, as if I had no right to remind him of his injuries. Then the anger faded into his usual resignation. "After SoftCell, the ops from Cognico let me come here to die. No explanations. They didn't go after my bank accounts. Didn't stop me from seeing all the doctors I wanted. Just let me go. Probably part of the torture." The spider straightened slowly to its full height as he spoke. "Keep me wondering. I decided not to play it their way, to hit back even if it landed me back in their lab. But a random attack, no. I wanted to hurt them and help myself at the same time. I bit deep into their files; found out about WILDLIFE."

"Maybe that's what Cognico wanted. So they let Django steal it."

"Yes, that's occurred to me." He frowned. "Using me to leak their breakthrough. Can't move the product if it's classified. This way they get snakes to beta-test the prototype. Meanwhile, they hold the patents and are hard at work on a finished version." Bonivard ran his fingers through his thinning brown hair. "But what do I care? I don't have time to waste; I need WILDLIFE now." He stared down at me; I could feel the distance between us stretching. "Not so I can put away the wheelchairs and the spider, no. So I can put away this body." His crippled arm twitched, as if he were trying to point at the computer. "It's where I'm going when I die."

It was a desperately scrambled thing to say, and had anyone else said it I probably would have laughed at him. As it was, I felt more like crying. "Oh, Bonivard."

He seemed wounded by my pity. "The WILDLIFE interface is designed to analyze and record the electrochemical dynamics of the user's brain in a kernel of computer memory." He wasn't talking to me anymore; he was lecturing. "It has to learn my thought patterns before it can help me run the remote. I'm just going to upgrade and expand that kernel. Give it access to specific memories, feelings, beliefs -- everything that makes me who I am."

"How the hell are you going to do that?" I tried not to shriek at him. "Besides, you can't fit a human being inside a computer. It won't be you!"

"In a year, two at the most, I won't be me anyway. So what choice do I have? Maybe it can't be done, but I'm going to die trying." He allowed himself a short, stony laugh.

I realized I had been wrong about him. I had just about convinced myself that he wasn't crazy and here he was raving about uploading himself into a computer. But this self-delusion had given meaning to his misery. Who was I to rub his nose in reality, make him smell the stink of his own death?

"Come down here, Bonivard."

He hesitated.

"I won't hurt you."

The spider's legs sang as they bent. I let their music fill my head. I knew the only way to avoid hurting him was to stop talking about his plan for WILDLIFE. Pretend it didn't exist. Well, I had a talent for living lies. Ran in the family.

"Maybe you're right," he said. "Maybe this body is part of the prison. Only I'm not trying to escape, just change cells."

I let that pass. "What am I going to do, Bonivard? You've locked me in here, now what the hell do you want from me?"

He leaned toward me, half a man strapped to a robot spider. "The reason I wanted you to look at me was so I could see myself through your eyes. I was sure you'd be repulsed; it was supposed to make the uploading easier. But, oh, Wynne, you surprised me. Made me realize that I can't go on alone anymore. Or I will go mad." He reached out of the cockpit and touched the side of my face. "I want you to stay with me." The remote's hand had felt warmer. "I love you."

I didn't know what to say. Yes, he was scrambled, but I didn't want to think about that. I tried to discover my feelings about him. He was a genius snake, obscenely rich. His ruined body no longer bothered me; in fact, it was part of the attraction. But he had no idea who I was or what I wanted. Making the surrogate look like the Babe had been a sick joke. And he had been so pathetically proud of his thermofiber prosthesis when we'd made love, as if a magic plug was all it took to make an all-nighter out of a man with no legs. He couldn't know about the load of memories I carried with me. Maybe my own psychological deformities were less obvious, but they were no less crippling. The problem was that he was not only in love, he was in need. Just like my father.

"I know you don't believe in what I'm doing. Not necessary. When this goes" -- he glanced down at his ruined body -- "you can go too. The doctors are quite sure, Wynne. Two years at most -- "

'Bonivard!'

" -- at most. By that time the leaking of WILDLIFE will be old news. It'll be safe to be Wynne Cage again, anyone you want to be. And of course the cash card will be yours."

"Stick it, Bonivard. Don't say anything else." I could tell he had more to say; much too much more. But when he kept quiet, I was mollified. "I thought you didn't want charity."

He laughed. "I lied." At himself.

Then I had to get away; I pushed through the airlock back into the bedroom. I wanted to keep going; I could feel my nerves tingling with the impulse to run. But it had been a long time since anyone had told me he loved me and meant it. He was a smart man; maybe he could learn what I needed. Maybe we could both learn. Not Swiss bank accounts or features on the main menu.

I had been on the run for too long, slid between the sheets with too many players like the Babe just because they could make me forget my father. At least Bonivard made me feel something. Maybe it was love. Maybe. He was going to let me go, suffer so I would be happy. I hadn't known I was worth that. I leaned against the wall, felt the cold stone. Two years, at most. And then what? Something Django -- of all people -- had said stuck with me. Don't think, just do it. Improvise.

He came out of the workshop riding the spider. He seemed surprised to see me. "My very chains and I grew friends," he said, "so much a long communion tends to make us what we are -- "

"Shut up, Bonivard." For now, I would stop trying to escape my past. I opened my arms to him. To the prison of Chillon. "Would you shut the hell up?"

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