

Medieval Realms: An Eclectic Collection

From the "Major Works" series

CJS Hayward

CJS Hayward Publications, Wheaton

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Preface

On television, a medieval fantasy shows Robin Hood's crew enter an enchanted mansion. The heroine sees a magical apparition in a magic mirror, and reassures herself, saying to herself, "I am... having... *a biochemical reaction!*"

Knowing, or not knowing, the Middle Ages makes a tremendous difference in writing medieval fantasy. It is not simply talent, but knowledge of the Middle Ages makes a great deal of difference in writing medieval fantasy literature. To someone who does know something of medieval culture, it is a sapping experience to read fantasy or fairy tales about twentieth century Americans dressed up awkwardly in armor.

The author has spent a great deal of time studying medieval literature and culture; he has read medieval versions of the Arthurian legends, and theological classics from the High Middle Ages.

These works are not perfect. But they are the works of someone who tried hard to understand the Middle Ages.

The Sign of the Grail

George had finally gotten through the first week at Calix College, and the chaos was subsiding. Bored for a minute, and too exhausted from the busy work to start researching something, he sat down, tried to remember something strange that he meant to investigate, and tried some more.

When he finally gave up and tried to think about what else he could do, he remembered a book he had seen in his closet, perhaps left over by a previous resident. He pulled out a fan and a lamp that were placed on it, and pulled out a large book. The entire leather cover had only eleven letters, and the dark leather showed signs of wear but seemed to be in remarkably good condition. The golden calligraphy formed a single word: *Brocéliande*. All across the front lay dark, intricate leather scrollwork.

What was "*Brocéliande*?" After looking at the leather and goldwork a short while, George opened *Brocéliande* and read:

The knight and the hermit wept and kissed together, and the hermit did ask, "Sir knight, wete thou what the Sign of the Grail be?"

The knight said, "Is that one of the Secrets of the Grail?"

"If it be one of the Secrets of the Grail, that is neither for thee to ask nor to know. The Secrets of the Grail are very different from what thou mightest imagine in thine heart, and no man will get them by looking for secrets. But knowest thou what the Sign of the Grail be?"

"I never heard of it, nor do I know it."

"Thou wete it better than thou knowest, though thou wouldst wete better still if thou knewest that thou wete."

"That be perplexed, and travail sore to understand."

The hermit said, "Knowest thou the Sign of the Cross?"

"I am a Christian and I know it. It is no secret amongst Christians."

"Then know well that the sacred kiss, the kiss of the mass, even if it be given and received but once per year, is the Sign of the Grail."

"How is that? What makes it such as I have never heard?"

"I know that not in its fullness. Nor could I count reasons even knew I the fullness of truth. But makest thou the Sign of the Cross when thou art alone?"

"Often, good hermit; what Christian does not?"

"Canst thou make the Sign of the Grail upon another Christian when thou art alone?"

George's cell phone rang, and he closed the book and ran to hear the call better. When he came back, though he spent an hour searching, he could not find his place in the heavy book. He turned outside.

There were a lot of people, but what he saw was the castle-like stonework of the campus, the timeworn statues, and finally the great wood with its paths, streams, and meadows. He got lost several times, but not truly *lost*, as he was exploring and finding interesting places no less when he lost his sense of direction. The next time he found his way, he went to the cafeteria and sat down at a table, part listening and part sifting through thoughts.

When he got home, his mind was hungry again, and he opened

Brocéliande to the middle:

Merlin howled.

"Lord of Heaven and Earth, I have everything I want, or rather everything I fled to. I have left the city and the company of men, and am become as a wild beast, living on grass and nuts.

"Is this because of whose son I am? Some say I have powers from my father, serving the Light only because the prayers spoken when some learned of that dread project. Yet here outside of castle and city I have learned things hidden from most men. I can conjure up a castle from the air, but not enter and live in one: I live in the wood as a man quite mad."

Then he looked around. The trees were a verdant green, yet he found apples. Presently he came to the fountain of Brocéliande; he rang not the bell but drew deep and drank a draught. The forest were his labyrinth and his lair.

A hawk came and set him on the branch close up.

Merlin said to it, "Yet I can speak with thee: no element is a stranger to me."

A sound of footsteps sounded, and Merlin ran not away.

Merlin his sister Ganeida laid a hand on Merlin his arm. "Come, Merlin. This is unworthy. I have brought thee food for a journey: King Arthur summoneth thee to his court."

Merlin beheld the wood called Brocéliande. He beheld its holly, its ivy, its trees shaken by storm and wind. He thought of the animals. And there was something about this forest that drew him: it seemed larger on the inside than the outside, and there was something alway that seemed shining through it, like faint and haunting music which he had by struggles learned to catch as he withdrew from castles and the world of men.

Then Ganiada did start to sing a different song, a plain and simple folk tune, and Merlin his heart settled, and he did walk with his sister.

George slowly closed the book.

He imagined the scene; there was something about Merlin that haunted and eluded him. There was—

There was a knock on the door.

He opened it. It was one of the people from dinner.

"Do you want to see a movie?"

"What movie?"

"We're still deciding. But there are a few of us going to the theater."

George thought for a moment. Up until that point he thought he didn't want to read more of the book for now. When he declined the invitation, there was a fleeting insight which he forgot the next moment.

The next day in class, the figure of Merlin had a stronger grip on his imagination.

If George had less energy, his classes might have suffered more. As it was, he was getting by, and he slowly began to realize that there was something more that gripped him than horses, swords, and armor. He kept opening more to see the beautiful fantasy, so different from his world. At one point he turned the page:

Then Queen Guinevere did sigh and wept sore.

A lady asked, "Milady, what is it?"

"This Grail cometh even now. Is it accursed?"

"The Round Table shattered sore hard and knights return with strange tales. Such a holy thing this Grail is called, yet when it

cometh the rich Grail yet burneth like fire. Already King Arthur his work is unraveling.

"Will it even take from me my Sir Lancelot? Or can I take even my Lancelot from the Holy Grail?"

There was something in the back of George's mind. He sat back, thinking, and then closed the book to make a brief visit to the unspoilt beauty of the wood.

When he went in, he noticed a great beech tree, lying, weeping. It seemed that there was something trying to get out of the verdure. There were ferns and moss around, and he walked and walked. The path took many turns, and George began to realize several things. First, it was dark. Second, he was lost. Third, a chill was setting in. Fourth, he could not see even the stars.

Before long he was running in heavy, icy rain, branches lashing, until a branch hitting his chest winded him. He sat down in stinging pain and regained his breath, then felt around and crawled beneath an outcropping. Here the rain at least would not get to him any more. He spent the night in waking shock at what this great pristine nature, unsullied by human contamination, was really like: the forest seemed to be without reason or order right down to the awkward surface of the rock that he was painfully lying on. Long-forgotten fears returned: when a little light broke through the clouds, were those things he saw rocks, fallen trees, or goblins? He spent a long time shivering, and when the sun rose, he thirsted for light, and got up, only half awake, and followed it until he came to the edge of the forest and saw the castle-inspired buildings of the college. A short while later he was warming up with a welcome blanket and the welcome sound of voices in conversation.

Something was eating away at the back of George's mind.

Perhaps because of his weariness, his attention in class was chiefly on the flicker of the fluorescent light and how the buildings, which on the outside were so evocative of castles, were so modern on the inside. The one thing that caught his mind was a set of comments about either how

we must be individuals and do our own thing or else we are all community and individuality is an illusion. He wanted to be haunted and meet hints of a larger world, and others' passionately held opinions seemed like they were taken from *Newsweek* and *USA Today*.

What was on TV? He stopped in the lobby and saw a show with a medieval set, very carefully done to convey a medieval flavor, and watched until a heroine looked at a magical apparition in a full-length mirror and said, "I am having... a biochemical reaction!" He could not explain what failed to confront him, but he walked out. It was Freya's Day, commonly shortened to "Friday." When he learned how the days of the week were named, for Norse gods or celestial bodies—namely, Sun's Day, Moon's Day, Tiw's Day, Wotan's Day, Thor's Day, Freya's Day, and Saturn's Day—something seemingly pedestrian met him with a touch of a larger world. Now, it seemed, things that looked like they could tell of a larger world confronted him with the utterly pedestrian?

His homework did not take long.

Then, amidst Bon Jovi blaring through the hall, George began read. What he was reading seemed to affect him more like a song would than a story: a lullaby almost. He read of Arthur walking into battle, carrying an icon of the Virgin above him. There were mighty blows, armies with their mounted shock troops, great knights clothed in chainmail hauberks astride elephantine destriers, and in the center Arthur holding what seemed to be a story within a story, an icon that opened out onto something larger, and yet something he could not see in his mind's eye.

Then at another place he read as Arthur crossed land and sea and placed his sword on the ground and claimed a second Britain, and then gave of his knights, his brothers, and his substance to make a place like Great Britain, with forests and orchards, fields and towns, until he had given what he could of his spirit to make a Little Britain.

George looked through and began to see things weaving in and out: an intensity, a concentration, and not just that he was entering another time but he was entering another *time*, though he could not tell how it was different: he only sensed that time moved differently, and that his

watch told something very different.

Then all of this seemed to crystallize as a grievously wounded Sir Lancelot came to an hospitable knight and Elaine his daughter spent endless time healing his wounds. Love so overwhelmed her that she poured herself out with such intensity that when Lancelot left for the only woman he could love, her body emptied of spirit and life floated on a bier in a boat until Arthur's court wept at the most piteous tale of her love. George found himself wishing he could weep.

—over hill, over dale until the night was black, and neither candle nor star pierced it. The great knight his destrier shook the earth. The great knight was clad in a double coat of mail and the shaft of his greater spear was as a weaver's beam. Then he did stop to dismount and his own steps shook the earth.

Before him was a chalice of purest gold, radiant with light—radiant as the day. He walked before it, his steps shook the earth, and he stood taller than ever he did stand, until his hand grasped it.

The light blazed brighter and a voice in the air spake, "Lancelot, Lancelot, why mockest thou me?" The light blazed, and Sir Lancelot fell against the ground in tremors, and his horse fled far away in terror.

Then Sir Lancelot spake a question which I will not tell you.

The voice answered with words not lawful for man to write, and the pure gold chalice vanished and the light with it.

The knight wist not why he ran, and later he awoke him in a strange place where there were neither man nor beast in sight.

George closed the book. He had been reading for a long time, he told himself. What was there to do?

He looked around the school website for clubs and organizations, and none of the many things people were doing caught his eye. He walked around the campus, looking at the buildings. He went to the library and

wandered around the bookshelves, and picked up a few items but set them down. Then he returned to his room and sat down for a while.

He was bored for the rest of the day.

That night, as he dreamed, he saw a castle, and walked into it. Whenever he looked at his body, he saw what looked like his ordinary clothing, and yet he believed he was wearing armor. He walked through hallways, chambers, the great hall, even dungeons, trying to see what he was searching for. At last he was in a room where he heard people, and smelt something ineffable. He caught a glimpse of a chalice that he could not see, yet he sensed its silhouette, bathed in indescribable light on either side, and he saw light rising above its core. But he never succeeded in seeing it.

He awoke from the strain to see it. He heard birdsong, and the fingers of the light of the dawn were brushing against his face.

Something crystallized in George's mind, and he did not need to tell himself, "I am on a quest."

The next day he went into the city to look around in the medieval institute, and tried to see what was there. He managed to walk at a brisk pace, almost run, through the museum, and was nervous over whether he would get out by the time he had to leave to catch dinner. Nothing caught his eye; nothing seemed interesting; everything seemed good only for a glimpse.

There was something eating at him.

During the next week, George discovered online reproduction sword dealers and looked at the perfectly machined character of the many closeup images available online. He didn't buy anything, but after the week thinking and failing to find other places, George returned to the museum. Maybe there was something he had missed.

He stopped at the first sword.

The sword, or what was left of it, looked like it had been eaten by

worms, if that were possible. The deeply pitted surface intrigued him; it had all the surface of the complexity of a rock, and he thought that if he could take a magnifying glass or a zoomed-in camera lens to this or that part, it could pass for the intricate surface of a volcanic rock.

The handle didn't look right at all. It was a thin square rod connecting a thick blade and a thicker pommel, and seemed the very definition of "ergonomically incorrect," as if it had been designed to gouge the wearer's hand or generate blisters. It held for George something of the fascination of a car wreck. Why on earth had the museum put such a poor-quality specimen on display?

Then he read the rather large plaque.

The plaque read:

This sword was excavated in what is now Cornwall in Great Britain and dates to the 5th or 6th century AD. It is considered to be remarkably well-preserved, being one of few such finds to be straight and in one solid piece, the metal part lacking only a handguard, and is one of this museum's prized holdings and one of the most valuable gifts from an anonymous donor. The handle, of which only the metal tang remains, was probably wood or possibly other organic materials.

Think for a moment about the time and place this sword would have come from. Everything was made by hand, and there was little wealth: owning a sword would have been like owning a car today. Microscopic examination suggests that this sword was made for someone wealthy, as there are tiny fragments of gold embedded in the blade.

What was life like when nothing was made by machines or mass-produced and therefore things were more expensive and there was less you could buy? What was life when you could not travel faster than a horse and what we today call information could not travel faster than people? What would your life have been like when you would have probably been born, lived, and died within a few miles of the same spot? Life was hard

times of the same spot? Life was hard.

But then look at the other side of the coin: can you think of anything people then would have had that you do not have today?

George looked at the sword, and tried to imagine it whole. At least he could tell what shape it suggested. And he tried to think about what the placard said, with none of the technologies he was used to. What would one do? Practice at swordplay? Wander in the forest?

George saw in his mind's eye Sir Lancelot kneeling on one knee, his sword point in earth, his sword pointing down, taking an oath. Then George looked over the sword again and it looked like Lancelot's sword: he imagined Sir Lancelot—or was it George?—laying his right hand on the sword and taking a mighty oath, and for a moment the sword in the museum took its full cruciform shape. And then as his eyes traced over the contours of the sword, it looked almost a relic, and he saw now one thing, now another: one scene from *Brocéliande* gave way to another, and something tugged at his heart.

He tried to imagine a great feast given by King Arthur to his nobles. There was something of that feast right in front of him, and it seemed to suggest an unfolding pageant. Knights and ladies dined with uproarious laughter, while minstrels sung enchanting ballads, and—

George realized someone was tapping on his shoulder. "Sir? Excuse me, but it's time for you to leave."

George turned and saw a security guard, and in puzzlement asked her, "Why? Have I done something wrong?"

She smiled and said, "You haven't done anything wrong, but I'm sorry, the museum is now closing. Come back another day!"

George looked out a window and saw that the daylight had completely fled. He realized he was very hungry.

He left after briefly saying, "Thank-you."

When he arrived home he was even hungrier, but even before he

WHICH HE ARRIVED HOME HE WAS EVEN HUNGRIER, BUT EVEN BEFORE HE began eating he began looking through the same sites, selling swords.

None of them looked real to him.

After eating part of his meal, George opened *Brocéliande*, flipping from place to place until an illustration caught his eye. He read:

Merlin walked about in the clearing on the Isle of Avalon. To his right was the castle, and to his left was the forest. Amidst the birdsong a brook babbled, and a faint fragrance of frankincense flowed.

Sir Galahad walked out of the castle portal, and he bore a basket of bread.

Then Galahad asked Merlin about his secrets and ways, of what he could do and his lore, of his calling forth from the wood what a man anchored in the castle could never call forth. And Galahad enquired, and Merlin answered, and Galahad enquired of Merlin if Merlin knew words that were more words than our words and more mystically real than the British tongue, and then the High Latin tongue, and then the tongue of Old Atlantis. And then Galahad asked after anything beyond Atlantis, and Merlin's inexhaustible fount ran dry.

Then Sir Galahad asked Merlin of his wood, of the stones and herbs, and the trees and birds, and the adder and the dragon, the gryphon and the lion, and the unicorn whom only a virgin may touch. And Merlin spake to him of the pelican, piercing her bosom that her young may feed, and the wonders, virtues, and interpretation of each creature, until Galahad asked of the dragon's head for which Uther had been called Uther Pendragon, and every Pendragon after him bore the title of King and Pendragon. Merlin wot the virtue of the dragon's body, but of the dragon's head he wot nothing, and Sir Galahad spake that it was better that Merlin wist not.

Then Sir Galahad did ask Merlin after things of which he knew

him nothing, of what was the weight of fire, and of what is the end of natural philosophy without magic art, and what is a man if he enters not in the castle, and "Whom doth the Grail serve?", and of how many layers the Grail hath. And Merlin did avow that of these he wist not none.

Then Merlin asked, "How is it that you are wise to ask after these all?"

Then Galahad spake of a soft voice in Merlin his ear and anon Merlin ran into the wood, bearing bread from the castle.

George was tired, and he wished he could read more. But he absently closed the book, threw away what was left of his hamburgers and fries, and crawled into bed. It seemed but a moment that he was dreaming.

George found himself on the enchanted Isle of Avalon, and it seemed that the Grail Castle was not far off.

George was in the castle, and explored room after room, entranced. Then he opened a heavy wooden door and found himself facing the museum exhibit, and he knew he was seeing the same 5th-6th century sword from the Celtic lands, only it looked exactly like a wall hanger sword he had seen online, a replica of a 13th century Provençale longsword that was mass produced, bore no artisan's fingerprints, and would split if it struck a bale of hay. He tried to make it look like the real surface, ever so real, that he had seen, but machined steel never changed.

Then George looked at the plaque, and every letter, every word, every sentence was something he could read but the whole thing made no sense. Then the plaque grew larger and larger, until the words and even letters grew undecipherable, and he heard what he knew were a dragon's footprints and smelled the stench of acrid smoke. George went through room and passage until the noises grew louder, and chanced to glance at a pool and see his reflection.

He could never remember what his body looked like, but his head was unmistakably the head of a dragon.

George sat bolt upright on his bunk, awake in a cold sweat, and hit his head on the ceiling.

The next day, George went to the medieval history library that was almost at the center of the campus, housed in a white limestone tower with one timeworn spire, and intricately woven with passages like rabbit holes. The librarian was nowhere in sight, and owing to his eccentricities the library still had only a paper card catalog, emanating a strange, musty aroma. George started to walk towards it, before deciding to wander around the shelves and get a feel for things medieval. The medieval history librarian was rumored to be somewhat eccentric, and insisted on a paper card catalog with no computers provided, which many of the students said might as well have been medieval.

His first read traced the development of symbol from something that could not give rise to science to something that apparently paved the way in that a symbol and what it refers to were no longer seen as connected. It seemed hard to follow, some where the argument was obscure and even more when he followed the reasoning: he grasped it and grasped it not. As he read, he read of the cultivation of cabbages and tales of kings, and whether grotesques could let pigs have wings. He read of boys doing the work of men and men who acted like boys, of children who asked for bread and their fathers would give them stones *in* their bread, of careful historians ages before the great discovery of history and classicists preserving the ancient life after the ancient life met its demise, of strange things that turned familiar and yet familiar things turned strange, of time becoming something a clock could measure, of those who forged, those who plagiarized, and arguments today why no medieval author should be accused of plagiarism for what he copied, and yet he read of a world where few died of old age and minor cuts and illnesses could kill. He read of the problem of underpopulation, the challenge of having enough births, and untold suffering when there were not enough people.

Yet to speak this way is deceptive, because all these wonders and more were made pedestrian. The more he studied, the fewer wonders he met, or at least the fewer wonders he could find, and the more he met a catalog of details. He read the chronicles of kings and those seeking what could be recovered through them, and however much he read King

Arthur was not mentioned once. Though he spent weeks searching in the library, the haunting beauty of Brocéliande had been rare to begin with and now he wot of it not none.

And the fruitless search for the history of Arthur led him to knock on the librarian's door.

"I'm in a bad mood. Leave me alone!"

"Please."

"You can come in if you must, but you would be better off leaving."

"I've looked all over and found neither hide nor hair of a book on King Arthur. Does this library have *nothing* on him?"

"King Arthur? No, not this part of the library; look in the appropriate sections on the electronic card catalog in the regular library."

"But I want to know the history of Arthur."

"The history of King Arthur?!? What can you *possibly* mean?"

"I had been reading about King Arthur outside the library."

"The general library has a number of the original sources, along with more literary criticism than one person can possibly read, and what little the history of literature knows about more and less obscure authors. And our literature department has several renowned scholars on Arthurian literature. But why are you trying to find King Arthur in a medieval *history* library? That's as silly as looking for the history of the animals in Aesop's fables."

"You don't believe in Arthur?"

"No, I don't. Though I could be wrong. A lot of scholars, *wrong* as they may be, believe there was an Arthur around the 6th century, a warrior owning a horse, though the consensus is that he was not a king. These—"

"So Arthur was a knight and not a king?!?"

"No, he wasn't a knight. He couldn't have been. If there ever was such a person."

"But you said he had a horse and—"

"You're making a basic historical mistake if you're imagining a warrior then, even one with a horse, as a '*knight*'. It would like a historian five or six centuries from now studying our technology, and knowing that Saint Thomas Aquinas was an author, imagining him doing Google searches and composing, in *Latin* of course, on his computer's word processor.

"Warriors owned horses, but stirrups hadn't reached Arthur's supposed land, and without a stirrup it is almost impossible to fight while mounted. A horse was a taxi to get a warrior to battle to fight on foot like everybody else, and nothing more. A warrior with a horse was a warrior with a better taxi to get to the scene of battle. A knight, on the most material level, is an almost invincible mounted shock troop compared to the defenseless-as-children so-called '*infantry*.' And then you have the ideal, almost the mythos, of chivalry that developed about these mighty brutal warriors.

"The Arthurian legends were never even close to history to begin with, even if they hadn't grown barnacles on top of barnacles, like... a bestseller with too many spinoffs. All the versions have their own anachronisms, or rather the earlier versions are nothing like anachronisms, projecting a legendary past for the kind of knight that was then becoming fashionable. You have a late medieval Sir Thomas Mallory fitting knights with plate armor that would have been as anachronous for an Arthur of the 5th or 6th century to wear as it would have been for a knight of Mallory's day to be equipped with today's Kevlar version of a bulletproof vest.

"I don't think it's a particularly big deal for there to be anachronisms; the idea that anachronism is a problem is a complete anachronism in evaluating medieval literature; saying that Chrétien de Troyes built an anachronous social ideal is as silly as complaining that the

It is as silly as complaining that the accounts of animals in a medieval bestiary are not doing the same job in the same way as a scientific biology textbook. Of course they aren't, but you're being equally silly to read a medieval bestiary as something that should be empirical scientific biology.

"Of course, getting back to anachronism, Mallory has guns which—"

"Guns?!? Machine guns? Handguns? Rifles?" George said.

"Nothing fancy, just early cannon, not a modern assault rifle. But there are none the less guns in the pivotal late medieval version of the story, which had Arthur's son and nephew, Mordred, besieging—"

"Which one was Mordred, and what was the other one's name?" George said.

"Which one? What do you mean..." The librarian said, pausing. "Aah, you get it. For that matter, the stories tend to include endless nobles whose family tree is, like a good nobility family tree, more of a family braid, and—"

It was around then that the conversation became something that George remembered with the confused memory of a dream. He knew that the librarian had explained something, but the closest he could come to remembering it was a discussion of how networked computers as the next generation of computing contributed to a unique medieval synthesis, or what actually seemed to make more sense of the shape of that "memory," the sound of an elephant repeatedly ramming stone walls.

What he remembered next was walking—walking through the library, walking around campus, walking through the forest, and then...

Had he been asked, he might have been collected enough to say that this was the first time in a long while he was not on a quest.

What was he doing now?

Was he doing anything?

Where was George?

He was lost, although that didn't register on his mind. Or perhaps he wasn't lost, if "lost" means not only that you don't know where you are, but that you wish you knew.

George was in the city somewhere, if that was where he was. A great forest of steel, glass, and brick. Some was adorned by graffiti, other bits by ugly paint. This was definitely not the castle to him, but the wild wood, much more the wild wood than what was merely a place with many trees and few buildings. What made the wood a wood and not like a castle, anyway?

George looked around. In front of him was a boarded-up restaurant. The sign said, "Closed for minor renovations. REOPENING SOON." Its paint looked chipped and timeworn, and from what he could see looking in the dirty windows, it was dusty inside. What, exactly, did the menu say? George could see the menu, and some pictures of what was probably supposed to be food, but even though he was on the edge of hunger, the hazy blurs did nothing to make his mouth water.

George walked a good distance further, and saw the bright colors of a store, and heard music playing. He wandered in.

Inside, the store was bustling with activity. Just inside, there was a demonstration of electronic puppies: an employee was showing the puppy off. On a whim, George walked over.

The young woman was saying words commands which the puppy sometimes did not respond to. She handed it to children to pet, who responded with exuberant warmth. But the more George watched the scene, the more the whole scene seemed off-kilter.

The puppies were cute, but there seemed to be something much less cute when they moved. What was it? The puppy's animation seemed neither like a cute stuffed animal nor like a toy robot. It seemed like a robot in a puppy costume, but the effect was... almost vampiric.

Then George looked at the employee again. She was quite attractive.

but her smile and the exaggerated energy for her role... reminded George of makeup almost covering dark circles under someone's eyes.

He ducked into an aisle. Below were not only unflavored dental floss and mint floss, but many different kinds of floss in all different colors, thicknesses, and several different flavors. But the choices in the actual floss were dwarfed by the choices in the cases: purple-and-pink containers of floss for preteen girls, larger rough-looking containers made of dark stonelike plastic for a man's man, and sundry groups—including trainers for babies who were still teething. George saw a sign above a display that said, "We bring you the freedom *TO CHOOSE!*"

He tried not to think about sledgehammers. He tried.

George was looking for a reason to stay in the store. There was eye-catching color everywhere, and he saw a section of posters, and started flipping through art posters, looking for something to buy, until he saw the sign above the posters. It said, "Priceless masterpieces from the greatest museums of the world, conveniently made available to you in American standard poster size and format, for only \$4.99 each."

Somehow the store's showmanlike displays seemed a bit hollow. George left.

George wandered out, something not quite clicking in his mind. He knocked on the building next door, and a voice said, "Just a minute; come in." He opened the door and saw a sight in shadows. A man was heading out a door. "As soon as I've finished taking out the trash and washed my hands, I can help you."

A short while later, the man emerged. "Hi. I'm Fr. Elijah." He extended his hand, his head and hands standing out against the darkness and his dark robe, and shook George's hand. George said, "I'm George."

"What can I do for you?"

George stopped, and thought. He said, "I was just looking around while I was waiting for my thoughts to clear."

Fr. Elijah said, "Are you a student?"

George said, "Yes."

Fr. Elijah said nothing, but it did not seem he needed to say anything just then. George was growing calm.

"May I offer you something to drink? I was just going to make tea, and I don't have a full range of soft drinks, but there should be something worth drinking. There's a pitcher of ice-cold water if you don't care for an old man's coffee or tea."

George said "Yes."

"Wonderful. Come with me." The two began walking, and they sat down.

George looked at him.

Fr. Elijah said, "Please sit down," motioning to an armchair. "Did you want coffee, water, or tea? I have cookies. Oh, and there's milk too."

George smiled. "Could I have a chalice of milk?"

Fr. Elijah turned to get the cookies, a cup and some milk.

George said, "I meant to say a cup of milk. Sorry, I was trying to be a little more serious."

Fr. Elijah said, "You can explain, or not explain. It's your choice. But I think you *were* being serious. Just not the way you expected. But we can change the subject. Do you have a favorite book? Or has anything interesting happened to you lately? I can at least listen to you."

George said, "I was just at the store nearby."

Fr. Elijah asked, "What do you think of it?"

George said, "Are you sure you won't be offended?"

Fr. Elijah said, "One of the things I have found in my work is that people can be very considerate about not being offensive, but sometimes I have something valuable to learn with things people think might offend me."

"Ever wonder about the direction our society has headed? Or see something that left you wishing you could still wonder about that?"

"A lot of people do."

"I was already having a bad day when I wandered into a store, and just when I thought things couldn't get any more crass, they got more crass. I've just been invited to buy an identity with the help of a market-segment dental floss container."

"You're a man after my own heart. I've heard that the store manager has some pretty impressive connections. I've heard that if none of the dental floss containers in the store suit the identity you want to have, and you ask the manager, he can get your choice of floss in a custom container made by a sculptor to meet your whims!"

"But isn't there more to life than that?"

"I certainly hope so! Oh, and did I mention that I've found that store an excellent place for important shopping for April Fools' Day? I'm hoping to get my godson horribly artificial sugary-sweet tasting lacy pink floss in a container covered by red and white hearts and words like 'Oochie-poo.' He'll hit the roof! On second thought, he'll be expecting such a gift... I should probably give it to him on what you'd consider August 12."

"Why? What's special about August 12?"

"That's a bit of a labyrinth to sort out. Some Orthodox keep the old Julian calendar, while some keep the 'new' civil calendar, which means that those who preserve the old calendar, even if we manage not to go off in right field, are thirteen days 'late' for saints' days, celebrating July 30, the Feast of Saint Valentine, on what you'd consider August 12. What you call Valentine's Day is the Western celebration of the saint we celebrate

on another day, and it's a bit of a Western borrowing to use it for pseudo-romantic purposes to pick on my godson, as that saint's feast did not pick up all the Western romantic connotations; Saint Valentine's story is a typical story of a bishop who strengthened people against paganism and was martyred eventually. Every day is a feast of some sort, and every feast—that is, every day—has several saints to celebrate... but I'm going on and on. Have I confused you yet?"

"Um, 'right field'? What does that mean?"

"Oops, sorry, personal expression. In the West people go out in left field and go loony liberal. In Orthodoxy, people go out in right field and go loony conservative. Some of the stuff I've been told would make me at least laugh if I didn't want to cry so badly. Sorry, I'm rambling, and I was trying to hear you out when it looked like you've had a rough day, right up to a store telling you there was nothing more to hope for in life than things like dental floss with a container designed for your market segment. Let me let you change the subject."

"Um, you're probably wondering why I said, 'chalice of milk.'"

"I would be interested in hearing that, but only if you want to tell. I have a guess, but I really don't want you to feel obligated to say something you'd rather not."

"What is your guess?"

"That you said 'chalice of milk' for an interesting reason that probably has an interesting connection to what, in life, you hope goes beyond the trivialities you were pushed into at that store. A chalice, whatever that means to you, is something deeper and richer."

George opened his mouth, then closed it for a moment, and said, "Does a chalice mean anything to you?"

"Oh, yes. A chalice means quite a lot to me."

"What does it mean to you?"

"George, have you ever seen a chalice?"

"No, but it's pretty important in something I've read."

"Would you like to see a chalice?"

"The chalice I've read about was made of purest gold. I'd imagine that if you have a fancy wine glass, maybe lead crystal, it would look poorer than what I'd imagine, and there are some things that are big enough that I'd rather not imagine."

"Well, there are some things that are bigger than can be seen, and that includes a chalice. But the chalice I have—I can't show it to you now—has the glint of gold, which has more layers than I can explain or know."

"Is there a time you can show it to me?"

"Yes, come during the Divine Liturgy, and you can see the chalice from which I serve the Eucharist. I can't explain—I know this offends some people, and I will understand if you are offended—that it would not be good for me to give you the Eucharist if you are not Orthodox. But you can see the chalice as it holds a treasure infinitely more valuable than its goldwork."

"What is that?"

"The Eucharist."

"Isn't that just a symbol?"

"Hmm, there are six hundred ways to respond to that. I can get into some of the intricacies later. If you want. Or we need never talk about it. But..."

"Saying the Eucharist is 'just a symbol' is as silly as saying that the Eucharist is 'just the body and blood of Christ'. What else do you want it to be—a designer container of dental floss?"

George's laugh was interrupted by a knock at a door. Fr. Elisha

George's laugh was interrupted by a knock at a door. Fr. Elijah looked at his watch, and his face fell. He said, "Just when the conversation was getting interesting! I'm sorry; I have an appointment."

George said, "Well, I won't take any more of your time; I'll come on Sunday. What time?"

"The Divine Liturgy starts at 9:00 Sunday morning; I'm sorry, that isn't a very good time for college students. Arriving five minutes late isn't a big deal. Most of the professors of campus can give you directions to my parish, the Church of the Holy Trinity. And bother that I have to end our talk!"

"That's OK. Do you have some literature that you want to give me? Where are your pamphlets?"

"Hmm, that would take some time to explain, and I can explain later if you want. But I don't have any pamphlets. If you want a book I can go to the library and you can borrow one. But Orthodox people don't usually feel obligated to stuff your pockets with as much paper as we can and leave you walking away feeling guilty that you dread the prospect of reading it. Come back; I enjoyed talking with you, and if you want I can get something from the library. But only if you want. Please excuse me." Fr. Elijah stood up and bowed slightly, but reverently, to George as they shook hands.

"Coming!" Fr. Elijah said. "I'm sorry; I was just trying to wrap up a conversation. Please come in. It's been a long time since I've seen you, and I've been looking forward to it."

George stepped out, and walked out. He stopped by a window to look into the Church building again.

He could tell nothing that looked to him like a chalice, but everywhere was the glint of gold.

George wandered back with a spring in his step.

He returned home and opened *Brocéliande*, and read:

Blaise turned at a slow step. "Why callest thou thyself empty? Hast thou none, my son?"

Merlin answered him. "Forgive me, my master, my lord."

The wind was deadly still.

Blaise turned even more fully. "What is it, my pupil?"

Merlin reached out his hand. A mighty wind blew, such as openeth doors that be closed and closeth doors that be open.

An apple tree shook of a violence and apples met their place on the humble earth, all apples did so which fell, save one which Merlin his hand did close upon it.

The wind blew and blew, stronger and stronger it blew, and Blaise looked upon Merlin, and spake: "Flyest thou now, my hawk?"

Merlin his chaste teeth closed in on the apple, and the great and mighty wind closed a door against the stone and hushed to become a soft murmuring breeze, as a still small voice.

Merlin looked upon his master. "Though the Grail remain a secret and a secret remain the Grail, men shall know it even under its cloak of samite most red. When a man shall grasp the secret of the Grail then shall he grasp the mystery of the Trinity."

Blaise looked upon his servant. "And who shall be in that grasp?"

Merlin spake softly. "My lord, I wit me not."

Blaise said, "My lord, it is well with thee."

Merlin abode in a quiet still spirit.

The hours and days passed quickly, until it was Sunday and George left a little early and arrived at the Church of the Holy Trinity early, looked at his watch and saw 8:52 AM

LOOKED AT HIS WATCH AND SAW 6:55 PM.

He stepped inside and found things suddenly cool. There was a dazzling darkness, with pure candlelight and lamplight glittering off of gold, with fragrances of smoke and beeswax and incense. There was a soft chanting, and the funny thing was that it was hard to say whether the Church seemed full or empty. He saw few people, even for the small space, but he had rather a sense that the place was full of worshipers, mostly unseen. He could feel glory, almost as a weight.

There seemed to be a continuous faint commotion as people entered, went to the front, doing something he could not tell, and walked around. He stood as most people were standing, although some were sitting and people seemed to bow or move their hands. It is not exactly that George did not feel conspicuous as to how he was standing out, as that that was not quite the greatest way he felt conspicuous.

How did he feel conspicuous? George found no answer he liked. The whole situation seemed foreign to him, and for the first time it did not seem so much that he was examining something but that something, or someone, was examining him and judging him.

Something happened. Or rather, this time the something that happened meant that people were sitting down, in pews around the edges or on the floor, and the chant had become ordinary speech. Fr. Elijah said,

In the Name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Last week after Liturgy, little John came up to me and said, "Fr. Elijah, I have a question." "What, I asked." "I saw *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* Friday and it was really, really cool! Could you tell me all about the Ark?" So I paused in thought, and exercised a spiritual father's prerogative. I said, "You know what? That's a good question. Let me think a bit and I'll answer that question in my homily." And when his father said, "But weren't you going to—" I said, "Don't worry about *that*. I'll blame the homily on him, and if people find it duller than a worn-out butter knife, they

can call you at work and complain." And *finally* I got him to crack a faint smile.

So this is the homily I'm blaming on him. First of all, the Ark of the Covenant is a spiritual treasure, and is spiritually understood. It is not lost, but it is found in a much deeper way than some expect. For it is both a *what* and, more deeply, a *who*. You can look up in fact where it is, and the amazing thing is that it is still guarded as a relic rather than treated simply as something that merely belongs in a museum, and the hidden Ark is in fact greater than if it were displayed in a showcase. It is one of many treasures the Church guards, and it is at the Church of our Lady Mary of Zion in the Ethiopian city of Axum. I've been there, even if I could not see the Ark. But the Ark which holds the bread from Heaven and the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed is in the shadow of the Ark to whom we sing, "Rejoice, O Volume wherein the Word was inscribed" and whose womb is a garden of spiritual treasures, "more spacious than the Heavens" as we say, by whom we are given the greater and in fact greatest Bread from Heaven. When we read of the Ark coming to King David and of the Theotokos or Mother of God coming to Lady Elizabeth, there are some surprising parallels which seem stunning until we recognize that that is just how Luke might be telling us that the Theotokos is someone to whom the Ark hints. There is a profound connection to the Arthurian legends, in which the Sir Galahad is granted to see into the Holy Grail and beholds a wonder beyond the power of words to tell. And it is in fact a misunderstanding on a number of levels to think that that rich Grail is confined to—

If George were sitting on a chair, he might have fallen off it. He was, fortunately, sitting on the floor. When he caught himself enough to follow the words, he listened closely:

...these other images. It was from the virgin earth that the first Adam, by whom we all live natural life, was taken. It was from the parched earth of the Virgin Theotokos that the last Adam, by whom we are called to the divine life, was given. And still this is not to tell how the first Adam, wanting to become God, lost his divinity, until

God became the Last Adam, raising up Adam that all of us who bear Adam's likeness might become divine, bearing the likeness of God. Death entered when we took and ate the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and now everlasting begins when we obey the summons to take and eat the Fruit from the Tree of Life.

Is it possible to call Mary Magdalene the Holy Grail? Yes and amen. We can call Mary Magdalene the Holy Grail in a very deep sense. She spoke before the Emperor, and that incident is why after all these years Christians still color Easter eggs, red eggs for the Orthodox Church as they were for Mary Magdalene, when she presented a red egg to the Emperor, perhaps miraculously. There are only a few dozen people the Church has ever honored more. She bears the rank of "Equal to the Apostles," and an angel told her the mysterious news of the Resurrection, and it was she who told the Apostles who in turn would be sent ("Apostle" means "Sent One") to the uttermost ends of the earth.

The Holy Grail is that vessel which first held the blood of Christ, and it is the shadow of that symbol in which the body and blood of Christ become real so that they can transform us. The Eucharist is misunderstood through the question of just what happens when the priest consecrates the gift, because the entire point of the transformation of the gifts is the transformation of the faithful so that we can be the Body of Christ and have the divine blood, the royal bloodline, the divine life coursing through our veins. God the Father the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven and earth is named. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each the King for whom every kingdom is named, so that the Kingdom of Heaven is more, not less, of a Kingdom than the kingdoms we can study on earth.

In the third prayer before communion, we are invited to pray, "O Thou Who by the coming of the Comforter, the Spirit, didst make thy sacred disciples precious vessels, declare me also to be a receptacle of his coming." Mary Magdalene bears powerful witness to what a disciple can be if she becomes a humble earthen vessel in which there is another coming of Christ. She became the Holy Grail, as does every one of us transformed by the power of Christ's body

and blood. If you only ask questions about the transformation of bread and wine, the Holy Grail is merely a *what...* but if you recognize the larger transformation that has the smaller transformation as a microcosm, the Holy Grail can also be a *who*: you and I.

It would take much longer to even begin to speak of that nobility of which you will only find the trace and shadow if you study royalty and their bloodlines. I have spoken enough.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

George was at once attracted, entranced, repulsed, and terrified. It seemed like more than he had dared to dream was proclaimed as truth, but that this meant he was no longer dealing with his choice of fantasy, but perhaps with reality itself. The chanting resumed. There was a procession, and what was in it? Ornate candles, a golden spoon and something that looked like a miniature golden lance, something covered with a cloth but that from its base might have been an intricately worked golden goblet, a cross that seemed to be glory itself, and other things he could not name. It was not long before George heard, "The holy things are for those who are holy," and the reply—was it a correction?—immediately followed: "One is holy. One is Lord, Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen."

George wanted to squirm when he heard the former, and when he heard the latter, he headed for the door. The spiritual weight he had been feeling seemed more intense; or rather, it seemed something he couldn't bear even though he hoped it would continue. He felt, just for a moment that this was more than him having an experience, but he failed to put his finger on what more it might be.

Once outside, he tried to calmly walk home, but found himself running.

George found himself walking, but in completely unfamiliar surroundings. He spent a good deal of time wandering until he recognized a major road, and walked alongside it until he returned home

recognized a major road, and walked alongside it until he returned home, hungry and parched.

He opened *Brocéliande* for a moment, but did not feel much like reading it. George went to check his email, began looking through his spam folder—to see if anything important got through, he told himself—and found himself wandering around the seedier side of the net.

In the days that followed, people seemed to be getting in his way, his homework was more of a waste of time, and somehow *Brocéliande* no longer seemed interesting.

Friday, George missed dinner and went, hungry, to a crowded store where a white-haired man stood right between him and the food he wanted... not only blocking the aisle with his cart, but adding a third 12-pack of soda to the bottom of his cart... and seeming to take forever to perform such a simple task.

After waiting what seemed too long, George refrained from saying "Gramps," but found himself hissing through his teeth, "Do you need help getting that onto your cart?"

The white-haired man turned around in surprise, and then said, "Certainly, George, how are you?"

George stopped.

It was Fr. Elijah.

"Can, um, I help you get that in your cart?"

"Thank you, George, and I would appreciate if you would help me choose another one. Do you have a favorite soda?"

"This may sound silly, but Grape Crush. Why?"

"Help me find a 12-pack of it. I realized after you came that it was kind of silly for me to inviting people like you inside and not having any soda for them, and I've been procrastinating ever since. Aah, I think I see them over there. Could you put that under your cart?"

George began walking over to the Grape Crush.

Fr. Elijah asked, less perfunctorily, "How are you, George?" and reached out his hand. At least George thought Fr. Elijah was reaching out his hand, but it was as if Fr. Elijah was standing on the other side of an abyss of defilement, and holding out a live coal.

Fr. Elijah shook George's hand.

George tried to find his footing on shifting ground, and managed to ask, "Fr. Elijah, how are you going to get that soda out to your car?"

"Usually someone from the store helps me put things in my trunk or something; I've never found a grocery store to be a place where nothing is provided."

The chasm yawned; George felt as if he were clothed in filthy rags.

"Um, and at home?"

"The Lord always provides something. Sorry, that sounded super spiritual. Usually it's not too long before someone strong comes by and can carry things."

George tried to smile. "I'm fine. How are you?"

Fr. Elijah made no answer with words. He smiled a welcoming smile, and somehow the store began to remind him of Fr. Elijah's office.

George kept waiting for Fr. Elijah to say something more, to answer, but Fr. Elijah remained silent. There seemed to be a warmth about him, as well as something he feared would burn his defilement, but Fr. Elijah remained silent, and pushed his cart, which had a small armload of groceries and a heavy weight of soda cases, to the register.

"I can help you load things into your car, Fr. Elijah."

Fr. Elijah turned with warmth. Gratitude was almost visible in his features, but he remained strongly silent.

features, but he remained strangely silent.

George momentarily remembered to grab a sandwich, then returned to Fr. Elijah in line.

George began to wonder why Fr. Elijah was not speaking to him. Or rather, that was the wrong way to put it. George could not accuse Fr. Elijah of being inattentive, but why was he silent?

George began to think about what he had been doing, and trying not to, to think of something else, to think of something else to talk about. But images returned to his mind, and a desire to—he certainly couldn't mention *that*.

Where were they? Fr. Elijah had just pushed the cart to his car, and slowly fumbled with his keys to unlock his trunk. George thought with a shudder about what it would be like to an old man to load cases of soda, even 12-packs.

"I can help you unload the soda at your house."

Fr. Elijah turned and made the slightest bow.

Once inside the car, George made a few nervous remarks about the weather. Fr. Elijah simply turned with what must have been a fatherly smile, but said nothing.

George did not consider himself strong, but it was only a few minutes for him to get the handful of cases of soda tucked into a slightly messy closet.

Once back in the car, Fr. Elijah seemed to arrive almost immediately at the dorm.

George said, "Now I remember. I wouldn't ask for another ride back, but I should have asked to borrow a book from your library."

Fr. Elijah turned. "*Should* you?"

George said, "What do you mean, should I? Are you mad at me?"

Didn't you tell me that I could borrow any book in your library if you wanted?"

Fr. Elijah said, "For all I am concerned now, you may borrow the whole library, if you want to. Or keep it, if you want."

"Then why don't you want me borrowing a book now?"

"I have many good books you could read, but right now, you don't really want one of my books."

"What do you mean?"

"If you genuinely want to borrow a book, I will gladly talk with you and suggest what I think would be your deepest joy. But why are you asking me for a book now?"

"I thought it would be polite to..."

Fr. Elijah waited an interminable moment and said, "Something is eating you."

George said, "You have no right to—"

Fr. Elijah said, "I have no right to this discussion, and neither do you. Thinking in terms of rights is a way to miss the glory we were made for. But let us stop looking at rights and start looking at what is beneficial. You don't have to answer, but are you happy now?"

George waited, and waited, and waited for an escape route to open up. Then he said, and the saying seemed like he was passing through white-hot ice, "I've been looking at—"

Fr. Elijah said, "Stop, You've said enough."

George said, "But how did you know?"

Fr. Elijah sighed, and for a moment looked like he wanted to weep. "George, I would like to say something deep and mysterious about some

special insight I have into people's souls, but that is not it. I am a father, a confessor, and one of the biggest sins I hear in confession—'biggest' not because it is unforgivable; Jesus was always ready, more than ready, to forgive this kind of sin, but 'biggest' because it keeps coming up and causing misery, is the sort of sin you've been struggling with. I count myself very fortunate that I grew up in an age when you could have all the basic utilities without getting all sorts of vile invitations coming whether you want them or not, and I am glad that I do not feel obligated to purchase some nasty pills because I'm not a real man unless I have the same drives I had at the age of eighteen. What a miserably small and constricted caricature of manhood! I count myself a real man, much more because I have not suffered what tends to become such a *dreary* dissipation and deflation of any real manhood."

George said, "You're not mad?"

Fr. Elijah raised his hand, moved it up and down and side to side, and said, "I am blessing you, priceless son."

George said, "How can I be free of this?"

Fr. Elijah said, "Come with me. Get back in the car."

They drove for a few more minutes, neither one needing to say anything, until George noticed with alarm the shape of the hospital.

George said, "Where are we going?"

Fr. Elijah said, "To the emergency room."

George looked around in panic. "I don't have money for—"

"Relax. None of the treatment you will be receiving will generate bills."

"What on earth are you—"

"I'm not telling you. Just come with me."

They walked through a side door. George's heart pounding, and

They walked through a side door, George's heart pounding, and George noticed two people approaching immediately.

Fr. Elijah turned momentarily, saying, "*Buenos noches, Señoras,*" and motioned with his hand for them to follow him.

As they and George followed, Fr. Elijah said, "Because of the triage in an emergency room, and because mere seconds are a matter of life and death in treating really severe injuries, people with relatively 'minor' injuries that still need medical attention can wait for an interminable amount of time."

Fr. Elijah suddenly stopped. George saw a boy with skinned knees, whose mother was slowly working through paperwork. Fr. Elijah said, "Take away his pain."

George looked at him, halfway to being dumbfounded. "What?"

Fr. Elijah said, "You heard me." Then he turned and left, so that George saw only Fr. Elijah's back and heard from him only broken Spanish.

George felt grateful that at least he wasn't too easily grossed out. He could look at lacerated flesh and eat if he needed to. George sat next to the boy, smelled an overwhelming odor from his blood, and suddenly felt sick to his stomach.

George tried to refrain from swearing about what Fr. Elijah could possibly have meant. Badger the hospital into giving anaesthesia sooner? Kiss it and make it better? Use some psychic power he didn't have? Find a switch on the back of the kid's neck and reboot him?

For a while, nothing happened, until the boy stopped sobbing, and looked at him, a little bit puzzled.

George said, "Hi, I'm George."

The boy said, "Mr. George."

George tried to think of something to say. He said, "What do you get

when you cross an elephant with a kangaroo?"

"What?"

"Really big holes all over Australia."

The boy looked at him, but showed no hint of a smile.

"Do you not get it?" George asked.

The boy said, very quietly, "No."

"An elephant has a lot of weight, and a kangaroo bounces up and down. If you put 'weight' and 'bouncy' together, then you get something that, when it bounces, is so heavy it makes big holes in the ground."

The boy said nothing until George added, "That's what makes it funny."

The boy made himself laugh loudly, and just as soon winced in pain.

George tried to think of what to do. After a while, he asked, "What's your favorite color?"

When the boy said nothing, George looked at his face and was surprised at the pain he saw.

"What is your name?"

"My name is Tommy."

George thought about what to say. He began to tell a story. He told of things he had done as a boy, and funny things that had happened (the boy didn't laugh), and asked questions which met with incomprehension. And this went on and on and on.

George wondered why he was having so much fun.

Then George looked at Tommy.

When was the last time George had even *begun* to do something for someone else?

George realized three things. First, he had stopped talking. Second, a hand was holding tightly to his sleeve. Third, there was something he was trying very hard not to think about.

George looked, and Tommy asked, "Mister, are you a knight? I want to be a knight when I grow up."

George had never before felt such shame that he wished the earth would swallow him up.

"Mister?"

"No, I am not a knight."

"You seem like a knight."

"Why?"

"You just do. Do you know anything about knights?"

"I've been reading a book."

"What's it called?"

"*Brocéliande*."

"Tell me the story of Brookie-Land."

"I can't."

"Why?"

"Because I haven't read all of it."

"What have you read?"

George closed his eyes. All he could remember now was a flurry of

images, but when he tried to put them together nothing worked.

George was interrupted. "Do you have a suit of armor?"

Immediately, and without thought, George said, "What kind of armor? I mean, is it chain mail, like a steel, I mean iron, sweater, or is it the later plate armor that gets into the later depictions? Because if there were a King Arthur, he would—"

"Did King Arthur know powerful Merlin? Because Merlin could—"

"I've read a lot about Merlin—he could build a castle just with his magic. And it apparently matters whose son he is, but I couldn't—"

"I want you to show me—"

A voice cut in. "Tommy!"

"Yes?" the boy said.

"The doctor is ready to see you... Sir, I'm sorry to interrupt, but—"

"Why does the doctor want to see me?"

"Because she wants to stitch up your knees, Silly Sweetie. Let the nurses roll you away. I'm glad—"

Tommy looked in puzzlement at his knees, saw how badly lacerated they were, and began screaming in pain.

There was a minor commotion as the nurses took Tommy in to be stitched up, or so George would later guess; he could never remember the moment. He only remembered walking around the emergency room, dazed.

Truth be told, though, George felt wonderful. He faintly noticed hearing Fr. Elijah's voice, saying something in Spanish, and joined a group of people among whom he felt immediate welcome. Then the woman who was on the bed was taken in, and Fr. Elijah, and to his own surprise, George, bid farewell to the other members of the group.

George and Fr. Elijah were both silent for a long time in the car.

Fr. Elijah broke the silence.

"Would it be helpful to talk with me about anything?"

"I have to choose just one?"

"No, you can ask as many questions as you want."

"Besides what I started to tell you—"

"Yes?"

"When I was talking with that boy, I mean Tommy, the boy you introduced me to, I—I'm not sure I would have said exactly this, but I've been spending a lot of time reading *Brocéliande* and no time choosing to be with other people... would you keep that book for me, at least for a time?"

"I certainly could, but let's look at our option. You sound less than fully convinced."

"I don't want to give it up."

"Well, yes, I wouldn't want to give it up either. But is that it?"

"No... I'm really puzzled. Just when I thought I had managed to stop thinking about never-never land and start thinking about Tommy, the kid asked me about never—I mean, he said that he wanted to grow up to be a knight, and he asked me if I was a knight. Which I am *not*."

"That's very mature of you..."

"And?"

"What would you imagine yourself doing as the right thing?"

"Getting away from that silly desire and be with other people

instead."

"Hmm."

"Hmm what?"

"Have you ever read C.S. Lewis's 'The Weight of Glory'?"

"No."

"Ok, I want to stop by my office before I drop you off at home, because I'm going to go against my word and give you literature to read. Although I only want you to read a few pages' essay out of the book, unless you want to read more essays—is this OK?—"

"I suppose."

"Because C.S. Lewis talked about the idea of unselfishness as a virtue, and said that there's something pitiable about letting unselfishness be the center of goodness instead of the divine love. Or something like that. And the reason I remembered that is that somewhere connected with this is this terrible fear that people have that their desires are too strong, and maybe their desires are too much in need of being deepened and layered, except I think he only said, 'too weak.' Today I would add: in a much deeper way that you can remedy by dangerous pills in your spam.

"Maybe you don't need to get rid of that book at all... maybe you should lend it to me for a time, and let me enjoy it, but maybe not even that is necessary."

"Why?"

"My guess is that if you read enough in that book—or at least the ones I've read—you may notice a pattern. The knight goes to the company of the castle and then plunges into the woodland for adventure and quests, and you need a rhythm of both to make a good story. Or a good knight."

"I fail to see how I could become a knight, or how knightood applies

"I fail to see how I could become a knight, or how knighthood applies to me."

"Hmm..."

"Hmm what?"

"Maybe that's a can of worms we can open another time... For now, I will say that the reason the stories have knights doing that is not because the knights wore armor and rode horses, but because the people telling the stories were telling the stories of men. Who need both castle and wood. Keep reading *Brocéliande*, and push it further. Push it to the point that your college and your city are to you what the castle was to the knight. Or even so that you don't see the difference. And alongside your trek into the enchanted wood, meet people. I would suggest that you find a way to connect with people, and work with it over time. If I may offer a prescription—"

"Prescription?"

"A priest is meant to be a spiritual physician, or at least that is what Orthodox understand. And part of the priest's job is to prescribe something. If you're willing."

"I'll at least listen."

"First, I want you to spend *some* of your time with other people. Not all."

"Doing what?"

"That's something you need to decide, and even if I can offer feedback to you, I would not make that decision for you. You need to have a think about it."

"Second, something for you to at least consider... Come to me for confession. I cannot give the sacrament I give to Orthodox, but I can bless you. Which isn't the immediate reason I mention it. Even if I were not to bless you, and even if Christ were not listening to your confession, there would still be power in owning up to what you have done. It gives power

would still be power in owing up to what you have done. It gives power in the struggle.

"Third, do you access the Internet through a cable or through wireless?"

"An ethernet cable. I don't have a laptop, and I've heard that the wireless network on campus is worth its weight in drool."

"Do you have a USB key?"

"Yes."

"Then give me your Ethernet cable."

"What kind of Luddite—"

"I'm not being a Luddite. I'm offering a prescription for you... There are different prescriptions offered for the needs of different people."

"So for some people it is beneficial to visit—"

"For me it has been. When I was trying to figure out what was going on, I went to a couple's house, and with their permission started looking through the pictures in their spam folder until I'd had more than enough. And I wept for a long time; I suddenly understood something I didn't understand about what I was hearing in confession. I still pray for the people photographed and those looking at the photograph, and some of the women's faces still haunt me—"

"The *faces* haunt you?"

"Yes. Understand that at my age, *some* temptations are weaker... but I looked at those faces and saw that each one was somebody's daughter, or maybe somebody's son, and my understanding is that it's nothing pleasant to pose for those pictures. At least the faces I saw reminded me of an airline stewardess trying really hard to smile peacefully to someone who is being abrasive and offensive. But as I was saying, I count my hour of looking to be of the greatest spiritual benefit. But it would not benefit you, and it is my judgment that in *your* case a little of what programmers

call a 'net vacation'—though I invite you to use lab and library computers —could help you in—"

"Do you know what it's like to give up the convenience of computers in your room?"

"Do you know what it's like to ride a horse instead of a car for a short time? I do..."

"But riding a horse is at least... like... um... it's more like Arthur's world, isn't it?"

"If you want to look at it that way, you're welcome to..." Fr. Elijah stopped the car and stepped out, saying, "Please excuse me for a moment." The shuffling seemed to drag on, and Fr. Elijah stepped out with a book and got back in the car. "Oh, and I almost forgot. Please don't make this a matter of 'I won't do such-and-such or even think about it,' because trying not to think about a temptation is a losing game. I am inviting you to a trek from castle to wood, and wood to castle, with both feeding into a balance. Here is the book with 'The Weight of Glory' and other essays. Now..."

Calix College was in sight almost immediately, and Fr. Elijah waited outside George's dorm for what became a surprisingly long time... he wondered if he should go up and see if George had changed his mind, and

George walked out and handed him a cable in the dark. It was thick and stiff.

"I thought Ethernet cables weren't this thick and stiff."

"It's my power cable. I put stuff I need on my USB key."

"Good man."

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye, and George, one other thing..."

"Yes?"

"There is no better time to be in a Church than when you know how unworthy you are."

"Um..."

"What?"

"I appreciate how much you're stretching, but..."

"George, I want to ask you something."

"I've been serving the Divine Liturgy for thirty-eight years now. How long have I been worthy to do so?"

"Is this a trick question? All thirty-eight?"

"It is indeed a trick question, but the answer is not 'thirty-eight.' I have *never* been worthy to serve the Divine Liturgy, nor have I ever been worthy to receive communion, nor have I ever been worthy to pray at Church, or anywhere else. We can talk about this if you like, but am not just being polite when I say that there is no better time to enter the Church than when you know yourself unworthy. Maybe we can talk later about what trumps unworthiness. For now, I wish you good night, and I would be delighted to see you join and adorn our company on Sunday."

George climbed up in his room and sat in his armchair, and it felt like a throne. He was exhausted—and on the other side of shame. He began dutifully opening the C.S. Lewis book, glanced at the title, then tossed it aside. It was not what he really wanted. He picked up *Brocéliande*, wiped the dust off the cover with his hand, and opened to its middle, to its heart. George read:

rode until he saw a river, and in the river a boat, and in the boat a man.

The man was clad all in black, and exceeding simple he appeared. At his side was a spear, and was a basket full of oysters

illed.

"I ask your pardon that I cannot stand. For the same cause I can not hunt, for I am wounded through the thighs. I do what I might, and fish to share with others."

The knight rode on, Sir Perceval he hyght, until he came upon a castle. And in that castle he met a welcome rich, before a King all in sable clad round, and a sash of purple royal girt about his head, and full majestic he looked.

Then in walked a youth, bearing a sword full straight, for it were not falchion neither scimitar, but a naked sword with a blade of gold, bright as light, straight as light, light as light. The very base of that sword were gem work, of ivory made and with sapphires encrusted. And the boy was girt tightly with a baldric and put the sword in its place. In utmost decorum the sword hung at his side.

The boy placed what he shouldered at the feet of the King.

Spake the King: "I ask your forgiveness that I do not rise. Partake of my feast."

Simpler fare was never adorned by such wealth of wisdom. The body was nourished, and ever more spirit in the fare that was read.

Anon processed one man holding a candelabra of purest gold with seven candles, anon another, anon a maiden mother holding a Grail, it was such a holy thing! Anon a lance that ever bore three drops of blood. And ever Perceval wondered, and never Perceval spake, though it passed many a time. With a war inside him Sir Perceval kept him his peace. Anon the King spake, "See thou mine only food," and anon came the Grail holding not a stone neither a snake but a single wheaten host, afloat as a pearl in a sea of wine, red as blood. And never the King ate he none else.

Here a page was ripped out from *Brocéliande*, with yellowed marks where once tape failed to mend what was torn.

The damsel arose from her weeping. "Perceval! Perceval! Why askedst thou not thine enquiry?"

George soon fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

Saturday he rested him all the day long: barely he stirred.

In his dream, George heard a song.

All was in darkness.

The song it came out of a mist, like as a mist, melodic, mysterious, piercing, like as a prayer, mighty, haunting, subtle, token of home and a trace of a deep place. How long this continued he wot not.

The one high, lilting voice, tinged with starlight, became two, three, many, woven in and out as a braid of three strands, or five, or ten, as a Celtic knot ever turning in and out. And as it wove in and out, it was as the waters of a lake, of an ocean, of a sea, and George swam in them. George was ever thirsty, and ever he swam. He swam in an ever-rippling reflection of the Heavens at midnight, a sea of unending midnight blue and living sapphire.

George's feet sunk and he walked on the noiseless loam. Up about him sprung blades of grass and he walked into a forest growing of emerald and jade atop pillars of sculpted earth. Anon he walked slowly and slowly he saw a farm with the green grass of wheat growing of the fertile fecund field.

Upon a ruins he came, a soft, silent place where a castle still lingered and the verdant moss grew. Then through a city he walked, a city alive and vibrant in its stones, though its streets were a for a moment at a rest from its men. And in that city, he walked into the Church his heart, and found a tome opened upon a wooden stand entwined by vines.

George looked for a moment at the volume, and for a moment he saw letters of sable inscribed in a field argent. Then the words shifted, grew older, deepened into the depth of a root and the play of quicksilver. The script changed, the words spoke from afar, and became one word

whose letters were hidden as behind a veil, one word inscribed at once in ciphers of luminous gold and congealed light that filled the book and shone all around it until—

George was awake, bright awake, wide awake, looking at a window the color of sunrise.

He arose to greet the coming of the dawn.

George went to Church and arrived almost an hour earlier than the 9:00 Fr. Elijah had given, and found to his surprise that although there were few other people, things had already begun. The fragrance of frankincense flowed and gold glittered, and he caught a word here and a phrase there—"Volume wherein the Word was inscribed," "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal," "Blessed is the Kingdom," "Lord have mercy." Then he heard a phrase he had heard innumerable times in other contexts. A shibboleth later taken from the New Testament, "The just shall live by faith," completely broke the illusion. George had had plenty of time to get sick of words he knew too well, or so it appeared to George. Yes, he was glad people understood them, but wasn't there more to understand than that? Even if they were both straightforward and important...

The homily began.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

One of the surprises in the Divine Comedy—to a few people at least—is that the Pope is in Hell. Or at least it's a surprise to people who know Dante was a devoted Catholic but don't recognize how good Patriarch John Paul and Patriarch Benedict have been; there have been some moments Catholics aren't proud of, and while Luther doesn't speak for Catholics today, he did put his finger on a lot of things that bothered people then. Now I remember an exasperated Catholic friend asking, "Don't some Protestants know anything *else* about the Catholic Church *besides* the problems we had in the sixteenth century?" And when Luther made a centerpiece out

of what the Bible said about those who are righteous or just, "The just shall live by faith," which was in the Bible's readings today, he changed it, chiefly by using it as a battle axe to attack his opponents and even things he didn't like in Scripture.

It's a little hard to see how Luther changed Paul, since in Paul the words are also a battle axe against legalistic opponents. Or at least it's hard to see directly. Paul, too, is quoting, and I'd like to say exactly *what* Paul is quoting.

In one of the minor prophets, Habakkuk, the prophet calls out to the Lord and decries the wickedness of those who should be worshiping the Lord. The Lord's response is to say that he's sending in the Babylonians to conquer, and if you want to see some really gruesome archaeological findings, look up what it meant for the Babylonians or Chaldeans to conquer a people. I'm not saying what they did to the people they conquered because I don't want to leave you trying to get disturbing images out of your minds, but this was a terrible doomsday prophecy.

The prophet answered the Lord in anguish and asked how a God whose eyes were too pure to look on evil could possibly punish his wicked people by the much more wicked Babylonians. And the Lord's response is very mysterious: "The just shall live by faith."

Let me ask you a question: How is this an answer to what the prophet asked the Lord? Answer: It isn't. It's a refusal to answer. The same thing could have been said by saying, "I AM the Lord, and my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways. I AM WHO I AM and *I will do what I will do*, and I am sovereign in this. I choose not to tell you how, in my righteousness, I choose to let my wicked children be punished by the gruesomely wicked Babylonians. Only know this: even in these conditions, the just shall live by faith."

The words "The just shall live by faith" are an enigma, a shroud, and a protecting veil. To use them as Paul did is a legitimate use of authority, an authority that can only be understood from the inside, but these words remain a protecting veil even as they take on a more

active role in the New Testament. The New Testament assumes the Old Testament even as the New Testament unlocks the Old Testament.

Paul does not say, "The just shall live by sight," even as he invokes the words, "The just shall live by faith."

Here's something to ponder: The righteous shall walk by faith even in their understanding of the words, "The just shall live by faith."

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

George was awash and realized with a start that he was not knocked off his feet, gasping for air. He felt a light, joyful fluidity and wondered what was coming next. This time he realized he was sure he saw a chalice; the liturgy seemed to go a little more smoothly and quickly.

As soon as he was free, Fr. Elijah came up to him. "Good to see you, George. How are you?"

George said, "Delighted... but I'm sorry, I haven't read 'The Weight of Glory' for you yet."

Fr. Elijah said, "Good man... no, I'm not being sarcastic. Put first things first, and read it when you have leisure. How did you find the homily?"

George said, "It was excellent... by the way, it was really for me that you preached last week's homily, right? You seemed to be going a good bit out of your way."

"It was really for you, as it was also really for others for reasons you do not know."

"But weren't you getting off track?"

"George, I have a great deal of responsibility, concerns, and duties as a priest. But I have a great deal of freedom too. I can, if you want, draw

a priest. But I have a great deal of freedom, too. I can, if you want, draw on King Arthur and his court every service I preach at from now until Christmas."

"How much do you mean, I mean literally? One or two? Four or five?"

"Huh? 'Literally'? Um, there is a temptation in the West to devote entirely too much time to what is literal. I *was* exaggerating when I said every service from now until Christmas... *but*, if you want, I'd be perfectly happy to do that literally, for every service you're here." Fr. Elijah extended his hand. "Deal?"

George paused in thought a moment. "Um, you've said that I could take all the books in your library and keep them if I want. I know you were exaggerating, but..."

"Yes, I was. But I am not exaggerating when I say that you can take them if you want."

"Don't you love books?"

"Immensely, but not as much as I want to love people! They're just possessions, and there are much greater treasures in my life than a good book, even though books can be quite good. Can we agree that I'll preach on something in Arthurian literature every liturgy I preach at until Christmas?"

"What if I'm not here?"

"We can make it part of the deal that I'll only preach on that topic if you're here."

George hesitated, and then shook his hand. "Deal."

Fr. Elijah smiled. "Some people have said my best homilies and best surprises have come from this kind of rash vow."

George started to walk away, and then stopped.

Fr. Elijah said, "Is something on your mind?"

George said, "What if other people don't like you preaching on something so odd? What will you do if people complain?"

Fr. Elijah said, "Then I can give them your cell phone number and have them call you at all hours of the day and night to grouse at you for foisting such a terrible proposal on me. Now get some coffee. Go! Shoo!"

After getting home, George did his laundry, looked to see if anyone was hanging out in the lounge (everybody was gone), and played games in the computer lab. It was a nice break.

The next day in math class, the teacher drew a grid on the board, drew dots where the lines crossed, erased everything but the dots, and set the chalk down. "Today I'd like to show a game. I'm handing out graph paper; draw dots where the lines cross. We're going to have two people taking turns drawing lines between dots that are next to each other. If you draw a line that completes a little square, you get a point. I'd like a couple of students to come up and play on the board." After a game, there was a momentary shuffle, and George found himself playing against the kid next to him. This continued for longer than he expected, and George began to piece together patterns of what would let his opponent score points, then what laid the groundwork for scoring points...

The teacher said, "Have any of you noticed things you want to avoid in this game? Why do these things lead to you giving points to your opponent when you don't want to, or scoring points yourself? This kind of observation is at the heart of a branch of mathematics called 'combinatorics.' And almost any kind of game a computer can play—I'm not talking about tennis—is something that computers can only play through combinatorics. I'd like to show you some more 'mathematical' examples of problems with things we call 'graphs' where a lot of those same kinds of things are—"

She continued giving problems and showing the kinds of thought in those problems.

George felt a spark of recognition—the same thing that attracted him

to puzzles. Or was it something deeper? Many "twenty questions" puzzles only depended on identifying an unusual usage of common words, "53 bicycles" referring to "Bicycle" brand playing cards rather than any kind of vehicle, and so on and so forth. Some of what the teacher was showing seemed deeper...

...and for the first time in his life, the ring of a buzzer left George realizing he was spellbound in a math class. It set his mind thinking.

In English class, he winced, as just as before-class chatter seemed about to end, one of the other students said, "A man gets up in the morning, looks out his window, and sees the sun rising in the West. Why?"

George was not in particular looking forward to a discussion of literature he wasn't interested in, but he wanted even less to hear people blundering about another "twenty questions" problem, and cut in, "Because the earth's magnetic poles, we suppose, were fluctuating, and so the direction the sun was rising from was momentarily the magnetic West."

The teacher laughed. "That isn't the answer, is it?"

The student who had posed the question said, "Um... it is..."

The professor said, "So we are to imagine someone going to a gas station, saying, 'Which way is East?', and the attendant responding with, 'Just a sec, lemme check... I know usually this way is East, but with the Earth's magnetic fluctuations, who knows?' You know that in a lot of literature, East and West are less like numbers than like colors?"

"Um... How could a direction be like a number *or* a color?"

"There's colorful difference and colorless difference. If I tell you there are 57 pens in my desk, I haven't said anything very colorful that tells much about pens, or about my desk. But if I tell you a rose is a delicate pink, I've told you something about what it's like, what it's *like*, to experience a rose."

"So what color is East, then? Camouflage green?"

"East isn't a color, but it's *like* a color where camouflage green and fiery red are different. In both Greek and Russian, people use the same word for 'East' and 'sunrise'... and if you're really into etymology, English does this too, only we don't realize it any more. 'East' in English originally *means* 'sunrise,' as 'Easter' comes from the Anglo-Saxon name of a goddess of light and spring. Such terrible things the Orthodox miss out on by their quaint use of 'Pascha.' For us, the 'big' direction, the one which has the longest arrow or the biggest letter, the one all other directions are arranged around, is North; in Hebrew, it's East. There is a reason many churches are arranged East-West and we often worship towards the East, and that has meant something for the U.S... Would you agree that we are part of the West?"

"So our land is the worst land?" George said.

"Well, if you read enough Orthodox nut jobs, yes... particularly if this land is their home. But U.S. land, or part of it at least, is called utter East... the one U.S. state where Orthodoxy isn't edgy, exotic, fruitcake or 'other,' is Alaska, where there has been a native Orthodox presence, strong today, for over two hundred years. You know how, in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C.S. Lewis has a wood nymph speak an oracle that has drawn Sir Reepicheep all his life?

"Where sky and water meet,
Where the waves grow sweet,
Doubt not, Reepicheep,
To find all you seek,
There is the utter East.

"There's something big you'll miss about the holy land of Alaska if you just think of it as fully a state, but just one more state, just like every other state. It's the only state, if 'state' is an adequate term, with a still-working mechanical clock on the outside of a public building that was made by an Orthodox saint. Among other things.

"And the idea of holy land that you would want you to travel to feeds

into things, even in Protestant literature like *Pilgrim's Progress*, which you will misunderstand if you treat the pilgrimage as just there as a metaphor for spiritual process. I have found it very interesting to look at what people classify as 'just part of the allegory,' even though we will read no simpler allegory among the readings for this class. Now in reading for today, have any of you had an experience like Pilgrim's wakeup call at the beginning of Bunyan?"

George's head was swimming.

Why were his classes so dull before this week? He remembered previous math lessons which, in various ways, failed to give him puzzle solving, and in annoyance, turned to previous English lessons, when—

—why hadn't he paid attention? Or, more accurately, when George had paid attention, why hadn't he let it be interesting?

Philosophy also turned out to be interesting; the professor began the unit on medieval philosophy by asking, "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?", eliciting various forms of derision, then asking people *what* they were deriding, began asking "How many of you can touch the head of the same pin at once?", produced a pin, and after students made various jostling efforts, asked whether a pin could accommodate a finite or infinite number of angels.

This was used to a class discussion about the nature of matter and spirit and whether angels dancing on the head of a pin would push each other away the way human bodies would... and at the end of class the professor began asking if people wanted to talk about how unfortunate it was that medieval philosophers *had* to use the poetic image of angels dancing on the head of a pin where others would have used the colorless language of analytic philosophy.

In chemistry, the professor did nothing in particular to make things interesting. George still enjoyed the lecture as it built to a discussion of isotope distributions as used to compute average molecular weights.

George was quite surprised when the weekend approached, spent the weekend playing card games and wondered at how quickly Sunday came

weekend playing card games, and wondered at how quickly Sunday came.

On Sunday, George entered the strange world of the Church building. It seemed more, not less, strange, but things began to make sense. "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." was something he noticed often, and he, if not understanding, was at least comfortable with the continual hubbub as people seemed to be moving about, sometimes to the front.

As the service passed, he found his eyes returning to, and then fixed on, an icon that showed three ?angels? sitting around a stone table. In the back was a mountain, a tree, and a building, a faroff building that George somehow seemed to be seeing from the inside...

The perspective in the picture was wrong. Wait, the perspective wouldn't be *that* wrong by accident... the picture looked very distorted, and George wanted to reach out and—

George looked. The perspective vanished, not at some faroff place on the other side of the picture, but behind him, and the picture seemed at once faroff and something seen from inside.

And what was it, almost at the heart of the icon, or somewhere beneath it, that the three peaceful, radiant, great ?angels? almost seemed clustered around? It looked like a chalice of gold.

George was looking, trying to see into the picture, wishing he could go closer, and seeing one person after another come closer in the dance of song and incense. George instinctively found himself backing up, and then realized people were sitting down and Fr. Elijah began:

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sir Thomas Mallory in *Le Morte d'Arthur* has any number of characters, and I want to describe one of them, Sir Griflet, who is completely forgettable if you don't know French: he appears briefly, never stays in the narrative for very long, never does anything really striking at all. His lone claim to fame, if you can call it that, is that

Mallory refers to him as "Sir Griflet *le fils de Dieu*." For those of you who don't know French, we've just been cued in, in passing, that by the way, Sir Griflet is the Son of God.

Now why would this be? There some pretty striking things you can do if you are a character in that work. Sir Griflet is not a singular character who has the kind of energy of Sir Galahad, or in a different but highly significant way, Merlin. For that matter, he does not have even a more routine memorability like Sir Balin who wielded two swords at the same time. He's just forgettable, so why is he called *le fils de Dieu*, I mean the Son of God?

In Chretien de Troyes, who is a pivotal author before Mallory, a character with a name that would become "Griflet" is equally pedestrian and is named "fis de Do", son of Do, which has a root spelling of D-O where the word for God in that form of French is D-E-U. So a starkly pedestrian character, by an equally pedestrian language error, seems to have his father's name mixed up with how you spell the word for God. How pedestrian, disappointing, and appropriate.

There is a somewhat more interesting case in the story of a monk who believed that Melchizedek was the Son of God, and this is not due to a language error. If you were listening when the readings were chanted from the Bible, you would have heard that Melchizedek was "Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life: but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually." This may be surprising to us today, but that's because most of us have lost certain ways of reading Scripture, and it was a holy monk who thought this. He made a theological error, not a mere language error, and when his bishop asked his assistance in praying over whether Melchizedek or Christ was the Son of God, he arrived at the correct answer.

Now let me ask you who is really the Son of God. Do you have an answer now?

I'm *positive* you're wrong. It's a forgettable person like Sir

Griflet or Melchizedek.

When the Son of God returns in glory, he will say, "Depart from me, you who are damned, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you showed me no hospitality; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick or in prison, and you did not visit me." And when the damned are confounded and ask when they could have possibly failed to do that, he will answer them, "I swear to you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it for me."

We, in our very nature, are symbols of the Trinity, and this does not mean a sort of miniature copy that stands on its own in detachment. The Orthodox understanding of symbol is very difficult to grasp in the West, even if you haven't heard people trying to be rigorous or, worse, clever by saying "The word is not the thing it represents." And talking about symbols doesn't just mean that you can show reverence to a saint through an icon. It means that everything you fail to do to your forgettable neighbor, to that person who does absolutely nothing that draws your attention, you fail to do to Christ.

And if you are going to say, "But my neighbor is not Christ," are you not straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel in what you are being careful about? Your neighbor as such is not Christ as such. True, but this is really beside the point. It betrays a fundamental confusion if any of the damned answer their Judge and say, "But I wasn't unkind to *you*. I was just unkind to other people." We are so formed by the image of Christ that there is no way to do something to another person without doing that to Christ, or as this parable specifically says, fail to do. And I'd like you to stop for a second. The last time you were at an unexpected funeral, did you regret more the unkind thing you said, or the kind word you failed say, the kind action you failed to take? Perhaps it may be the latter.

Christ hides in each of us, and in every person you meet. There is a mystery: the divine became human that the human might

become divine. The Son of God became a man that men might become the Sons of God. God and the Son of God became man that men might become gods and the Sons of God. Christ took on our nature so that by grace we might become what he is by nature, and that does not just mean something for what we should do in our own spiritual practices. It means that Christ hides in each person, and to each person we owe infinite respect, whether they're boring, annoying, mean, lovely, offensive, fascinating, confusing, predictable, pedestrian, or just plain forgettable like old Sir Griflet.

You owe infinite respect.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Did George want to go up to the icon? He went up, feeling terribly awkward, but hearing only chant and the same shuffle of people in motion. He went up, awkwardly kissed the three figures someplace low, started to walk away in inner turmoil, turned back to the image, bowed as he had seen people see, and kissed the chalice of wine.

It was not long before he saw Fr. Elijah come out with a chalice, and draw from it with a golden spoon. This time he noticed people kissing the base of the chalice. There was nothing awkward about them, and there seemed to be something majestic that he began to catch a glimmer of in each of those present.

George later realized that he had never experienced worship "stopping" and coffee hour "beginning." The same majestic people went from one activity into another, where there was neither chanting nor incense nor the surrounding icons of a cloud of witnesses, but seemed to be a continuation of worship rather than a second activity begun after worship. He was with the same people.

It didn't occur until much later to George to wonder why the picture had a chalice... and then he could not stop wondering. He picked up *Brocéliande* and read:

The knight and the hermit wept and kissed together, and the

hermit did ask, "Sir knight, wete thou what the Sign of the Grail be?"

The knight said, "Is that one of the Secrets of the Grail?"

"If it be one of the Secrets of the Grail, that is neither for thee to ask nor to know. The Secrets of the Grail are very different from what thou mightest imagine in thine heart, and no man will get them by looking for secrets. But knowest thou what the Sign of the Grail is?"

"I never heard of it, nor do I know it."

"Thou wote it better than thou knowest, though thou wouldst wete better still if thou knewest that thou wote."

"That is perplexing and hard to understand."

The hermit said, "Knowest thou the Sign of the Cross?"

"I am a Christian and I know it. It is no secret amongst Christians."

"Then know well that the sacred kiss, the kiss of the mass, even if it be given and received but once per year, is the Sign of the Grail."

"How is that? What makes it such as I have never heard?"

"I know that not in its fullness. Nor could I count reasons even knew I the fullness of truth. But makest thou the Sign of the Cross when thou art alone?"

"Often, good hermit; what Christian does not?"

"Canst thou make the Sign of the Grail upon another Christian when thou art alone?"

"What madness askest thou?"

"Callest thou it madness? Such it is. But methinks thou wete not all that may be told."

"Of a certainty speakest thou."

"When thou dwellest in the darkness that doth compass round about the Trinity round about that none mayeth compass, then wilt thou dwell in the light of the Sign of the Grail with thy fellow man and thy brother Christian, for the darkness of the Trinity is the light of the Grail."

George got up, closed the book, and slowly put it away. He wondered, but he had read enough.

George dreamed again of a chalice whose silhouette was Light and held Light inside. Then the Light took shape and became three figures. George almost awoke when he recognized the figures from the icon. George dreamed much more, but he could never remember the rest of his dream.

That week, Fr. Elijah's homily was in George's mind. He passed the check-in counter as he walked into the cafeteria, began to wonder where he might apply Fr. Elijah's words... and stopped.

The line was moving slowly; he had come in late after wandering somewhat. Sheepishly, he stopped, looked at the woman who had scanned his ID, and extended his hand. "Hi, I'm George."

The woman pushed back a strand of silver hair. "Hi. It's good to meet you, George. I'm Georgina."

George stood, trying to think of something to say.

Georgina said, "What are you majoring in?"

"I haven't decided. I like reading... um... it's really obscure, but some stuff about Arthur."

"King Arthur and the Round Table?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful son. Can you tell me about it sometime? I always love

wonderful, son. Can you tell me about it sometime? I always love hearing about things."

George said, "Ok. What do you... um..."

"I been working at this for a long time. It's nice seeing all you students, and I get some good chats. You remind me of my grandson a little. But you're probably pretty hungry now, and the lines are closing in a few minutes. Stop by another day!"

George ate his food, thoughtfully, and walked out of the cafeteria wishing he had said hi to more of the support staff.

That week, the halls seemed to be filled with more treasure than he had guessed. He did not work up the courage to introduce himself to too many people, but he had the sense that there was something interesting in even the people he hadn't met.

On Wednesday, George went to register for his classes next semester, and realized his passwords were... on his computer, the one without a power cord.

After a while, thinking what to do, he knocked on a floormates' door. "Um, Ivan?"

"Come in, George. What do you want?"

George hesitated and said, "Could I borrow a power cord? Just for a minute? I'll give it right back."

Ivan turned around and dragged a medium-sized box from under his bed. It was full of cables.

"Here, and don't worry about returning it. Take a cord. Take twenty, I don't care. I have them coming out of my ears."

George grabbed one cord, then remembered he did not have the cord for his monitor. He took another. "I'll have these back in a minute."

"George, you're being silly. Is there any reason you need *not* to have

a power cord?"

"Um..." George opened his mouth and closed it. Then he hesitated.
"No."

George left, registered online, shut his computer down, left the room, did some work at the library, and went to bed.

Thursday he was distracted.

Friday, it was raining heavily, and after getting soaked in icy rain running to and from his classes, George decided he would check his email from his room... and found himself wandering through the spam folder, and threw the cords out in the dumpster.

Sunday he walked into church with hesitation, and Fr. Elijah almost immediately came over. "Yes, George?"

George hesitated.

Then he told Fr. Elijah what was going on.

Fr. Elijah paused, and said, "George, do you know about the Desert Fathers?"

"No."

"A group of people a bit like the hermits in Arthurian legend. Some people think that Merlin was originally based on such monks... but aside from that speculation, they were much holier than either of us. And there was one time when someone asked them, 'What do you do?' And what do you think the Desert Father said?"

"Pray? Worship? Live a good life?"

"'We fall and get up, fall and get up, fall and get up.' That is the motion of Orthodox life, and if you see prostrations, you will literally see us fall and get up. I'm not sure if you think that if you repent of a sin once, the hard part's over and it's all behind you. In my sins, I have to keep repenting again and again. You have fallen, now get up. And get up again

repenting again and again. You have fallen, now get up. And get up again. And again. And again. And keep getting up.

"The Lord bless you, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

George walked away still feeling unworthy, and everywhere saw a grandeur that seemed to be for others more worthy than him. Everything around him seemed royal, and Fr. Elijah preached:

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

In our commemorations, we commemorate "Orthodox kings and queens, faithful princes and princesses," before we commemorate various grades of bishops. The bishop is in fact royalty; instead of calling him "Your Majesty," we call him "Your Grace," "Your Eminence," "Your Holiness," "Your All Holiness." If you do research, you will find that the bishop is more than a king: the bishop is the Emperor, and wears the full regalia of the Roman Emperor.

One question that has been asked is, "The king for the kingdom, or the kingdom for the king:" is the king made king for the benefit of the kingdom, or is the kingdom a privilege for the benefit of the king? The Orthodox choice of now requiring bishops to be monks is not because married persons are unfit, or rather necessarily more unfit, to serve. Most of the apostles in whose shadows the monastic bishops stand were married, and the monk bishops I have met consider themselves infinitely less than the married apostles. But a monk is given to be a whole burnt offering where nothing is kept back and everything is offered to God to be consumed by the holy sacrificial fire. (Or at least that's what's supposed to happen, but even if this is also what's supposed to happen in a marriage, it's more explicit in monasticism.) And it is this whole burnt offering, unworthy though he may be, who makes a bishop: Orthodoxy answers "the king for the kingdom:" the king is made king for the benefit of the kingdom, the bishop serves as a whole burnt offering for the benefit of the diocese.

Now let me ask: Which of us is royalty? And I want you to listen very carefully. All of us bear the royal bloodline of Lord Adam and Lady Eve. It's not just the bishops. I will not go into this in detail now, but the essence of priesthood is not what I have that "ordinary" Orthodox don't have. It's what I have that Orthodox faithful *do* have. And without you I can celebrate the liturgy. And the essence of royalty is not what a king or bishop has that a "commoner" or faithful does not have; it's what king and bishop share with the ordinary faithful. The Greek Fathers have no sense that "real" royal rule is humans ruling other humans; that's a bit of an aberration; the real royal rule is humans ruling over what God has given them and over themselves, and doing that rightly is a much bigger deal than being one of the handful of kings and bishops.

And each of us is called to be what a bishop is: a whole burnt offering in humble service to the kingdom—large or small is not really the point—over which the Lord has appointed us king. It may mean showing conscience by cleaning up your room—and if you have a first world abundance of property, it is a very small way of offering them back to the Lord to keep them in good order. It means carefully stewarding precious moments with other people, maybe saying, "I hope you have a wonderful day," and saying it like you mean it, to support staff. And it means humbly ruling your kingdom within, in which both Heaven and Hell may be found. It is when you serve as king, the king made for the kingdom, that your kingdom will be your crown and glory.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

After Church, a young woman stormed up to Fr. Elijah. She had, at as far arm's length from her body as she could hold it, a clear trash bag holding a pink heart-shaped piece of artisan paper that appeared to have writing on it. She stopped opposite Fr. Elijah and said, "*Do you know anything about this note?*"

Fr. Elijah smiled gently. "It appears someone has sent you some sort

of love note. How sweet!"

"Were *you* involved?"

"What, you think I would do something like that? I'm hurt!"

The young woman stood up straight and put her hand on her hip. Fr. Elijah turned to George and said, "Would you like to know what's going on?"

The young woman said, "Yes, I'd love to hear you explain *this*."

Fr. Elijah said, "George, the elephant population in Sri Lanka is in some peril. They're not being hunted for their ivory, let alone for their meat, but there is a limited amount of land, and farmers and elephants are both trying to use an area of land that makes it difficult for them to both support themselves. So some people tried to think about whether there was a way to make a win-win situation, and make the elephants an economic asset. They asked themselves whether elephants produce anything. And it turns out that something that eats the enormous amount of food an elephant eats does, in fact, produce a *lot* of something."

George said, "I don't see the connection. Have I just missed that you're changing the subject?"

The young woman said, "He *hasn't* changed the subject."

Fr. Elijah said, "They're using it to make hand-crafted artisan paper, colored and available in a heart shape, which you can buy online at MrElliePooh.com if you're interested."

George looked at Fr. Elijah in shock and awe.

The woman said, "Grandpappy, you are *such* a pest!"

Fr. Elijah lightly placed an arm around her shoulder and said, "George, I'd like to introduce you to my granddaughter Abigail. She has a face as white as alabaster, raven-black hair, and lips are red as blood. And she has many merits besides being fun to pick on."

Abigail stuck out her tongue at her grandfather and then shifted to his side. "And my grandfather does many fine things besides be obnoxious... Can't live with him, can't shoot him... You should get to know him, if you haven't." She gave him a gentle squeeze. "There are brownies today, George, and they're great! Can I get you some?"

George read in *Brocéliande*, and wandered in the wood, and the castle of Calix College, and the surrounding city. Fr. Elijah began to introduce fasting, and George found something new in his struggles... and began to make progress. Nor was that the only thing in George's life. He began to find the Middle Ages not too different from his own... and he was puzzled when he read in *Brocéliande*:

And in that wood anon saw Sir Yvain a lion fighting against a primeval serpent, and the serpent breathed fire against the lion his heel, and a baleful cry did the lion wail. Then Lord Yvain thought in his heart of which animal he should aid, and in his heart spake, "The lion is the more natural of the twain." And anon he put his resources on the side of the lion, and with his sword he cleft the ancient serpent in twain and hew the serpent his head in seven, and warred against the wicked wyrm until he were reduced to many small bits. And he cleaned his sword of the serpent his venomous filth, and anon the lion kept him at his side.

And anon Sir Yvain slept and an advison saw: an old woman, whose colour was full of life and whose strength intact and yet who were wizened, riding upon a serpent and clothed in a robe black as coal, and spake and said, "Sir Yvain, why have ye offended me? Betake ye as my companion." Then Sir Yvain refused her and there was a stench as brimstone aflame. Then a woman clad in white, riding astride a lion, new as white snow did courtesy and said, "Sir Yvain, I salute thee." And about her was a fragrance of myrrh.

Anon Sir Yvain awoke, and sore amazed was he, and none could interpret his advison.

George spoke with Fr. Elijah, and asked him what the passage meant. Fr. Elijah said, "What does this passage *mean*? You know, that

isn't as big a question in Orthodoxy as you think... but I'll try to answer. In fact, I think I'll answer in a homily."

"It had better be impressive."

"Fine. I'll preach it as impressive as you want."

"When?"

"On Christmas."

That evening, George called Fr. Elijah to say that he was going home for Christmas... and then, later in the week, said, "Fr. Elijah? Do you know anybody who could keep me? My parents were going to buy me a ticket home with frequent flier mileage on an airline, but my grandfather is ill and my mother used up those miles getting a ticket... and money is tight... I don't know what I'm going to do."

"Well, you could talk with your College and try to get special permission to stay over break... but I'd prefer if you stayed with me. Because we agreed that I would only preach on the Arthurian legends, including your Old Law and New Law, if you were there... and I was so looking forward to preaching a Christmas homily on the Arthurian legends."

"Can't you preach it without me?"

"We agreed and shook hands. I have that homily for Christmas, but only if you're there."

"Um... I would be an intruding—"

"George, I am a priest because I love God and I love people. And I do meet people quite a lot, but my house is empty now. It would be nice to have some young energy and someone to share more than a Christmas dinner with?"

"Are you sure?"

"You know how to get to my place. I'll see you whenever you want to

you know how to get to my place. I'll see you whenever you want to come over."

On Christmas, Fr. Elijah preached,

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Christ is born! Glorify him!

In the Arthurian legends, there is a story of a knight who sees a serpent fighting a lion, kills the serpent, and wins a kind response from the lion. In some versions the knight has a vision in which one woman appears on the serpent and another on the lion, and we learn that these women represent the Old Law and the New Law.

What are the Old Law and the New Law? One can say the Torah or Law of Moses, and the Gospel, and that is true up to a point, but the "Old Law" is not just a take on Judaism. Sir Palomides, a Saracen, described with profound confusion between Islam and paganism (and the problem with Islam is not that it is pagan but that it is not pagan enough—it is more emphatic about there being one God, even more than the one God is), becomes a Christian and is asked to renounce the Old Law and embrace the New Law. Even if Sir Palomides is in no sense a Jew.

In the ancient world, it is not enough to say that the Orthodox Church understood itself as the fulfillment of Judaism, politically incorrect as that may be. The Orthodox Church was even more fully the fulfillment of paganism, and if you understand what was going on in Plato, you understand that paganism was deepening. The Orthodox Church is the place where that final deepening of paganism took place. And I would like to explain for a moment why Orthodoxy is pagan and neo-"pagan" forms like Druidry aren't.

The popular stereotype is that paganism was merry and free until Christianity's grim hand came down, and that's like saying that difficult toil was carefree until someone came along and with a grim hand invited people to a feast. Pagan virtues—courage, justice,

wisdom, moderation—are retained in Christianity, but they are not the virtues of joy by themselves. C.S. Lewis said that if you're not going to be a Christian, the next best thing is to be a Norseman, because the Norse pagans sided with the good gods, not because they were going to win, but because they were going to lose. The Norse decision was to meet the Day of Doom, called Ragnarok, and go down fighting on the right side. And so the Norse have a tale of the war-god Tyr who took and kept an oath even at the price of letting a wolf bite off his right hand, and there is something very much like ancient paganism in keeping an oath though it cost your right hand.

What Orthodoxy offered paganism in the ancient world was precisely not a grim hand flattening everything, but retaining the virtue already recognized in paganism while deepening them with faith, hope, and love that live the life of Heaven here on earth. The Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love are the virtues that can see beauty, that bring Heaven down to earth, that can call for the whole Creation to worship God: as we sing at the Eucharist, joining the Song that summons the host of angels, sun, moon and stars, heavens and waters above the heavens, sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command, mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl, kings and all people, princes and rulers, young men and maidens, old men and children—all called in the Psalmist's summons to praise the Lord.

If you want to know how today's "neo-paganism" can fail to be pagan, I would recall to you the Medieval Collectibles website which offers a medieval toilet cover so you can have a real medieval coat of arms on your, um, "throne." The website's marketing slogan is "Own a piece of history," but you're not owning a piece of history... or think of the interior decorator who was told, "I want an authentic colonial American bathroom," to which the decorator replied, "Ok, so exactly how far from the house do you want it?"

Some have noted that the majority of books written by Orthodox today are by Western converts, and there is a reason for that. The Reformation almost created literate culture, but the opposite of

literate is not illiterate, but oral, in a way that neo-paganism may want to create but is awfully hard to recreate. Even in its spiritual *reading* the Orthodox Church remains an oral culture in its core while it uses writing: many of its most devout would never write a book, and even now, sensible Orthodox will answer the question, "What should I read to understand Orthodoxy?" by saying "Don't read, at least not at first, and don't *ever* let reading be the center of how you understand Orthodoxy. Come and join the life of our community in liturgy." Orthodoxy is not better than classical paganism in this regard, but it is like classical paganism and it keeps alive elements of classical paganism that neo-paganism has trouble duplicating. (A neo-"pagan" restoration of oral culture bears a hint of... I'm not sure how to describe it... an oxymoron like "committee to revitalize" comes close.) After years of the West tearing itself away from nature, people in the West are trying to reconnect with nature, and some neo-"pagans" are spearheading that. But look at Orthodoxy. Come and see the flowers, the water and oil, the beeswax candles and herbs, the bread and wine that are at the heart of Orthodox worship: the Orthodox Church has not lost its connection with the natural world even as it uses technology, and it may even have a fuller connection with the natural world than paganism had; classical Rome could sow salt in the soil of Carthage and go out of their way to pollute out of spite, which even environmentally irresponsible companies rarely do today. Which isn't getting into the full depth of a spiritually disciplined connection to nature like that of St. Symeon the New Theologian—in the Orthodox Church we call him "new" even though he's from the fourteenth century—but it's missing the point to ask if Orthodoxy is pagan because of the role of the saints in worshipping God. If you want the deep structure, the culture, the way of life, of paganism, the place where you will find it most alive is precisely Orthodoxy.

The Arthurian author Charles Williams makes a very obscure figure, the bard Taliesin, the pilgrim who comes to Byzantium sent to bring a treasure and returns with the Pearl of Great Price, the New Law. In Stephen Lawhead, it is Merlin who appears as the culmination of the Druidic Order and the apex of the Old Law: the

old learned brotherhood is disbanded and Merlin proclaims the New Law, and this is really not just a story. The Evangelical Orthodox Church was formed when a group of Protestants tried to do something very Protestant, reconstruct the original Christian Church through studying old documents. *Very* Protestant. And they came to a certain point, that when they quizzed an Orthodox priest, they realized something. And the Evangelical Orthodox Church entered the Orthodox Church because they realized that the Old Law of Protestant searching to reconstruct the ancient Church needed to be fulfilled in what they realized was the New Law. The Holy Order of MANS—MANS is an acronym, but not in English; it stands for *Mysterion, Agape, Nous, Sophia*, some terms from Greek that are deep enough to be hard to translate, but something like "profound mystery, divine love, spiritual eye, wisdom." Do these mean something Christian? Do they mean something esoteric? In fact the Holy Order of MANS was something of both, and they pushed their tradition deeper and deeper... until the Holy Order of MANS was dissolved and many of its people followed their leader's sense that their Old Law led to this New Law. If you know the story of the Aleut religion in Alaska, the shamans—and it is difficult to explain their "shamans" in contemporary terms; perhaps I should refer to them as people who had tasted spiritual realities—said that certain people were coming and to listen to the people who were to come. And the people the shamans foretold were Orthodox monks who had in turn tasted of spiritual realities, such as St. Herman of Alaska. Not, necessarily, that moving from paganism to Orthodoxy was that big of a change for them. It wasn't. But the Aleuts recognized in these monks something that was very close to their way of life, but something that could deepen it, and it was because of their depth in their Old Law as pagans that they were ready for an Orthodox New Law. Stephen Lawhead has a lot of carefully researched history—at times I wished for a little less meticulous research and a little more riveting story—but whether or not anything like this can be confirmed archaeologically in the Celtic lands, the same kind of thing can be confirmed, even as having happened very recently.

But when I say "Merlin," many of you do not think of the herald of the New Law and for that matter many of the older sources do not

of the New Law, and for that matter many of the other sources do not do this either. If a boy today is enchanted by just one character from the Arthuriad, it is ordinarily not King Arthur, Pendragon though he may be, nor Sir Galahad, who achieved the Holy Grail in some versions, nor Sir Lancelot, who is proven to be the greatest knight in the world, nor the Fisher-King, nor the fairy enchantress Morgana le Fay, nor King Arthur's peerless Queen Guinevere, whose name has become our "Jennifer." It is the figure of Merlin.

Today, if you ask *what* Merlin was—and I intentionally say, "what," not "who," for reasons I will detail—the usual answer is, "a wizard." But if you look at the stories that were spread from the Celtic lands, the answer is, "a prophet." In the Old Testament, one of the prophets protests, "I am neither a prophet, nor a prophet's son," and another prophet says something to the Lord that somehow never gets rendered clearly in English Bible translations never choose to get right: "You violated my trust, and I was utterly betrayed." The Hebrew word for prophet, '*nabi*', means "called one," and one never gets the sense in reading the Old Testament prophets that the prophets, when they were children, said, "I want to grow up to be a prophet" the way people today say, "I want to be the President of the United States."

And this idea of Merlin as *prophet* is not just a different or a more Christianly correct word. The Arthurian legends may be thought of today as "something like fiction;" even when people in the Middle Ages questioned their historical accuracy, those people were throwing a wet blanket on something a great many people took as literal fact. There is a book called *The Prophecies of Merlin*, which was taken extremely seriously for centuries, as the word of a prophet. And one gets the sense that in modern terms Merlin's identity was not a self-definition that he chose, not in modern terms, but something that was thrust upon him.

It may sound strange to some if I say that the earlier attempt to build a castle on Merlin's blood, and Merlin's later calling a castle out of the wind, relate to Christ. But if you think I am pounding a square peg into a round hole, consider this: Sir Galahad, whom some consider a painfully obvious Christ-figure whose strength is as the

consider a primarily obvious Christ figure, whose strength is as the strength of ten because his heart is pure and who is always strong in the face of temptation, enters the world after Sir Lancelot, the greatest knight in the world and a man who goes above and beyond the call of duty of faithfulness in his devotion to another man's wife, goes to a castle, is given the Arthurian equivalent of a date-rape pill in the form of a potion that makes him think his hostess is the woman he's been carrying on with, and that night sires Galahad. You may call this a magical birth story if you like, but it doesn't give us much advance notice that the son born will turn out to be the Arthurian icon of purity who will achieve the Grail.

So how is Merlin, who reeks of magic, introduced? In the oldest surviving work that flourished outside of Celtic circles, in fact written by a Celtic bishop, Merlin appears when King Vortigern searches for a boy without a father, and hears Merlin being teased for being without a father. And let me be clear, this is not because his father has passed away. We learn that the Devil wished to be incarnate, could only come into the world of a virgin, found a virgin who was spiritually pure, having only slipped in her prayers once, and thus the person meant to be the anti-Christ was conceived. The Church, just in time, said powerful prayers and the boy, born of a virgin without a sire, commanded all the power over the natural world he was meant to, but would serve the good. Now is anyone going to say that that's not a reference to Christ? Merlin is most interesting because of how the story itself places him in the shadow of Christ.

One thing that's very easy to overlook is that in the story where there's a terrible storm and Christ is sleeping in the front of the boat while his disciples are asking if he doesn't care that they were going to die, is not just that the disciples were right: in that part of the world there were storms that could very quickly flood a boat and kill people when the boat sank. Christ stands up, and says something to the storm before rebuking the disciples for their lack of faith. And that's when the disciples *really* began to be afraid. Mark's Gospel is the one Gospel with the simplest, "I don't speak Greek very well" Greek, and at this point he uses the King James- or Shakespeare-style Greek Old Testament language to say that when Jesus

commands the storm to be still and it actually obeys him, *that is* when they are most terrified.

Before Jesus stopped the storm, they were afraid enough; they knew the storm they saw was easily enough to kill them. But this was nothing compared to the fear out of which they asked, "Who is this, that even the wind and the waves obey him?" This person who had been teaching them had just displayed a command over nature that left them wondering who or what he was, a "what" that goes beyond today's concern about "who am I?" and has something that cannot be reached by angst-ridden wrestling with who you are.

Something like that question is at the heart of debates that people argued for centuries and are trying to reopen. What, exactly, was Jesus? Was he an ancient sage and teacher? Was he a prophet? A healer or a worker of wonders? Someone who had drunk of deeper spiritual realities and wanted to initiate others into the same? Was he something more than a man, the bridge between God and his world?

The answer taken as final was the maximum possible. It was "Every one of these and more." It pushed the envelope on these even as it pushed into a claim for the maximum in every respect: Christ was maximally divine, maximally human, maximally united, and maximally preserved the divine and human while being the final image both for our understanding of what it is to be God and what it is to be human.

And what, finally, would we have if we deepened Merlin? What if he were the son, not of the worst finite creature, but of the best and infinite Creator? What if he had not simply power over nature but were the one through whom the world was created and in whom all things consist? What if we were dealing with, not the one who prophesied that a few would find the Holy Grail, but the one who gave the Holy Grail and its gifts that are still with us? What if Merlin were made to be like the pattern he is compared to? When Merlin is deepened far enough, he becomes Christ.

The Christian lord of Cyprus was out hawking when his dearly beloved hawk—I don't know if the hawk was a merlin, but I can say that a merlin is a type of hawk—became entangled in the brush in the wood. Loving the hawk dearly, he ordered that the branches be cut away so that he would still have this hawk, and when that was done, not only was his hawk found, but an icon showing the Queen and Mother of God on a throne, and the Divine Child enthroned upon her lap and an angel on either side. They found what they were looking for, but they also found a singularly majestic icon of the Incarnation.

The Christ Mass, the Nativity, is an invasion in the dead of winter. It is the feast of the Incarnation, or more properly one of the feasts of the Incarnation, which is not something that stopped happening once after the Annunciation when the Mother of God bore the God-man in her womb.

Everything that the Christ Mass stands for will eventually be made plain, but the Christ Mass is a day of veiled glory. When God became man, he was born in a stable. When Christ returns, he will appear riding on the clouds. When he came, a choir of angels proclaimed the news to shepherds and a few knees bowed. When he returns, rank upon rank of angels will come in eternal radiant glory and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the manifest glory of God the Father. When he came once, a star heralded the hour of his birth. When he returns, the stars will fall as ripe figs from a tree and the sky itself will recede as a vanishing scroll. Every thing that is a secret not will be made plain, but he first came in secret...

...and he comes today in secret, hidden in us. For the Incarnation was not finished after the Annunciation, but unfolds still as Christ is incarnate in the Church, in the saints like St. Herman of Alaska, a wonderworker who was seen carrying logs weighing much more than himself, stopped a forest fire, calmed a stormy sea, and left behind a body preserved from corruption as it was on display for a month at room temperature, and left behind much of the Aleut Orthodox community that remains to this day—and also in us. And the Incarnation is still unfolding today. The castle of the Arthurian

world is more than stone walls and a porticullis; the castle is almost everything we mean by city, or society, or community. And it is the castle writ large that we find in the Church, not only a fortress waging war against the Devil but a people ruled by her Lord. This Castle is at once founded upon a fluid more precious than ichor, not the blood of a boy without a father but the blood of a God-man, without father on the side of his mother and without mother on the side of his Father. It is the Castle still being built by the wind of his Spirit still blowing—and remember that the world behind the Medieval West did not always stow "spirit" and "wind" in sealed watertight compartments: the wind blows where it will and the Spirit inspires where it will, so this Castle has a Spirit blowing through it that is more windlike than wind itself.

And until the Last Judgment, when every eye will see him, even those that pierced him, it is his will to be incarnate where he is hidden behind a veil to those who cannot see him: incarnate in the Church and in each of us, called to be his saints, and called to become Christ.

Christ is born! Glorify him!

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Fr. Elijah turned around, stopped, bent his head a moment, and at last turned back. "Oh, and one more thing... George's number is in the parish directory, and these homilies that talk about King Arthur and his court have been all his fault. If there's *anything at all* that you don't like about them, I invite you to call him at all hours of the day and night to grouse at him for foisting such terrible ideas on me."

That evening, George came, and after some hesitancies, said, "When can I become Orthodox?"

"At Pascha. We can continue working, and you will be received in the Church."

George thanked him, and began to walk out.

"Um, Fr. Elijah, aren't you somewhat surprised?"

"George, I was waiting for you to see that you wanted to become Orthodox. Go back to your reading."

The Christmas break passed quickly, and the first class after break was the introduction to computer science. The professor said, "Most of my students call me Dr. Blaise, although you can use my last name if you're comfortable. I wanted to offer a few remarks.

"Many of your professors think their class is your most important class, and that entitles them to be your number one priority in homework and demands outside the classroom. I don't. I believe this class is a puzzle piece that fits into a larger puzzle. Exactly how it fits in will differ, depending on whether you become a major—which I invite you to consider—or whether you choose an allied major but focus on something other than computer science, or whether your interests lie elsewhere and I am broadening your horizons even if your main interests lie somewhere else. I will try to help give you a good puzzle piece, and in office hours especially I want to support you in helping fit this piece of the puzzle into the broader picture.

"My best student was a mechanic; car and airplane mechanics, for instance, are solving a problem with a system, and I have never been so stunned at how quickly a student learned to debug well as with this mechanic. I've found that people who know something about physics, mathematics, or engineering pick up computer work more quickly even if you don't see a single physics equation in this class: learn physics and programming is a little easier to learn. And it goes the other way too: one of my colleagues in the math department explained that students who know the process of taking something and writing a computer program to reach the desired results, correctly, are prepared to do something similar in mathematics, and take something and write a correct proof to reach the desired results. Learn something in one hard science and you have an advantage in others."

One student raised her hand. "Yes?" Dr. Blaise asked.

"What about those of us interested in philosophy or religion? What if we're doing something computers won't help us with? Are you going to teach us how to use word processors?"

"Well, I'd point out that there is a long tradition of studying mathematics—geometry—as a sort of mental weightlifting before studying philosophy or theology. Or some of my poet friends say that it's a way of poisoning the mind, and I'll respect them if they want to say that. But for many of you, it is useful, even if we don't teach word processing—ask the lab tech for sessions that will teach you how to use computer software. Computer *science* is about something else; computer science isn't any more about how to use computers than astronomy is about how to use telescopes."

The student raised her hand again, slightly, and then put it down.

Dr. Blaise said, "I'd like to hear your thought. If you aren't convinced, other people probably aren't convinced either, and it will do everybody good to have it out in the open."

"Um... But why does..." She paused, and Dr. Blaise smiled. "I want to study English."

"Good stuff. So does my daughter. It's a bit of a cross-cultural encounter, and I think it can benefit English students for the same reason my majors benefit from taking English classes. But never mind programming specifically; I want to talk about how the disciplines can integrate. Programming won't help you the same way as some of the humanities will, but I'd like to talk about how things might fit together.

"I saw one of your English professors, a lovely medievalist who knows the Arthurian legends well. She was talking with one of the campus ethicists, who has interests in the history of moral theology. The topic of discussion? One that you might wince at, on the short list of positions the Catholic Church is unpopular for: contraception. And the ethicist said he'd found something he thought the medievalist literature professor might find interesting.

"The history of contraception like almost any other big question

The history of contraception, like almost any other big question, involves a lot of other things. And one of those things involves a suggestion by John Noonan, not for one of several proposed answers for a question, but of an answer to a puzzle that has no other answers, at least as of the time Noonan wrote.

"The vision of courtly love, and what is celebrated in that love between a man and a woman—probably another man's wife, for what it's worth—is an ideal that was all about celebrating 'love', and in this celebration of 'love,' there was a big idea of 'Play all you want; we will encourage and celebrate play, whether or not you're in marriage; just be sure that you do it in a way that won't generate a child.'

"Scholars do have difficulty keeping a straight face in the idea that the courtly romances are coded messages about secret Cathar teachings. They aren't. But they flourished as nowhere before in a land where something of Catharism was in the air, and, like contraception, the idea of celebrating 'love' and encouraging people, 'Play, but do it in a way that don't generate a child' is not exactly Cathar, but is the sort of thing that could come if Catharism was in the air.

"And, the ethicist went further, the Arthurian romances are done in such a way that it is very difficult to demonstrate any clear and conscious authorial understanding of Cathar teachings, let alone coded messages sent to those 'in the know'... but that doesn't mean that Catharism had nothing to do with it. And not just because strict Cathars would have taken a dim view of *this* way of taking their ball and running with it. A *very* dim view, for that matter.

"Catharism, called Gnosticism as it appeared in the ancient world and various other things as it resurfaces today, has various things about it, and not just wanting to celebrate love to high Heaven while understanding this wonderful 'love' as something which one should be able to do without generating children. That's not the only thing, and it is one point of including Cathar elements without doing them very well.

"Catharism, or Gnosticism or whatever the day's version of it is called, is deeply connected with magic, and this occult element has a lot of ideas, or something like ideas, if you get very deep into it. And in the

Arthurian legends, there is an occult element, but it isn't done very well. There are dweomers all over the place, and Merlin and almost every woman work enchantments, not to mention that all sorts of items have magical 'virtues', but the English professor had almost no sense that the authors were really involved with the occult themselves. It was kind of a surface impression that never had any of the deeper and darker features, or the deeper secret doctrines of one in the know. It kind of portrays magic the way a poorly researched TV show portrays a faroff land—there may be a sense of interest and enchantment untainted by actual *understanding* of what is being portrayed.

"And besides that surface impression, there is something of self-centered pride. The only people who really have a pulse are nobles living in large measure for themselves, knights who are trying to do something impressive. Commerce never seems to really taint the screen of luxury; furthermore there is a sense that being in fights for one's glory is no great sin, and it doesn't really matter what those fights do to the others. It's a very different view of fighting from 'just war.'

"The Arthurian legends are undoubtedly classics of world literature, and it is terribly reductive to say that they're simply a bad version of Cathar doctrine. That denigration of their literary qualities is not justified, just as dismissing Star Wars as just a bit of violent Gnosticism or Catharism or whatever is out of line. Star Wars would never succeed if it were just dressed up Gnosticism.

"But it does raise the question of whether the literature of courtly love, so foundational to how people can understand 'love' today and understand what it means to celebrate 'love' and say that the Catholic Church hates love between men and women if it will not recognize that contraception will help that love be celebrated with less unwelcome 'consequences'... It raises the question, not of whether the literature is bad literature and not worth study, but whether it is very good literature that contains something fatal."

There was one more question, and Dr. Blaise began discussing computer science. At least George believed later that the professor had been discussing computer science, and trusted others' reports on that

score.

But George did not hear a word more of what Dr. Blaise said that day.

The computer science class was a night class, and when it was finished, George found himself surprised when he entered the parsonage.

Fr. Elijah was sitting, his back to the door, staring into the fireplace. A large volume, looking like an encyclopedia volume, was sitting open on Fr. Elijah's sparsely appointed desk. Fr. Elijah, his back still to the door, said, "Come in, George. What is the matter?"

George said, "I hope I didn't interrupt—"

Fr. Elijah said, "I was just resting a bit after reading something. St. Maximus's language gives me such trouble."

George rushed over to the desk. "Maybe I can help." He looked, and looked again, until he realized the volume had columns of Latin and Greek. The volume was printed, but it looked old, and there were worm holes.

"Come in and sit down, George. You don't need to be reading St. Maximus the Confessor quite yet, even if your Greek is better than mine, or you find the Latin easier. Now sit down. You didn't come here so you could help me understand the Greek, even if I wouldn't be surprised if, bright lad as you are, you know Greek a good deal better than I do."

"It's Greek to me," George said, forcing a smile, and then shaking. Fr. Elijah rose, turned around, and said, "Sit down in my chair, George, and enjoy the fire. I'll step out into the kitchen, make some hot cocoa, and then we can talk. I wish my cat were still around; she was a real sweetheart, and she would sit in your lap and purr. Even if it was the first time she met you." Fr. Elijah left, silently, and went about making hot cocoa. He returned, holding two mugs, and gave one mug to George. "I put extra marshmallows in yours."

Then Fr. Elijah sat down in a smaller chair, in the corner, and sat,

listening.

George blurted out, after some silence, "I think the Arthurian stuff I read may be Gnostic."

Fr. Elijah took a sip.

"One of the people in my class said that Arthurian literature arose because of the Cathars."

Fr. Elijah took another sip.

"Or something like that. It seems that a lot of what people do as glorious things in courtly literature is Gnostic."

Fr. Elijah took a slow sip, and asked, "Like what?"

"Well, the ideal of love is big on celebrating love, only it's better if children don't get in the way, and you're careful to keep children out of the way. And there's magic all over the place, and nobles are superior."

Fr. Elijah took another sip.

"At least that's how I remember it, only I'm probably wrong."

Fr. Elijah stroked his beard for a moment and said, "Well, that's a big enough question that we should respect the matter by not trying to sort it out all at once. Let's not assume that because it is so big a question, we are obligated to rush things. If it is a big question, we are more obligated *not* to rush things."

"*Why?*"

"Ever hear of Arius or Arianism?"

"You mean racism?"

"No, not that spelling. A-R-I-U-S and A-R-I-A-N-I-S-M. The race-related bit is spelled with a 'Y'."

"Ok."

"Arius was a deacon who was really worried that his bishop was saying something wrong. So he rushed to correct his bishop, and in his rush to correct the Orthodox Church founded a heresy. He gets it worse in the Orthodox liturgy than even Judas; various other heretics are accused of being taught by Arius.

"There were two mistakes he made. The biggest and worst mistake was fighting the Orthodox Church when they said he was wrong, and that was the real problem with Arius. But another mistake was trying to rush and fix the problem of heresy he thought his bishop was guilty of.

"Holier men than either of us have rushed and said something heretical in their rush job. I'm not sure either of us are going to go warring against the Church and trying to fix it has thought about our correction and said 'No,' but if you've raised a big question, or your class has, that's all the more reason *not* to rush."

George said, "So what should we do?"

Fr. Elijah said, "Take a deep breath and a sip of cocoa," and waited. Then he said, "Now what is it that has you so wound up?"

"I thought there was really something in what I was reading."

"There probably is."

"But the idea of love, and all the magic, are some sort of second-rate Cathar stuff."

"Why do you think that?"

"Well, I'm not sure... um... well, they're big on the experience of love."

Fr. Elijah sank a little into his chair. "In other forms of Gnosticism, there is an idea of some things as experience... and they are understood as experiences, significant as experiences, and not as significant for other reasons... and I can see some pretty Gnostic assumptions feeding into

reasons... and I can see some pretty Gnostic assumptions feeding into that ideal of love. You may be right..."

"But isn't love to be celebrated? How else could it be celebrated?"

"In the New Testament times, celibacy was encouraged despite the fact that it was giving up something big. But the something big is not the obvious 'something big' people would be worried about giving up today... it's having children to carry on one's name. There is a good deal more.... People, even with hormones, were interested in some other things *besides* pleasurable experiences. There is more I could explain about what else *besides* 'being in love' could make a happy marriage between happy people, but... Sorry, I'm ranting, and you're not happy."

"Fr. Elijah, if what I'm saying makes sense, then why on earth did you preach those homilies? Were you lying... um, I mean..."

"Don't look for a nicer word; if you think I might have been lying, I would really rather have you bring it out into the open than have it smouldering and damaging other things. No, I'm not angry with you, and no, I wasn't lying."

"Then why—"

"George, allow me to state the very obvious. Something was going on in you. And still is. It seemed, and seems to me, that you were coming alive in reading the Arthurian legends. As a pastor or priest or spiritual father or whatever you want to call me, I made an appropriate response and preached homilies that blessed not just you, but also several other people as well. Now, maybe, you are shattered, or maybe you are ready to begin hungering for something more. You know how, in classic Gnosticism, there's a distinction the Gnostics hold between the so-called 'hylic' people who don't have much of any spiritual life, meaning people who aren't Christian in any sense, and the 'psychic,' meaning soulish, not ESP people, of Christians who have a sort of half-baked spiritual awakening, and the 'pneumatic,' meaning spiritual, Gnostics who are the real spiritual elite?"

George said, "It doesn't surprise me. It's absolute bosh from

beginning to end. It has nothing to do with the truth."

Fr. Elijah closed his eyes for a moment. "George, I am not quite sure I would say that."

"What, you're going to tell me the Gnostics had it right?"

"They had more right than you think; they're *seductively* similar to Christianity. They wouldn't have anywhere near the effect they're having if it were any other way.

"You know how Orthodox Christianity is patted on the head as a sort of lesser outer revelation that is permissible for those who have reached the outer courts but are not ready to enter the inner sanctum of the Gnostics' secret knowledge? That's *backwards*. The Gnostic 'knowledge' might be excusable for people who have not reached the inner reaches of Orthodoxy. It is the Gnostic that is the light-weight spiritual reality. And it is the light-weight spiritual reality that is the Old Law which the New Law fulfills more than the Old Law can fulfill itself. You reacted to something in the Arthurian legends because there is something there, and if you now know that they are not the New Law, I will ask you to excuse me if I still hold those legends to be an Old Law that finds its completion in the New Law. The highest does not stand without the lowest, and part of the New Law is that it makes a place for the Old Law. Including that spark of life you saw in the Arthurian legends."

"But why *preach* as if you found so much in them? I were to ask you to do something silly, like preach a sermon on how things have been censored out of the Bible, would you do that too?" George took a breath. "I'm sorry; you can change the subject if you want."

Fr. Elijah said, slowly, "I have a question for you, and I want you to think carefully. Are you ready for the question?"

George said, "Yes."

"Can we know, better than God, what the Bible should say?"

"No."

"But quite a lot of people do think that. A lot of people seem to be trying to help the Bible doing a better job of what it's trying so hard to say, but can't quite manage. Or something like that."

"I've read some liberals doing that."

"It's not just liberals. Let me give one example. George, have you been big in Creation and evolution debates?"

"Not really."

"Christians have several options, but for the *Newsweek* crowd, there are only two options. Either you're a young earther, or you're an evolutionist, and the new 'intelligent design' is just the old creationism with a more euphemistic name. Rather depressing for a set of options, but let's pretend those are the only two options.

"Now are you familiar with what this means for dinosaurs?"

"Um..."

"The connection isn't obvious. We've seen, or at least I have, cartoons in magazines that have cave men running from T. rexes or hunting a brontosaurus. Which is, to an evolutionist, over a hundred times worse than having cave men whining loudly about the World Wide Wait. There's a *long* time between when the last dinosaurs of any kind, and the first humans of any kind, were around. As in hundreds of millions of years longer than humans have been around in any form. On that timeline, it's a rather big mistake to have humans interacting with dinosaurs.

"But if you have a young earth timeline, with the whole world created in six days, then it's not such a ludicrous idea that humans might have interacted with dinosaurs... and your English Bible offers an interesting reason to believe that humans have seen living dinosaurs. Have you read the book of Job?"

George said, "Um, no. It's one of a lot of..."

Fr. Elijah interrupted. "There's a lot in the Bible to read, and even people who read the Bible a lot don't read it quickly unless they're speed-reading, and then it still takes them a couple of weeks. If you can call that 'reading the Bible;' I've tried it and I think it's one of the sillier things I've tried—a sort of spiritual 'get rich quick' scheme. I was smart enough to stop. But if you check your English Bible, you will see in Job a creature called the 'behemoth,' perhaps because the translators on the King James Version didn't know how to translate it, and the 'behemoth,' whatever that may be, is a mighty impressive creature. We are told that it is not afraid though the river rushes against it, suggesting that whatever the behemoth is, it is a big beast. And we are told that it stiffens or swings its tail like a cedar, the cedar being a magnificent, and quite enormous, tree which reaches heights of something like one hundred fifty to two hundred feet. And regardless of where you stand on Creation and evolution, the only creature that has ever walked the earth with a tail that big, or anywhere *near* that big, is one of the bigger dinosaurs. So the Bible offers what seems to be excellent evidence that people have seen dinosaurs—alive.

"Which is all very lovely, of course given to the English Bible. But first, the 'behemoth' is in fact an overgrown relative of the pig, the hippopotamus, and second, it isn't really talking about his *tail*. The same basic image is translated unclearly in the Song of S—"

George spit out a mouthful of soda and took a moment to compose himself. "I'm sorry. Did I—"

Fr. Elijah looked around. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that as you were taking a sip. Let me get you a napkin. Here."

George said, "Ok, so maybe there are some other vivid images that have been, bowlderized—you know, edited for television. Anything more? Were any ideas censored?"

Fr. Elijah said, "A bit murky, but I'm tempted to say 'yes.' One idea has been made less clear; there may be other tidbits here and there. A couple of forceful passages that may be interpreted as implying things about contraception don't come across as clearly. But that may not be

copyright; there is a double meaning that is hard to translate correctly in English. I don't find the English translation strange. But there's one story in the Old Testament, where the future King David is running from King Saul, who is leading a manhunt and trying to kill David. There are a couple of points that David could have killed Saul, and at one of these points, David's assistant either encourages David to kill Saul or offers to kill Saul himself, and David says what your English Bible puts as, 'I will not lay my hand on the Lord's anointed,' or something like that. Would you like to know what it says in Hebrew or Greek, or in Latin translation?"

George said, "Um..."

Fr. Elijah got up. "I wasn't expecting that you would; it's really not that important or even as impressive as some people think. If you don't know those languages, it may be easiest to see in the Latin. Aah! Here's my Latin Bible. Just a minute. Let me get my magnifying glass." After almost dropping a dark green Bible with golden letters on the cover, and an interminable amount of flipping, he said, "What is this word here?"

"I don't know Latin."

"Never mind that. What does that word look like?"

"It's a lowercase version of 'Christ,' with an 'um' added."

"Yes indeed. And at the top it says the name of an Old Testament book, in Latin 'Liber Samuhelis.' What do you think the word you pointed out means?"

"I told you that I don't know Latin."

"What's an obvious guess?"

"Um..." George paused. "Christ."

"Yes indeed."

"What does the lowercase 'c' mean?"

"It means nothing. As a matter of language-loving curiosity, the text is in Latin; either in the manuscripts or in this printed Bible, capitalizations follow a different rule, and 'christus'/'christum'/'... isn't automatically capitalized. Now why is the Old Testament book of Samuel using the equivalent of the 'Christ'?"

"Because the Latin is messed up?"

"Ernk. Sorry. Bzzt. Thank you for playing, but no. The Latin is *fine*. It's the *English* that's messed up. The Latin correctly translates, 'I will not lay my hand on,' meaning violently strike, 'the Lord's Christ.' Didn't you know that the word 'Christ' means 'anointed'?"

"Yes, but..."

"The Bible, Old Testament and New, uses 'Christ' for those who are anointed—the Son of God, prophets, priests, kings, and ultimately the people of God. The whole point of becoming Christian is to become by grace what Christ is by nature, and even if we can never be perfect in Christ, there is something real that happens. If you ever become Orthodox, you will be 'Christed,' or in the related and standard term, 'chrismated,' meaning, 'anointed with holy oil.' And, at a deeper level, the anointing is about anointing with the Holy Spirit, as Christ was. And the New Testament in particular says a lot about Christ, but the Bible calls Christ or Christs others who are anointed. But the Bible translations, coincidentally by people who have much less room for this in their theology, introduce a division that isn't in Hebrew, Greek, or the Catholic Church's Latin, and translate the Hebrew 'moshiah' or the Greek 'christos' one way when it refers to the one they think is 'really' Christ, and another way when it refers to other Christs even if what the text says is, quite literally, 'Christ.' They introduce a very clear divide where none exists in the text, using a language shenanigan not entirely different from some mistranslations translating 'God' with a big 'G' when the Bible talks about the Father, and a 'god' with a little 'g' when the Bible refers to Christ. Perhaps your Bible's translators still say 'anointed one,' but there is some degree of censorship. The reader is saved the shock of too many correctly translated and explicit statements that we are to be little Christs, Sons of God, living the divine life—there's a word for the divine life in

Greek that is different from the word for mere created life, and that dimension doesn't seem to come through. It's not all censorship, but there's something not quite right about the translators who refuse to either consistently say 'Christ,' or else consistently say 'Anointed One,' so that the readers never get the something important in the Bible that Western Christianity does not always get. But there is enough mystery in the Bible. Sacred Scripture is unfathomable even apart from relatively few areas where the translators try to make sure that the reader does *not* get the full force of the what the text is saying. God exceeds our grasp; he is and ever shall be Light, but whenever we try to shine a light to search him out, its beam falls off in darkness, and the God who is Light meets us beyond the cloud of darkness enshrouding him.

"I say this to answer your question, which I know was purely rhetorical. I'd prefer not to scandalize people and have to clean up the pieces later, but even the tough old women you see in our parish aren't so prissy as you might think. But I want to more directly speak to your intent, and the deep question behind your asking if, because you had hypothetically asked me, I would preach a sermon about the Bible and censorship. I wasn't crossing my fingers or simply saying what I thought would please you, when I preached about the Arthurian legends, and there is nothing I wish to take back. I really was preaching in good faith."

"Then I don't want *Brocéliande* for now."

George said, "You may like the book. I don't. I don't want it any more."

"Then may I take a look at it? I would like to have it, to look at. If you don't want it any more, that's fine, but you can have it back any time."

"Fine. Maybe it will be better for you than for me."

"By the way, what are you doing for Spring Break?"

"Dunno. Do you have any suggestions?"

"There are some truly beautiful places where you could get blasted out of your mind, acquire a couple of new diseases, and if you time it

right, come back still in possession of a rather impressive hangover."

"Um..."

"Yes?"

"Why don't we just cut to the chase and get to your real suggestion?"

"Aah, yes. It turns out that there's a finishing school which is offering a week-long intensive course in the gentle art of polite conversation, but—oh, wait, I was going to suggest that to my granddaughter Abigail. I would never make such a suggestion to you. Finishing school—what was I thinking? What I was really wondering was whether you have considered one of the alternative spring breaks."

"Like Habitat for Humanity? But I have no skill in construction."

"That's not really the point. Last I checked, Habitat for Humanity had nothing on their website about how only seasoned construction workers can be of any use."

"But aren't there a lot of things that could go wrong?"

"Like what?"

"I might hit myself on the thumb with a hammer."

"If you're worried about being at a loss for words, last April Fool's Day my godson gave me a book listing bad words in something like a thousand languages, and you can borrow it. There are worse things in life than hitting your thumb with a hammer, and if it's that big of an issue, I'd be happy to ask the head of Habitat for Humanity to refund your wasted time. If you're worried about getting sunburned, the store next door has an impressive collection of sunscreen containers, giving you options that rival those for dental floss. I personally recommend the SPF 30 in your choice of soft pastel-hued plastic bottles with a delicate floral scent created through a carefully blended confection of unnatural chemicals. I don't think that Habitat is going anywhere where you'd be in real danger of snakebite, but I can help find a kit you can use to bite the snake back.

Have I left something out?"

A week later, and (though he did not tell Fr. Elijah) realizing that Abigail was also a student at Calix College, George returned. Fr. Elijah said, "Why the long face, George? Just a minute while I make some tea."

"Um, I'm not signed up for the alternative spring break."

"George, I only asked you to consider... tell me what's on your mind... *if* you want to."

"I was in line, and I just missed signing up."

Fr. Elijah sat in silence.

"I could have gone, but there was a girl in line after me, and she really wanted to go. I let her have the last slot."

"Excellent. Some would call it sexist, but I'd call it one of the finer points of chivalry."

Fr. Elijah paused and then said, "Could you come with me to the house for a second?"

George gulped.

Fr. Elijah led George out to the house and rummaged on a shelf before pulling out a CD. "George, could you put this in the CD player and hit play? I've figured out how to use the CD player several times, but I keep forgetting, and I don't want to keep you waiting." He handed the CD to George and said, "I'll be right out. I need to make a phone call." He stepped into another room and closed the door.

George looked at the CD, did a double take, and looked at the player. He began to hear a rap beat.

As I walk through the valley where I harvest my grain,
I take a look at my wife and realize she's very plain.
But that's just perfect for an Amish like me.
You know, I shun fancy things like electricity

YOU KNOW, I SHUN fancy things like electricity.
At 4:30 in the morning I'm milkin' cows.
Jebediah feeds the chickens and Jacob plows... Fool!
And I've been milkin' and plowin' so long that
Even Ezekiel thinks that my mind is gone.

I'm a man of the land! I'm into discipline!
Got a Bible in my hand and a beard on my chin.
But if I finish all my chores and you finish thine,
Then tonight we're gonna party like it's 1699!

We been spending most our lives, living in an Amish paradise.
I've churned butter once or twice, living in an Amish paradise.
It's hard work and sacrifice, living in an Amish paradise.
We sell quilts at discount price, living in an Amish paradise.

A local boy kicked me in the butt last week.
I just smiled at him and turned the other cheek!
I really don't care; in fact, I wish him well.
'Cause I'll be laughing my head off when he's burning in Hell!
But I ain't never punched a tourist even if he deserved it
An Amish with a 'tude? You know that's unheard of!
I never wear buttons but I got a cool hat.
And my homies agree, I really look good in black... Fool!
If you'll come to visit, you'll be bored to tears.
We haven't even paid the phone bill in 300 years
But we ain't really quaint, so please don't point and stare;
We're just technologically impaired!

There's no phone, no lights, no motorcar,
Not a single luxury,
Like Robinson Caruso,
It's as primitive as can be!

We been spending most our lives, living in an Amish paradise.
We're just plain and simple guys, living in an Amish paradise.
There's no time for sin and vice, living in an Amish paradise.
We don't fight. We all play nice, living in an Amish paradise.

Hitchin' up the buggy, churnin' lots of butter,
Raised a barn on Monday, soon I'll raise another!
Think you're really righteous? Think you're pure in heart?
Well, I know I'm a million times as humble as thou art!
I'm the pious guy the little Amlettes wanna be like,
On my knees day and night, scorin' points for the afterlife,
So don't be vain and don't be whiny,
Or else, my brother, I might have to get medieval on your heinie!

We been spending most our lives, living in an Amish paradise.
We're all crazy Mennonites, living in an Amish paradise.
There's no cops or traffic lights, living in an Amish paradise.
But you'd probably think it bites, living in an Amish paradise.

Fr. Elijah walked back into the room and served the tea, smiling gently.

George said, "Um..."

Fr. Elijah said, "Yes?"

"I'm not sure how to put this delicately."

"Then put it indelicately. Bluntly, if you wish."

"I hadn't picked you out for a Weird Al fan."

"It was a present."

"Who would buy you a Weird Al CD?"

"A loved one."

"Um... do you ever do something less spectacular, like play chess?"

"I'm not a big fan of chess, and besides, I've visited the chess club at the Episcopalian church, and it seems the Anglican Communion isn't going to produce that many more good chess players."

"Whv?"

....

Fr. Elijah sipped his tea. "Can't tell a bishop from a queen."

George coughed, sputtered, tried to keep a straight face, and then tried to steer the conversation back. "When were you given the Weird Al CD?"

"For April Fools' Day. The present is much appreciated."

"I like Weird Al, but why did you play that?"

"Because I was just on the phone."

"And?"

"I've just arranged for you to spend your Spring Break at an Amish paradise."

"Um..."

"Yes?"

"Are you joking?"

"No."

"Are you being *serious*?"

"Yes."

"Are you being sadistic again?"

"Yes, I'm being very sadistic."

"*Why*?"

"I'm not saying."

"I'll be bored to tears."

.....

"Perhaps. But boredom can be good, and not just because it can build character."

"Um... Never mind. I've grown rather fond of computers. I've found out the hard way that I rather need them."

"If it's *that* hard for you to spend a few days without spam, you can use your cell phone to read all the insulting messages telling you that you can't handle money, or that you need snake oil diets, or some part of your body is too small, or you're not man enough for a relationship with a real woman and must content yourself with pixels on a screen. And if you forget leave your cell phone at home, you might be able to borrow one of theirs."

"Amish don't use phones or the Internet. They're 'just technologically impaired;' didn't the song say that?"

"You can ask them; I'm sure one of them would be willing to lend you his cell phone."

"Um..."

"Let's forget about *that*; we can talk about it later if you want. Anyway, after school gets out, come over here with your bag. Someone else is doing some running, and will give you a ride. He's a bit hard of hearing, so he's not much good for chatting in the car, but he's a great guy. But you can gripe to him about how backwards the Amish are."

"Oh, and one more thing... I'm not exactly sending you into bear country, but if one of the workmen were attacked by a bear, I'd be very worried."

"Um..."

"Yes?"

"*That* seems obvious."

"But not for the reason you think. I'll explain why after you return."

There was a knock on the door, and Fr. Elijah opened it.

"George, I'd like to introduce you to Jehu. Jehu, this is George. Oh, George, I'm sorry for being a pest, but could you open your bag and pull out everything inside?"

George looked at Fr. Elijah, rolled his eyes, and began unpacking.

"Which of these items mean anything at all to you? Which have a story, or were expensive, or were a gift?"

George looked at Fr. Elijah, who stood in silence.

"You can put anything that means anything to you in this closet; it will be here when you get back. I'm not sending you to a den of thieves, but..."

George began shuffling and sorting while Fr. Elijah waited. When he was finished, Fr. Elijah said, "How much does your windbreaker mean to you?"

"It's new, but I want to have it with me on the trip."

"Take it off. You have an old sweatshirt or two."

"Sorry, I insist on this one. It doesn't mean that much to me."

Fr. Elijah said, "If you must..."

George said, "I've taken enough out. Have a good evening." He stiffly shook Fr. Elijah's hand. "You better have a good reason for your odd behavior."

Fr. Elijah said, "I can explain later, if you need me to."

George repacked the remaining half of his luggage into the duffle bag, and left with Jehu.

Some days later, Fr. Elijah heard a knock and opened the door. "George, George! How are you? I must hear about your trip. That's a

lovely jeans jacket you have there. Is there a story behind it?"

George gave Fr. Elijah a look that could have been poured on a waffle, and then began quickly taking his coat off.

Fr. Elijah said, "You wouldn't throw a coat at an old man who doesn't have the reflexes to block it... I must hear the story about the coat, though."

George closed his mouth for a second, and then said, "Filthy sadist!"

Fr. Elijah said, "It sounded like you had an interesting trip."

"Did you call and *ask* them to be obnoxious?"

"I did no such thing."

"Honest?"

"I called and asked them to go easy on you."

"You called and asked them to go *easy* on me?"

"Well, you seem to have gotten through the matter without getting any black eyes."

"You call that going *easy*? These guys are pacifists, right?"

"That depends on your idea of a 'pacifist'. If you mean that they don't believe you should use violence to solve conflicts, then yes, they are pacifists."

George said, "*And...*"

"But does that make them wimps? In any sense at all?"

"You *did* say that you would be worried if one of them were attacked by a bear... *Why?*"

"I'd be worried for the bear."

George sunk down into his chair.

"You must have some stories to tell."

"They wanted help raising a barn, and they wouldn't let me do any of the stunts they were doing *without a harness*, but when I went to the outhouse, things shook, and when I opened the door, I was over ten feet in the air."

"Earthquake?"

"Forklift. I don't know why they had one."

"Did you ever think you would sit on such a high throne? I have a suspicion that's higher than even my bishop's throne."

"We are *not* amused."

"You are using the royal 'We,' Your Majesty. Excellent."

"The first day, I didn't take off my shirt at work, but I did take off my windbreaker, and when I left, they nailed it to the beams!"

"Excellent. Is that why Your Majesty has a new, handmade jeans jacket?"

George gave Fr. Elijah another look that could have been poured on a waffle.

"I should maybe have told you... They don't think anything of nailing down any clothing that's taken off as a practical joke. Did you ever get an opportunity to nail down some clothing or something of theirs?"

"Yes, but like a gentleman, I did not."

"That was rude of you."

"You mean they're *offended* at what I didn't do?"

"No; I just said it was rude. They wouldn't be offended. But what I was going to say is that the women have lots of denim, and are very adept at sewing new clothes; it's almost like making a paper airplane for them. Or maybe a little bigger of a deal than that. But you seem to be laboring under a sense that since the Amish are such backwards people, they aren't allowed to have a sense of humor. Were you surprised at the sense of humor they had?"

"Filthy sadist!"

"So did you get bored with nothing interesting to do besides surf the web through your cell phone?"

George said, "Filthy sadist!" Then he paused.

Fr. Elijah sat back and smiled. "George, I believe you have a question."

George hesitated.

"Yes? Ask anything you want."

George hesitated again, and asked, "When can I come back?"

Fr. Elijah just laughed.

George walked around, and had a few chats with Abigail on campus. She started to occupy his thoughts more... and George wondered if he really wanted to dismiss all of the literature of courtly love.

He tried to put this out of his mind the next time he saw Fr. Elijah.

He thought he'd pay a visit, and knocked on Fr. Elijah's door.

Fr. Elijah said, "I'm glad you're here, George. Did you know that a man-eating tiger got loose on the campus of Calix College?"

George stood up and immediately pulled his cell phone out of his pocket. "Do the police—"

"Sit down, George, and put your cell phone away, although I must commend your gallant impulse. This was before your time, and besides, George, it starved."

George said, very forcedly, "Ha ha ha."

"Sit down, please. Have you had any further thoughts about your holiday with the Amish?"

"It seems a bit like King Arthur's court. Or at least—"

"Why would that be?"

George sat for a while, and said nothing.

"Are you familiar with Far Side comic strips?"

"Yes."

"I expected so. You like them, right?"

"Yes, but I haven't read them in a while."

"Do you remember the strip with its caption, 'In the days before television'?"

"Can't put my finger on it."

"It shows a family, mesmerized, sitting, lying, and slouching around a blank spot where there isn't a television... I think you've had a visit to the days before television. You didn't even need a time machine."

George sat in silence for a moment.

Fr. Elijah continued, "If you want, I can show you the technique by which the Bible is censored, and how the translators hide the fact that they've taken something out of the text. But do you know the one line that was censored from the movie production of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*—the Disney one, I mean?"

"I didn't notice that anything was censored."

"Well, you're almost right. Now it seems to be religion that is censored, Christianity having replaced sex as the publishing world's major taboo, and Disney did not censor one iota of the stuff about Aslan. But there is one line of the book that almost gets into the movie, but then Father Christmas merely makes a smile instead of verbally answering the question. Do you know what that line is?"

"What?"

"Battles are ugly when women fight."

"Um... I can see why they would want to smooth over that."

"Why? Battles are ugly when *men* fight. There is a reason why Orthodox call even necessary fighting 'the *cross* of St. George.' '*Cross*,' as in a heavy, painful burden. I've dealt pastorally with several veterans. They've been through something rough, much rougher than some people's experience with, say, cancer. And it is my unambiguous opinion, and that of every single soldier I've spoken to at length, that battles are ugly... whether or not women fight. Therefore, battles are ugly when women fight, and you'd really have to not understand battle, think it's the same thing as a violent fantasy or watching an action-adventure movie, to deny that battles are ugly when whatever group fights.

"So why make such a big deal over a single line, 'Battles are ugly when women fight?' Why is that one line worth censoring when Disney has the guts to leave Aslan untouched? What's a bigger taboo in the media world than Christ?"

"Umm... I can't put my finger on it."

"Ok, let me ask you... What do you think of the Amish women?"

George tried not to stiffen.

"I'm sorry, George, I meant *besides* that... When you're my age you can forget that for women to dress very modestly can—"

"Then what *did* you mean?"

"Imagine one of those women in a fight."

George tried not to make a face.

Fr. Elijah said, "My understanding is that they're strong and hard workers, probably a lot stronger than many men you know."

George said, "Um..."

"Would you deny that they are strong? And tough, for that matter?"

"No..."

"Does it bother you in the same way to imagine an Amish man having to carry a gun into combat?"

"No. He'd be pretty tough."

"But the women are pretty strong and tough too. Why does it bother you to think about one of them entering combat and fighting?"

George said nothing.

"The women strike you as stronger and tougher than many men that you know. So they're basically masculine?"

"Fr. Elijah... the women there almost left me wondering if I'd met real women before, and the men left me wondering if I'd met real men before. I don't know why."

"I think I have an answer for why the idea of an Amish woman fighting in battle bothers you more than an Amish man fighting in battle."

"What?"

"I've been reading through *Brocéliande*. Let me read you a couple of passages." Fr. Elijah returned momentarily, and flipped through *Brocéliande* before reading:

Sir Galahad he rode, and rode and rode, until saw he a dragon red. Anon the wyrm with its tail struck a third of the trees against the earth that Sir Galahad they might slay. Anon Sir Galahad warred he against the wyrm.

The dragon charged, and anon Sir Galahad his horse trembled, and Galahad gat him down to earth. The dragon laughed at Sir Galahad's spear which brake to-shivers, and breathed fire red as Hell.

Sir Galahad gat him behind his shield, and then charged with his sword, though it should break as rotted wood. Anon the dragon swept him, though his helm saved Sir Galahad his head from the rocks.

Then Sir Galahad, who his strength was as the strength of a thousand because his faith was pure, leapt him and wrestled against the beast. Anon the beast turned and tore, against the knight, until the knight he bled sore. Never was such combat enjoined, but the knight held his choke until the dragon his death met.

Fr. Elijah pulled the bookmark out, and found one of several other bookmarks:

Rose the smoke of incense, of frankincense pure the garden did fill. 'Twere many women present, that hyght Lady Eva, and Lady Elizabeth, and Lady Anna, and Lady Martha, and Queen Mary. Sang they a song, 'twere of one voice, and in that song kept they a garden: in the garden was life. Queen Mary a radiant Child gave suck, and others gave life each in her way.

Verdant was the place of their labour.

Fr. Elijah said, "I think you're missing the point if you're trying to tell if there are differences between men and women by asking who is tougher."

"Why?"

"It's like asking what the differences are between apples and oranges, and then thinking you need to justify it with a measurement. So you may say that apples are bigger than oranges, until you realize that navel oranges are the size of a grapefruit and some varieties of apples don't get that big. So maybe next you measure a sugar content, and you get really excited when you realize that maybe oranges have a measurably lower Ph than apples—a scientist's way of measuring how sour they are—until someone reminds you that crabapples are so tart you wouldn't want to eat them. And all this time you are looking for some precise scientific measurement that will let you scientifically be able to distinguish apples and oranges...

"Is it simply a measure of some difference in physical strength that makes you not like the idea of an Amish woman in battle? If you knew that the women were equally as strong as the men, identically strong, or tough or whatever, would that address..."

George hesitated. "But..."

Fr. Elijah sat silently.

"But," George continued, "the idea of an Amish woman in battle... I know some girls who wanted to go into the military, and it didn't bother me *that* much. And the Amish women *are* pacifists."

"So if those women were gung-ho military enthusiasts, even if they weren't soldiers, then you wouldn't mind—"

"Ok, ok, that's not it. But what is it about the Amish?"

"George, I think you're barking up the wrong tree."

"So what is the right tree? Where *should* I be barking?"

"When people notice a difference with another culture, at least in this culture they seek some 'That's cultural' explanation about the *other* culture."

"So there's something about *this* culture? Ours?"

"George, let me ask you a question. How many times in the Arthurian legends did you see someone invite a man to be open about himself and have the courage to talk about his feelings?"

George was silent.

"We still have the expression, 'wear the pants,' even though it is no longer striking for a woman to wear trousers. It used to be as striking as it would be for a man to wear a skirt."

"Um... you don't approve of women wearing pants?"

"Let's put that question on hold; it doesn't mean the same thing. Abby wears trousers all the time. I wouldn't want her to do otherwise."

"But..."

"George, when have you seen me at the front of the church, leading worship but *not* wearing a skirt?"

"Um..."

"But I wouldn't want you wearing a skirt. The question of wearing a skirt, or pants, or whatever, is like trying to make a rule based on size or tartness or whatever to separate apples from oranges."

"It's the wrong question, then?"

"It's *fundamentally* the wrong question... and it misleads people into thinking that the *right* question must be as impossible to answer as the wrong question. Never mind asking who is allowed to wear pants and who is allowed to wear a skirt. We're both men. I wear a skirt all the time. You shouldn't. And, in either case, there is a way of dressing that is appropriate to men, and another to women, and that propriety runs much deeper than an absolute prohibition on who can wear what. And this is true even *without* getting into the differences between men's and women's jeans, which are subtle enough that you can easily miss them,

but important."

"Like what?"

"For starters, the cloth is hung on men's jeans so that the fabric is like a grid, more specifically with some of the threads running up and down, and others running side to side. On women's clothing, jeans included, the threads run diagonally."

"And this is a deliberately subtle clue for the super-perceptive?"

"It changes how the cloth behaves. It changes the cloth's physical properties. Makes women's clothing run out faster, because it's at just the right angle to wear out more quickly. But it also makes the cloth function as more form-fitting. On men's jeans, the cloth just hangs; it's just there as a covering. On women's jeans, the cloth is there to cover, but it's also there to highlight. This, and the cut, and a few other things, mean that even if men and women are both wearing jeans, there are differences, even if they're subtle enough that you won't notice them. Men's jeans are clothing. Women's jeans are more about adornment, even—or *especially*—if it's something you're not expected to notice."

"So we do have differences?"

"We do have differences despite our best efforts to eradicate them. We want men to be sophisticated enough to cultivate their feminine sides, and women to be strong enough to step up to the plate."

"Um, isn't that loaded language?"

"Very. Or maybe not. But one of the features of Gnosticism is that there keeps popping up an idea that we should work towards androgyny. Including today."

"Like what?"

"Um, you mean besides an educational system that is meant to be unisex and tells boys and girls to work together and be... um... 'mature' enough not to experience a tingle in the relationship? Or dressing unisex?"

Or not having too many activities that are men only or women only? Or not having boys and men together most of the time, and women and girls together? Or having people spend long periods of time in mixed company whether or not it is supposed to be romantic? Or an idea of dating that is courtly love without too many consciously acknowledged expectations about what is obviously the man's role, and what is obviously the women's role? Or—"

"Ok, *ok*, but I think there was more—"

"Yes, there is much more to the Amish, or the Arthurian legends, than what they hold about men and women. But there is also much more *in* what they hold about men and women—all the more when they are telling of Long Ago and Far Away, so that political correctness does not apply to them, so that men who go on great quests can be appreciated even by a woman who thinks men would be better off if they would just learn to talk more about their feelings and in general hold a woman's aspirations of conversational intimacy. And the Amish are 'technologically impaired,' or whatever you want to call them, so they're allowed to have real men and real women *despite* the fact that they are alive today. But the pull of men taught to be men, and women taught to be women, is powerful even if it's politically incorrect, and—"

George interrupted. "Is this why I was trying to keep a straight face when you were asking me to imagine an Amish woman carrying a gun?"

Fr. Elijah thought. "For an Amish man to have to fight in battle would be bad enough. An Amish woman entering a battlefield would be something that would cut against the grain of their life as women. It's not so superficial as the women being dainty and not strong enough to hold a gun."

"The men seem stronger and tougher than the women, though."

"Yes, but is it only a matter of being tougher? Is what you observed simply a matter of the women being tough but the men being tougher?"

George was silent.

Fr. Elijah looked at his watch and winced. "Always when I'm having a good conversation... George, I'm sorry, but I've got someone coming over any minute, and a bit of preparation. Sorry..."

George picked up his belongings, and Fr. Elijah blessed him on his way out. Then George stepped out, and Fr. Elijah momentarily opened the door. "Oh, and by the way, George, I have some more of that paper, if you want to write her a love note." He closed the door.

George scurried away, hoping that Fr. Elijah hadn't seen him blush.

It was not much later that April Fool's Day came, falling on a Sunday. George did not feel brave, and paid a visit to Bedside Baptist. The days seemed to pass quickly with Abigail in the picture.

On Earth Day, George listened and was amazed at how many references to Creation he heard in the liturgy—not just the reference to "his mother, the earth," but how plants and trees, rocks, stars, and seas, formed the warp and woof by which the Orthodox Church praised her Lord. The liturgy left him wishing Fr. Elijah would put off his preaching and say something to celebrate earth day...

Fr. Elijah stood up.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Today is Earth Day, and I thought that that would provide an excellent basis for my preaching today. The very opening chapters of Genesis are not about man alone but man and the whole Creation. There are some very interesting suggestions people have made that when Genesis says that we were told not only to "be fruitful and multiply," but "fill the earth and subdue it," the word translated "subdue" is very gentle, almost an embrace, as a mother nurtures a child. Which is a very lovely image, but is absolute hogwash.

The word translated "subdue" is the word Christ uses for exactly what Christians must not do by "lording their authority" over other Christians as the heathen do. The book of Genesis tells of this

beautiful Creation and then has God charge us with a charge that could much better be translated, "trample it under foot." And what better day than Earth Day than to talk about why we should trample the earth under foot, told to us in a text that is resplendent with natural beauty?

Many people today call the earth 'Gaia', and that is well and good. Today one calls a man 'Mr.' and a woman 'Miss' or 'Ms.' or 'Mrs.' if there is no other honorific, and as much as adults all bear that title, in Latin every woman bears then name of 'Gaia' and every man bears the name of 'Gaius.' And if we are speaking of the earth, it is well and proper to call her Gaia; only someone who understands neither men nor women would think of her as sexless!

If you are dealing with a horse, for instance, it helps to keep in mind that they are prey animals with a lot of fear. Never mind that they're much bigger than you; they're afraid of you, as you would be afraid of a rat, and need to be treated like a small child. But you can only deal with a horse gently after it is broken and after you have made it clear that it is you holding the reins and not the horse. You need to be able to treat a horse like a little child if you are to handle them... but if you spoil it, and fail to establish your authority, you have a terrified small child that is stronger than an Olympic athlete. You *do* need to be gentle with a horse, but it is a gentleness that holds the reins, with you in charge.

There are a number of fundamental difficulties we face about being in harmony with nature, and one of the chief ones is that we are trying to be in harmony with nature the *wrong* way. We are trying to take our cue from our mother the earth, perhaps instead of taking our cue from technology. And it is excellent to treat Gaia gently, and perhaps technology is in fact quite a terrible place to take our cue from, and something else we absolutely need to trample under foot, but there is something mistaken about the rider taking his cue from the horse. In Genesis we are called to rule material Creation as its head: we are to give it its cue, rather than following. Perhaps you have seen the *Far Side* cartoon that says, "When

imprinting studies go awry" and shows a scientist last in line with ducklings follow a mother duck... which is very funny, but not a recipe for a life well lived. We are made from the same clay as horse and herb, but unless we are deeply sunk into the even worse cues we will take from technology when we fail to rule it, we do not serve our best interests—or the earth's—when we ask her to dance and expect her to be our lead.

But enough of what is politically incorrect in the West, where we say that men should not lead and mean, in both senses, that humans should not lead the rest of Creation and that males should not lead females. I could belabor why both of those are wrong, but I would like to dig deeper, deeper even than saying that lordship applies to every one of us even if we are all "a man under authority," *including* me.

Patristic exegesis of the rule over Creation is first and foremost of a rule over our passions and over ourselves. We are not fit to lead others or Creation if we have not even learned to lead ourselves; "better is a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." If you are following a Western model, then you may be thinking of a big enterprise for us to start ruling Creation which is really beside the point. If you save yourself through ascetical mastery, ten thousand will be saved around you. Never mind that this is mystical; it is a matter of "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you." You become a leader, and a man, not by ruling over others, but by ruling over yourself.

We are in Great Lent now, the central season of the entire Orthodox year, not because it is about ruling others or about ruling Creation—it isn't—but because it is about ruling ourselves. We are not to seek a larger kingdom to rule outside ourselves; we are to turn our attention to the kingdom within, and rule it, and God will add a larger kingdom outside if we are ready. The first, foremost, and last of places for us to exercise lordship is in ourselves, and our rule over the Creation is but an image of our rule over ourselves, impressive as the outer dominion may be.

We bear the royal bloodline of Lord Adam and Lady Eve, and we are to be transformed into the image of Christ. Let us seek first the Kingdom of God, with all that that means for our rule over ourselves.

In the Name of the Lord and Father, and of the Son who is Lord, and of the Heavenly King, who is the Holy Ghost, Amen.

After his Sunday dinner, George thought it would be a good time to wander in the wood.

In the forest, he found himself by a babbling brook, with the sound of a waterfall not far off. George brushed off a fallen mossy log and sat down to catch his breath.

George began listening to the birdsong, and it almost seemed he could tell a pattern. Then two warm hands covered his eyes.

George tried to look up, remembered his eyes were covered, and brought his own hands up to his face, briefly touching a small, soft pair of hands. Then he said, "It's definitely a man..."

Then George turned. Abigail was sticking out her tongue.

Abigail's dress was a rich, deep, deep red, the color of humble earth seen through a ruby. A pair of bare white feet peeked out from beneath a long flowing skirt, a wide, golden straw hat sat atop her locks, and dark, intricate knotwork lay across her heart.

George looked down at his own feet and saw his own worn combat boots, before looking at Abigail's face. She smiled and said, "Boo!"

George said, "What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?"

"Taking a walk, as I do from time to time."

"Must be pretty rare for you, if this is the first time I've seen you."

"You're in the woods more often than I am?"

A squirrel darted out, climbed across Abigail's foot, and scurried away.

George asked, "It wasn't afraid of you?"

"Most of them aren't, at least not that much of the time."

George looked at her, and she said, "It's not such a big deal, really. Read any good books lately?"

"No, and—ooh, I told Fr. Elijah I'd read C.S. Lewis, something or other about 'glory.' I need to get back to him."

"Maybe it's a box you're not meant to open, at least not yet... if I know Grandpa, he's probably forgotten about it completely."

"But I should—"

"You should leave it a closed box, if anything. How are you?"

George looked at the forest—how like a garden it looked—and then Abigail. He was at something of a loss for words. He looked down at her alabaster feet, and then her face. "Having a good day."

She smiled, and a sparrow flew between them. "There's a hawk in here somewhere, only it's hard to find. You can spend a lot of time exploring this forest. I'm having a good day, too."

George sat for a while, trying to think of something to say, and Abigail said, "You're being pretty quiet now."

George said, "I've been looking at majoring in math."

Abigail said, "Um..."

"You know how to tell if a mathematician is an extravert?"

"Nope."

George looked down and said, "He looks at *your* feet when they're talking to you."

Abigail giggled. "Have you heard my Grandpappy's theory on how PMS got its name?"

George said, "Um..."

She giggled again. "Something about 'Mad Cow Disease' being taken."

George stiffened, and looked for something to say.

Abigail said, "Stop it, George. Just stop it. Don't you get it? Don't you stand and listen or sing the hymn where the the Mother of God is honored as the Ewe that bore the Lamb of God and the Heifer that bore the Unblemished Calf?"

George's mind raced. "I suppose that if, in the same breath, Christ is called—"

Abigail interrupted. "Next time you're in Church, listen, really listen, as the Mother of God is honored, then listen as Christ our God is worshiped. There's a difference. Don't try to analyze it or even put your finger on it. Just listen, and... George, do you understand women? At all?"

George looked for something to say, but found nothing.

A dark cloud blew across the sky, and cold rain began to fall more heavily until it poured.

George said, "May I lend you my jacket?"

Abigail said, "I'm fine."

The rain grew colder, and began to pelt. George and Abigail both rose and began scurrying towards campus. George took off his jacket and started to place it around Abigail's shoulders.

Abigail said "I don't—"

Abigail said, "I don't

George looked down and said, "I'm wearing boots and you have bare feet," and wrapped his jacket around her shoulders. Then a gust of wind tore at Abigail's hat, but George caught it.

Then they ran back, with George shivering under his threadbare T-shirt. When they got back, he went to his dorm and she to hers. George called Abigail and confirmed she was OK, took three long, hot showers, and spent the rest of the evening sinking into a lounge chair in his bathrobe, sipping cocoa, and thinking.

Tuesday evening, George found time to visit Fr. Elijah. He wanted to talk about another subject. Definitely another subject.

"Fr. Elijah, are you busy?"

"I hope not... come in."

"After all this, I still want the Holy Grail."

"Excellent thing, my son... the chief point of life is to search for the Holy Grail."

"But will I find it? I mean... I'm not sure what I mean."

"May I show you something old?"

"As far as material age goes, it is much older than the Holy Grail."

The old man opened a desk drawer, and fished out a small box.

"I thought this might interest you," he said, and took something out of the box, and placed it in George's hand.

George looked the item over. It looked like a piece of bark, not much larger than a pebble, and yet it seemed heavy for a piece of bark. "Is this stone or wood? I can't tell which it is."

"Is it stone or wood? In fact, it is petrified wood... from the Oak of Membré."

MAMBRE.

"Oak of Mambre? Should I have heard of it before?"

"You probably have, and if you can't remember it, there is something you're missing."

"What is the Oak of Mambre?"

"I'll tell you in a bit. When you grasp the Oak of Mambre, you hold the Holy Grail."

"How?"

"The Oak of Mambre is older than any of the civilizations you know; for that matter, it might be older than the practice of writing. Do you know about Abraham?"

"The one Paul calls the father of all who believe?"

"Yes, that Abraham. The Bible tells how Abraham met three men who came to him, and showed the most lavish hospitality, giving them the costliest meal he could have given. And it was then that the men promised the impossible. It is clear enough later that these men were in fact angels, were in fact God.

"From the West, you may not know that even if we Orthodox are big on icons, it's fingernails to a chalkboard when Orthodox see the Father portrayed as the proverbial old man with a beard. Christ may be portrayed because of his incarnation; the same is not true of the invisible Father, who is not and never will be incarnate. Icons of the Father have been fundamentally rejected, but there was one exception. From ancient times there has been an icon of Abraham's hospitality to the three men, or three angels, and centuries ago one iconographer showed something deeper: it is the same three men or angels, but instead of a table with a lamb as in the old version of the icon, there is an icon with a chalice atop an altar. In both the old and the new form of the icon, the Oak of Mambre is in the back, and it is this same oak for which I have shown you a fragment."

"Is it holy because it is old?"

"Being old does not make a thing holier. The pebbles in your yard are of stone ages older than the oldest relic. Though they are, admittedly, part of the earth which received Christ's blood on the cross, and which Bulgakov rightly calls the Holy Grail.

"A thing is kept and preserved because it is holy, and if people will try to keep a holy thing for a long time, it will probably be old to most of the people who see it. Same reason most of the people who have seen the Liberty Bell saw it when it was old because people have been keeping it for a long time, much longer than the time when it was new, so most of the people who have seen, or will see, the Liberty Bell, see it as an old treasure. But back to holy things: a holy thing is, if anything, timeless: when there arose a great evil in Russia and Marx's doctrine helped people try to make paradise and caused a deep, deep river of blood to flow, the communists in the Orthodox heartland of Russia made martyrs, and in that torrential river of blood made more Orthodox martyrs than the rest of history put together. God will preserve saints' relics from that, and it may be that there are more relics from the past century than all centuries before. And they are not the less holy because they are new. But let us return to the Oak of Mambre and why, if you grasp it, you hold the Holy Grail."

"Ok. Why is that?"

"The Church has decided that the only legitimate way to portray an icon of the Trinity is in the hospitality of Abraham. And the Icon of the Holy Trinity is the deepest icon of the Holy Grail—deeper even than an icon that I can show you that shows the Mother of God as a chalice holding her Son. Where is the Holy Grail in this icon?"

"Is it that little thing in the center?"

"In part. Where else is it?"

George looked long and hard, seemed to almost catch something, before it vanished from his face.

"There are different interpretations," Fr. Elijah said, "and the icon conceals things; even the angel is a protecting veil to a reality that cannot be seen. But in the layers of this icon, the deepest glimpse sees the Father on the left, the Spirit on the right, and the Son in blood red clothes in the center, encased as in a chalice, showing the reality in Heaven for which even the Holy Grail is merely a shadow."

George turned the stone over in his hand with awe, closed his eyes, and then looked at the relic he held in his hand. "So I am holding the Holy Grail."

Fr. Elijah said, "Yes, if you look on it with enlightened eyes. Where else do you meet the Holy Grail?"

"In every person I meet?"

"'Tis hard to answer better than that. When you become Orthodox, you will receive the Eucharist and kiss the chalice, and, perhaps, find that the Holy Grail is achieved not by an unearthly isolated hero, but by a community in common things."

"But why do people kiss the Holy Grail? I mean the chalice?"

"If you call it the Holy Grail, even if your tongue slips, you may be understanding it. The Western view is that there is one original chalice and the others are separate sorts of things; in Orthodoxy, what is the same between the Holy Grail and 'another' chalice runs infinitely deeper than what separates them; the 'real' thing is that they are the same."

"But why the kiss?"

"Let me ask you a question. Do you think a kiss has more to do with worship, or with mental calculations?"

"Does it have to do with either?"

"You haven't read the Bible in Greek."

"What does the Greek Bible have to do with it?"

"Quite a lot, but it will take me a bit to explain why. But there is a deep tie.

"The main word for reverence or worship, in the Greek Bible, literally means to kiss. Part of what you'll keep coming to again and again is that the West understands the mind as the thing that calculates, and the East understands the mind as what knows, and is enlightened, because it tastes and even more deeply because it worships. I don't know how to put this clearly, in terms that will make sense to someone who does not know the spiritual realities involved. There is a false kiss—I dare say, the kiss of Judas or a kiss that is hollow like the kiss of Judas—that is nothing more than a calculated act. But there is also a kiss that has something to do with worship, and it is no error that Orthodoxy has things 'with love and kisses.' We embrace icons, crosses, holy books, each other with reverence that includes a kiss. And rightly done, such kisses are connected to worship."

"I still don't understand why."

"Let me make a momentary detour; I'll get back in a moment. Old texts can be at once something we genuinely experience a deep connection to, and something treacherously unfaithful to our assumptions. What would you say, for instance, that the medieval Scholastics are talking about when they use the word that is usually translated, 'intellect'?"

"I try to keep my mind free of preconceptions, especially when dealing with something unfamiliar."

"So you'd be open to anything they'd say about the intellect's ability to draw logical conclusions from one thing to another?"

"They can let the intellect draw conclusions however they want to."

"But here's the thing. They *don't*. It is a fundamental error to read 'intellect' as 'the thing that reasons by logical deduction. Saying that the 'intellect' is what makes deductions by reasoning from one thing by another is like saying that an object's height is what you measure with a

bathroom scale, or that its weight is measurable with a ruler. It's a fundamental error; the intellect is precisely what does not reason from premises to conclusions."

"Then what is the intellect?"

"I usually don't use the term 'intellect' for it; the closest English equivalent I can think of is 'spiritual eye'. But even that misses what exactly this spiritual eye connects with. And this spiritual eye was known to the Greek Fathers no less than the Latin scholastics; if anything, the Greek Fathers were more attuned to it. Scholastic theology is an exercise, to a large degree, of that which reasons; the theology of the Fathers comes from another place. The spiritual eye is that which connects with spiritual realities, that which worships above all—and if you want a good, short definition for what 'intellect' means besides 'what IQ is supposed to measure,' use the definition 'where one meets God.' If reasoning deduces what you may not see yet, the spiritual eye *sees*, and knows by what it can see, not by what it can pull from other things it already has. This reasoning from one thing shines like the sun in Western Scholasticism."

"And that's something you don't have in Orthodoxy?"

"We do have it. But reasoning shines like the *moon*: it reflects the light of the sun in each of us, the sun of our mind's spiritual eye. It plays more of a supporting role."

"And what does all of this have to do with your ritual kiss?"

"There was an awful video I heard was shown in one of your college's psychology classes; I don't know if you've seen it. It was talking about one psychological theory, and discussed how reward and such could be used to reduce autistic behaviors. And it showed a scientist, or psychologist, or something, who was patiently training a little girl to not do whatever he was trying to stop her from doing, and the girl lit up when he gave her a kiss. And then, along with a fake-sounding Mommy-ese talking in a high-pitched voice which I *assure* you was not spontaneous, he started to use almost forced kisses to, well..."

George cut in "Manipulate her?"

George Catlin: Manipulate Her.

"Yes, you found the word I was looking for. The one time I heard Abigail talking about that video, she said there was a bit of bristling going though the class; the students were uncomfortable with something about that video and its one more mere technique, a mere *tool*, for changing a little girl's behavior."

"Is the spiritual eye, or whatever, spontaneous? Is it about spontaneity?"

"I'll have to think about that... I'm not sure I've seriously thought about whether the spiritual eye is spontaneous. But spontaneity is not the issue here. The point has to do with what place a kiss should come from if it is not to be hollow. Have you noticed that none of the icons I've showed you have a signature?"

"Because the iconographers are not supposed to be what we think of in the West as artists, with their own signature style and their big egos?"

"A little bit. Iconography is art, and artistry and talent do mean anything: the iconographer is not a cog in a machine—and may be doing something much bigger than trying to use art supplies for self-expression. There is something self-effacing about iconography—something very self-effacing—but you find that when you bow down and efface yourself, it is you doing something much bigger than otherwise. Writing icons is a form of prayer, a spiritual exercise, and it is said—just like we speak of 'writing' icons rather than 'painting' them—that it is inadequate for an iconographer to sign the icon, because the icon is written, not merely by the iconographer's hand, but by his his spiritual eye. It is ever much more than a merely material process, and when you become Orthodox you may sense icons that have spiritual depth and icons that let you see no further than the wood, and if you receive this gift, you will be responding to the spiritual process out of which the icon arose."

"I have sensed something... the icons still look like awkward pictures to me, but I'm starting to find something more."

"That is good. And your mouth—with which you breathe in your

spirit, and show the reason of speech, and will receive the Eucharist—is not that *by* which you may give a kiss; it is that *through* which you may give the kiss that comes from and to some extent is the embrace of your spiritual eye. That's when a kiss is furthest from the hollow kiss that Judas gave. The knowledge of the spiritual eye is something I have discussed as sight, but in the ancient world all people recognized something touch-y about all the five senses, not just one. And this knowledge and drinking are exemplars of each other, draughts from the same fountain, and it is not an accident that 'know' has a certain sense in the Bible between, for instance, Adam and Eve: the spiritual eye knows by drinking in, and it is a fundamental error to think that the holy kiss has nothing to do with knowledge."

"This sounds like a fairy tale."

"Maybe you know your fairy tales, and know that there is something magic about a kiss. As one scholar put it, examples of the kiss as a means of making and breaking enchantments have been found in the folklore of almost every culture in the Western world. Orthodoxy has something more than this enchantment. There is a spiritual mingling, and even the Eucharist is understood as a kiss, and a kiss that embraces others: in the Eucharist, the body of Christ is offered up, including a token of bread for every parishioner—before being distributed. Have you not noticed that the best bishops and the most devout of the Orthodox, give the best kisses? But let me step back a bit.

"The difference in understanding symbol is one of the biggest differences between East and West. In the West, at least in its modern forms, a symbol is a detached and somewhat arbitrary representation. In the East a symbol is connected, cut from the same cloth as it were. The difference between Orthodoxy and various Protestant schools is not whether the Eucharist is a symbol, but what that means—that the Eucharist is an arbitrarily detached token, connected only in the viewer's mind, or whether it is connected and in fact the same on a real level.

"We are made in the image of God, which means that how you treat others is inseparable from how you treat God: you treat God with respect, love, or contempt as you meet him in the person of others. And the things

that we reverently kiss in Orthodoxy are all connected with God. We show our reverence to God in how we treat them. And if a person is being transformed according to the likeness of Christ, then it is fitting to reverently kiss that person and show respect for the Lord.

"To give the holy kiss rightly is a microcosm of faith and community. You cannot do it alone, nor can you do it apart from worship. If you look at the things that fit together in a fitting kiss, you have love, God, your neighbor... there are a great many actions that are listed in the Bible, and many of them are holy actions, but only one is called holy: the holy kiss. If you grasp the Holy Grail in your heart, and you grasp this kiss in its full sense, you will know that the sacred kiss in which our souls are mingled is the Sign of the Grail. It is the eighth sacrament."

George was silent for a long time. "I don't think I know enough to be Orthodox."

Fr. Elijah said, "Join the club! I know *I* don't know enough."

"But you're a priest!"

"And you cannot become Orthodox without entering the royal priesthood. You aren't ready to be Orthodox just because you know a certain amount; you're ready when you're ready for the responsibility, like getting married, or getting a job, or any other of a number of things. You are ready when you are ready to take the responsibility to return the Creation as an offering to God and shoulder a priestly office. And, in your case, I might add, when you enter the great City and Castle called the Church, and are ready for the Sign of the Grail."

"All I know now is my own unworthiness."

"Good. You're growing! Ponder your unworthiness and give it to God. Do you want to take *Brocéliande* back now?"

George gladly took the book back. He returned to his room, and some time later, George began reading:

The hermit spoke. "Listen as I tell the history of Saint George.

"The King wept sore. 'The land is weeping, the land itself weeps. The dragon hath devoured every damsel of the land, every last one, and now it seeketh mine own. I bewail the death of my joy and my daughter.'

"Then Saint George said, 'By my faith I will protect her and destroy this fiend,' and Saint George prayed and gat him his destrier and armed him and fewtered his spear and rode out and faced the sea.

"And the dragon arose from the sea and his deeps. And venom were in the wyrm his heart, and the grievous stench of death stank all round.

"Then the serpent charged upon Saint George the ever victorious knight, and the dragon breathed fire which brake and were quenched upon Saint George his shield, a grand cross gules upon a field or.

"Then Saint George made him the Sign of the Cross.

"Then Saint George smote the dragon, the great paladin his great spear dove into the dragon his mouth and dolve far beyond that insatiate devouring maw, until the dragon his head were riven asunder from the dragon his body trampled by Saint George his horse. And Saint George hurled the wyrm his head into the dark thrice cursed valley far outside of the castle.

"That day the King and the whole castle made such merriment as had never been since, for we do not know merriment today. There were jugglers and jesters and a table full filled, and before evensong the King gave George the hand of the King his daughter. That were the gayest of all."

The knight asked the hermit, "Why speakest thou me of this history?"

The hermit spake unto him and answered, "Sir knight, thou hast given me not thine name. What be it?"

"Thou entreatest of me my name? Thou askest what none hath asked of me aforetimes. My name is called Sir Perceval. And now I ask of thee of what I have asked not aforetimes. Had Saint George heard tell of whom doth the Grail serve?"

George slowly closed the book, and put it on a shelf. He momentarily wondered why he treated *Brocéliande* as something to read alone. There was something that seemed just out of his reach.

And then George realized something deep, deep inside himself.

Then it was Holy Week.

Or at least George wanted it to be holy week for him, too.

George found himself standing in Church, in the holiest of surroundings, and struggling to pray. Memories arose; painful memories of stinging things done by those he loved. Voluptuous images sometimes followed. He struggled to pray, but his mind remained locked in earthly struggles. His body ached in the long services: there were icons, chanting, and incense without, and struggles within. He wanted to rest in worship, and he couldn't.

In his mind, he remembered a moment when a beggar had come to him, and wouldn't stop pleading no matter how much he annoyed George. The image filled his mind, and George was startled when he turned and saw the beggar's face on the wall. Why was that?

George was looking at an icon of Christ.

He had fallen short, and not only in seeing that beggar as nothing but an annoyance. Did George really have no common bond with that beggar?

For that matter, did George have no common bond with the civilization that he disdained, the civilization that included everybody he knew from the beggar to his parents, the civilization that gave him everything from his clothing to his language? Was it there for no other

purpose than for him to criticize and feel superior to?

Fr. Elijah, moving amongst the congregation, swung the censer before George in veneration.

George barely noticed that some of these thoughts were giving way, and he was aware, with almost a painful sharpness, of something else.

George mulled over Fr Elijah's words about hollow kisses, and then started to see how hollow *George* was.

Unworthy thought he felt, George stood with growing awe and wonder, waiting until Great and Holy Thursday, the one day in holy week where wine was allowed. "Ordinary" wine was allowed, held in honor and in remembrance of the Last Supper, when wine became the blood of Christ and the eucharistic chalice was forever given to men. This day, if anything, was to George the feast of the Holy Grail.

And so he stood entranced, as if he were entering from afar. He watched the Last Supper as here and now, as Fr. Elijah stood "in the flame" before the altar, and then listened as he read the Gospel according to St. John the Evangelist, of the night when Christ loved his disciples to the last, and prayed out from the glory he shared with the Father before the worlds had begun.

And Fr. Elijah read and read, reading until George's body ached from standing.

Then someone walked over to twelve unlit candles, and lit one. The first.

George's heart sank. There were eleven candles still to go.

The readings continued, and became shorter, until the twelve candles were lit. George began to feel anger at the unending readings—until he heard Christ's words from the garden of Gethsemane: "What, could you not watch with me one hour?" Who were those words spoken to?

And then, when the readings had run their course, the liturgy followed—at once unlike an intimate gathering in an upper room in external appearance, but yet like the place that feels like home though nothing on the outside resembles the home. George thought for a moment about a historical reconstruction of the Last Supper pursued through academic rigor in archaeology... and then realized he needed no such thing. He was watching the Last Supper all around him, and in the words of Fr. Elijah's remark, "You didn't even need a time machine."

Or was this liturgy a spiritual time machine? Certainly time flowed in the most interesting ways, now quickly, now slowly, swirling about in eddies... there was something George could not put his finger on, but he understood for a moment what could make a person imagine a way to turn back time.

And so George found himself almost surprised when Fr. Elijah said, "He gave it to his holy disciples and apostles, saying, 'Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins.'"

Then the faithful sealed this with their, "Amen."

Then Fr. Elijah said, "Likewise, he took the cup of the fruit of the vine, and having mingled it, offering thanks, blessing, and sanctifying it, he gave it to his holy disciples and apostles, saying, 'Drink of this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.'"

The disciples around him sealed this, with their, "Amen."

George looked in wonder at the chalice that was raised. He thought, "This is it. This is the Holy Grail, forever given, that belongs to Christ's disciples."

As the liturgy continued, and Fr. Elijah proclaimed the Holy Gifts, the people continued to seal the Gifts with their "Amen," and George watched as they received from the chalice, and kissed the chalice in reverence, and (though George paid this little attention) Fr. Elijah's hand.

George found himself basking in the glow of that long moment for as

the liturgy continued and Fr. Elijah anointed those around him that they may be healed in soul and body.

As he walked home, he thought, "I have seen the Holy Grail. It has been under my nose. Very soon I will be one of those who share it, one of those the Holy Grail belongs to."

When George got home, he slept as peacefully as he slept in ages.

Then George entered the Church on Great and Holy Friday.

The whole service moved slowly, felt like something great but alien that slipped through George's fingers no matter what he did to grasp it. Around him were some who were silent, some who were singing, and some who were weeping. A great cross was brought out, and a great icon of Christ hung on it with nails.

And then something clicked in George's heart.

Some years before, he had been at a martial arts demonstration and saw a fifth degree black belt standing like a picturesque statue, looking quaint and exotic, holding a beautiful pair of fans. And then, for an instant, there was a flurry of motion as he was attacked by six other black belts with swords. And then, an instant later, George saw a fifth degree black belt standing like a picturesque statue, looking quaint and exotic, holding a beautiful pair of fans, and all around him were six other black belts with swords, on the ground, crying.

That had for long been the greatest display of power George had seen.

Now something was at the back of his mind.

Here was a new image of strength.

Were they the same?

Were they different?

Was the true nature of strength strength in weakness?

was the true nature of strength, strength in weakness:

The fifth degree black belt showed strength behind apparent weakness—or at least what looked like weakness to an outsider like George; he had no idea what it would look like to someone who was not a barbarian like him. To him, the martial arts demonstration seemed to show strength, if a show was needed, and a strength great and powerful enough to vastly understate itself. And the One before him on the cross showed more of the same... or was that really true?

Was it?

Something about that did not sit well.

Inside George's heart flashed an icon that had been on his mind—of a Man, his head bent, a purple robe about his wounded body. The robe was royal purple to mock the "pretender," his hands were bound, and a crown of thorns rested atop his bent head.

Atop the icon was an inscription in Greek and in English:

Ο ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΤΗΣ ΔΟΞΗΣ

THE KING OF GLORY

George raised his eyes to the crucified God.

This was another kind of strength.

George began to weep.

This was the strength that prayed, if there was any way, that the cup might pass from him.

This was the strength that prayed, "Thy will be done."

This was the strength that drank the cup to the dregs, and shattered it forever.

This was

THE KING OF GLORY
THE KING OF KINGS
THE LORD OF LORDS
THE GOD OF GODS
THE LION OF JUDAH
THE FIRSTBORN OF THE DEAD
THE RESURRECTION AND ETERNAL LIFE
THE NEW MAN AND THE LAST ADAM
THE UNCREATED GOD
THE DIVINE, ORDERING WISDOM
THROUGH WHOM ALL THINGS WERE MADE
BY WHOM ALL THINGS WERE MADE
IN WHOM ALL THINGS CONSIST
THE LORD OF THE CHURCH AND ALL CREATION
THE BRIDEGROOM OF THE CHURCH AND ALL CREATION

Had George ever known what it was to worship?

George stood in awe of the one who was, in truth, the Holy Grail...
or rather, the one for whom the Holy Grail was but a shadow.

And who was George next to such holiness and power?

Unclean and defiled.

When George had thought about going to his first confession, it had looked to him like the least attractive part of the picture of becoming Orthodox. But now, even if he knew even more dread, he wanted, not so much to be unburdened for himself, but to turn himself in and render what was due.

He didn't just think he needed to. He simply knew that it was something that he owed with from the core of his being.

What evil had he not practiced?

He prayed aloud, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," and then in spirit and body fell prostrate before his God and

Lord.

George returned home, mindful of his sin, but ever so much more mindful of the greatness of the Lord and Savior.

He spent Saturday in the terrifying struggle to repent of his sin, to face his sin and write the spiritual blank check that he feared in the unconditional surrender of rejecting sin.

When he confessed his sin, Fr. Elijah blessed him, said, "I'm sorry I can't give you the sacramental absolution yet—that will follow your chrismation," and then said, "Welcome home, son. Keep repenting."

And then the vigil was upon them.

It began with George standing in the center of the action as he stood before the congregation and, answering Fr. Elijah, renounced the Devil and all his works, rejecting sin, schism, and heresy, and vowed himself to Christ as a member of the Orthodox Church.

Then Fr. Elijah anointed George with sacred chrism, chrismating him with the fragrant oil of anointing that sealed George as a little Christ, as spiritual prophet, priest, and king, as one of the faithful in the Orthodox Church. This oil of spiritual blessing that worked in him more deeply even as it was wiped away from his skin—the emblem of the Spirit that penetrated like a sword. Fr. Elijah absolved George of his sins, and then the newly illumined servant of God George, stood before the congregation.

Then George faded into the background while the vigil unfolded, and he could never remember all of it—only that it seemed like a treasurehouse from which more and more wondrous treasure was brought forth. George remembered later the incense, the chant of "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death," the call of "Christ is risen!" and its answer, "He is risen indeed!", repeated triumphantly, in English, in Slavonic, in Arabic, in Spanish... and most of all George remembered the faces around them. There was something more deeply radiant and beautiful than that of someone who had won millions of dollars. The vigil lasted for hours but though George ached he barely

condemns. The vigil lasted for hours, but though George ached, he barely minded—he almost wished it would last for hours more.

When it was time for the homily, Fr. Elijah stood up, his face radiant, and read the age-old homily of St. John Chrysostom, read at all kinds of Orthodox parishes on Pascha for ages:

If any man be devout and loveth God,
Let him enjoy this fair and radiant triumphal feast!
If any man be a wise servant,
Let him rejoicing enter into the joy of his Lord.

If any have labored long in fasting,
Let him now receive his recompense.
If any have wrought from the first hour,
Let him today receive his just reward.
If any have come at the third hour,
Let him with thankfulness keep the feast.
If any have arrived at the sixth hour,
Let him have no misgivings;
Because he shall in nowise be deprived therefore.
If any have delayed until the ninth hour,
Let him draw near, fearing nothing.
And if any have tarried even until the eleventh hour,
Let him, also, be not alarmed at his tardiness.

For the Lord, who is jealous of his honor,
Will accept the last even as the first.
He giveth rest unto him who cometh at the eleventh hour,
Even as unto him who hath wrought from the first hour.
And He showeth mercy upon the last,
And careth for the first;
And to the one He giveth,
And upon the other He bestoweth gifts.
And He both accepteth the deeds,
And welcometh the intention,
And honoureth the acts and praises the offering.

Wherefore, enter ye all into the joy of your Lord;

Receive your reward,
Both the first, and likewise the second.
You rich and poor together, hold high festival!
You sober and you heedless, honor the day!
Rejoice today, both you who have fasted
And you who have disregarded the fast.
The table is full-laden; feast ye all sumptuously.
The calf is fatted; let no one go hungry away.
Enjoy ye all the feast of faith:
Receive ye all the riches of loving-kindness.

Let no one bewail his poverty,
For the universal Kingdom has been revealed.
Let no one weep for his iniquities,
For pardon has shown forth from the grave.
Let no one fear death,
For the Saviour's death has set us free.
He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it.

By descending into Hell, He made Hell captive.
He embittered it when it tasted of His flesh.
And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry:
Hell, said he, was embittered
When it encountered Thee in the lower regions.

It was embittered, for it was abolished.
It was embittered, for it was mocked.
It was embittered, for it was slain.
It was embittered, for it was overthrown.
It was embittered, for it was fettered in chains.
It took a body, and met God face to face.
It took earth, and encountered Heaven.
It took that which was seen, and fell upon the unseen.

O Death, where is thy sting?
O Hell, where is thy victory?

Christ is risen, and thou art overthrown!

Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!
Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice!
Christ is risen, and life reigns!
Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave.
For Christ, being risen from the dead,
Is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

To Him be glory and dominion
Unto ages of ages.

Amen.

And then the prayers moved very quickly—joyously—radiantly—and the Eucharist was served, George being called up first among the faithful to receive it.

Then the newly illumined servant George received Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

And George kissed Fr. Elijah's hand and the chalice,
forgetting it was the Holy Grail.

And when the liturgy finished, Fr. Elijah announced to the congregation, "You may kiss the convert."

Then the feast began,
a faint fragrance of frankincense flowed,
and a fragrant fragrance of flowers flowed.

Fr. Elijah spoke a blessing,
over a table piled high with finest meats
and puddings
and every good thing,

and the fruit of the vine poured out.

Every door and every window was opened,
and the wind blew where it willed,
and the wind blew where it pleased,
and George settled in to his home,
grateful to God.

Then someone told a Russian folktale,
and someone began singing,
and people began dancing,
and a little boy chased a little girl,
clutching a flower.

And men and women,
children,
young and old,
saluted George with a kiss,
every last one
of his brethren.

And the crystalline light
of a sapphire sky
blew through the window,
and angels danced,

and saints below cracked red Pascha eggs,
red in the footsteps of Mary Magdalene,
a holy grail,
and George laughed,
and wanted to weep,
for joy.

Then George and Abigail talked long.

George could never remember now long the celebration seemed to last. It seemed that he had found a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed, filled with every kind of wonder, at once Heaven and home, at once chalice and vine, maiden and mother, ancient and alive. It was the family George had forever wanted to enter.

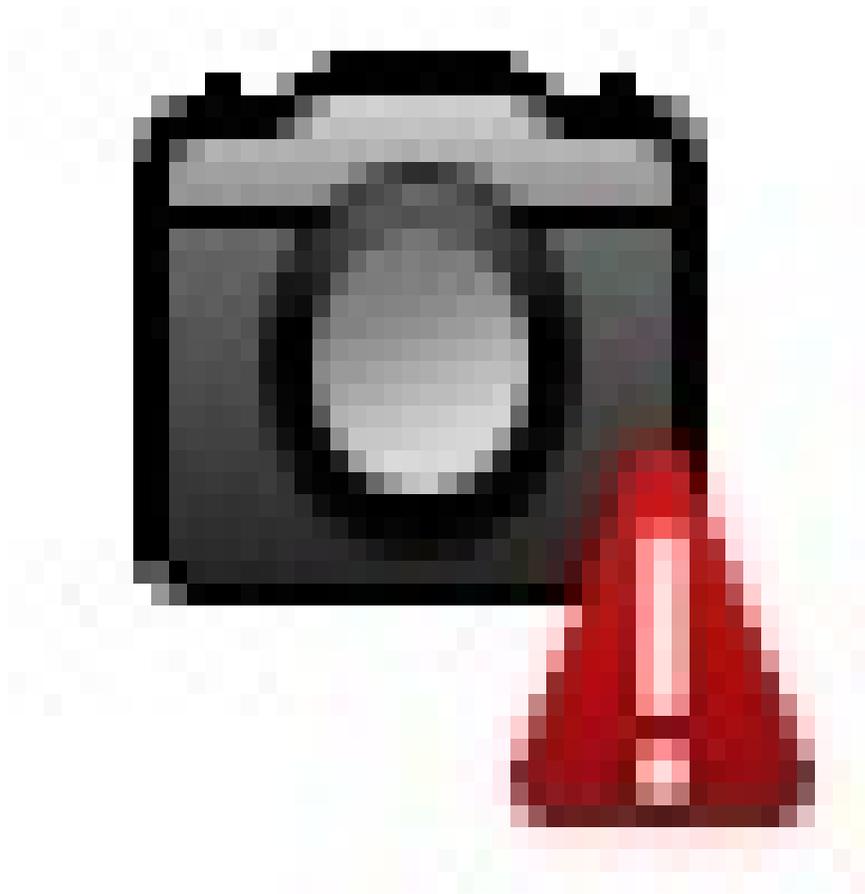
Then George kissed Abigail—a long, full kiss—and absolutely nothing about it was hollow.

When he stepped back, Fr. Elijah tapped him on the shoulder. "By the way, George... I know this is down the road, but let me know when you two get engaged. I'd be happy to do your wedding."

George looked at Abigail, paused, and said, "Abigail, do you see how the candlelight glistens off your Grandpappy's bald spot? Isn't it romantic?"

Fr. Elijah and Abigail turned to each other and said, "It's about time!"

Then Fr. Elijah said, "Welcome to the Castle of the Saints, George. Welcome home."



A Picture of Evil

Once upon a time, there was a king. This king wished that his people know what evil was, so that his people could learn to recognize and flee from it. He issued a summons, that, in a year, all of his artists should come to him with one picture, to show what was evil. The best picture would be displayed to the people.

In a year, they all appeared at the king's palace. There were very few artists in the kingdom, but those who were there were very skillful, and worked as they had never worked before. Each brought a picture beneath a shroud.

The king turned to the first artist who had come. "Jesse, unveil your picture, and tell us its interpretation."

Jesse lifted the cloth. Against a background of blackened skulls was a dark green serpent, the color of venom and poison, with eyes that glowed red. "Your Majesty, it was the Serpent whose treacherous venom deceived man to eat of the forbidden fruit. The eye is the lamp of the body, and the Serpent's eye burns with the fires of Hell. You see that beyond the Serpent are skulls. Evil ensnares unto death and outer darkness."

The court murmured its approval. The picture was striking, and spoke its lesson well. The king, also, approved. "Well done, Jesse. If another picture is chosen, it will not be because you have done poorly. Now, Gallio, please show us your work."

Gallio unveiled his painting. In it was a man, his face red and veins bulging from hate. In his hand, he held a curved dagger. He was slowly advancing towards a woman, cowering in fear. "Your Majesty, man is created in the image of God, and human life is sacred. Thus the way we are to love God is often by loving our neighbor. There are few blasphemies more unholy than murder. You have asked me for a picture to show what evil is, that your subjects may flee from it. This is evil to flee from."

The court again murmured its approval, and the king began to shift slightly. It was not, as some supposed, because of the repellent nature of the pictures, but because he had secretly hoped that there would be only one good picture. Now, it was evident that the decision would not be so simple. "Gallio, you have also done well. And Simon, your picture?"

Simon unveiled his picture, and people later swore that they could smell a stench. There, in the picture, was the most hideous and misshapen beast they had ever seen. Its proportions were distorted, and its colors were ghastly. The left eye was green, and taller than it was wide. The right eye was even larger than the left, red, bloodshot, and flowing with blood; where there should have been a pupil, a claw grotesquely protruded. It was covered with claws, teeth, fur, scales, blood, slime, tentacles, and bits of rotted flesh; several members of the court excused themselves. "However it may be disguised, evil is that which is sick, distorted, and ugly."

There was a long silence. Finally, the king spoke again. "I see that there are three powerful pictures of evil, any one of which is easily a masterpiece and well fit to show to the people. Barak, I know that you have been given artistic genius, and that perhaps your picture will help me with this difficult decision. Unveil your picture."

Barak unveiled his picture, and an awestruck hush fell over the court. There, unveiled, was the most beautiful picture they had ever seen.

The picture was in the great vault of a room in a celestial palace. It was carved of diamond, emerald, ruby, jasper, amethyst, sardonyx, and chrysolite. Through the walls of gem, the stars shone brightly. But all of this was nothing compared to the creature in the room

and was nothing, compared to the creature in the room.

He carried with him power and majesty. He looked something like a man, but bore glory beyond intense. His face shone like the sun blazing in full force, his eyes flashed like lightning, and his hair like radiant flame. He wore a robe that looked as if it had been woven from solid light. In his left hand was a luminous book, written in letters of gold, and in his right hand was a sharp, double edged sword, sheathed in fire and lightning.

The king was stunned. It took him a long time to find words, and then he shouted with all of his might.

"You fool! I ask you for a picture of evil, and you bring me this! It is true that fools rush in where angels fear to tread, and that, like unthinking beasts, they do not hesitate to slander the glorious ones. What do you have to say for yourself and for this picture? I shall have an explanation now, or I shall have your head!"

Barak looked up, a tear trickling down his cheek. "Your Majesty, do you not understand? It is a picture of Satan."

The Spectacles

I got up, washed my face in the fountain, and put out the fire. The fountain was carved of yellow marble, set in the wall and adorned with bas-relief sculptures and dark moss. I moved through the labyrinth, not distracting myself with a lamp, not thinking about the organ, whose pipes ranged from 8' to 128' and could shake a cathedral to its foundation. Climbing iron rungs, I emerged from the recesses of a cluttered shed.

I was wearing a T-shirt advertising some random product, jeans which were worn at the cuffs, and fairly new tennis shoes. I would have liked to think I gave no hint of anything unusual: an ordinary man, with a messy house stocked with the usual array of mundane items. I blended in with the Illusion.

I drove over to Benjamin's house. As I walked in, I said, "Benjamin, I'm impressed. You've done a nice job of patching this place since the last explosion."

"Shut up, Morgan."

"By the way, my nephews are coming to visit in two weeks, Friday afternoon. Would you be willing to tinker in your laboratory when they come? Their favorite thing in the world is a good fireworks display."

"Which reminds me, there was one spice that I wanted to give you. It makes any food taste better, and the more you add, the better the food tastes. Pay no attention to the label on the bottle which says 'arsenic'. If

you'll excuse me one moment..." He began to stand up, and I grabbed his shoulder and pulled him back down into the chair.

"How are you, Benjamin?"

"How are you, Morgan?"

I sat silent for a while. When Benjamin remained silent, I said, "I've been spending a lot of time in the library. The sense one gets when contemplating an artistic masterwork is concentrated in looking at what effect *The Mystical Theology* had on a thousand years of wonder."

He said, "You miss the Middle Ages, don't you?"

I said, "They're still around—a bit here, a piece there. On one hand, it's very romantic to hold something small in your hand and say that it is all that is left of a once great realm. On the other hand, it's *only* romantic: it is not the same thing as finding that glory all about you.

"The pain is all the worse when you not only come from a forgotten realm, but you must reckon with the Illusion. It's like there's a filter which turns everything grey. It's not exactly that there's a sinister hand that forces cooperation with the Illusion and tortures you if you don't; in some ways things would be simpler if there were. Of course you're asking for trouble if you show an anachronism in the way you dress, or if you're so gauche as to speak honestly out of the wisdom of another world and push one of the hot buttons of whatever today's hot issues are. But beyond that, you don't have to intentionally cooperate with the Illusion; you can 'non-conform freely' and the Illusion freely conforms itself to you. It's a terribly isolating feeling."

Benjamin stood up, walked over to a bookshelf, and pulled out an ivory tube. "I have something for you, Morgan. A pair of spectacles."

"Did you make these?"

"I'm not saying."

"Why are you giving me eyeglasses? My eyes are fine."

"Your eyes are weaker than you think." He waited a moment, and then said, "And these spectacles have a virtue."

"What is their virtue? What is their power?"

"Please forgive me. As one who has struggled with the Illusion, you know well enough what it means to deeply want to convey something and know that you can't. Please believe me when I say that I would like to express the answer to your question, but I cannot."

I left, taking the glasses and both hoping that I was concealing my anger from Benjamin and knowing that I wasn't.

I arrived at home and disappeared into the labyrinth. A bright lamp, I hoped, would help me understand the spectacles' power. Had I been in a different frame of mind, I might have enjoyed it; I read an ancient and mostly complete Greek manuscript to *The Symbolic Theology* to see if it might reveal new insights. My eyes lingered for a moment over the words:

That symbol, as most, has two layers. Yet a symbol could have an infinite number of layers and still be smaller than what is without layer at all.

I had a deep insight of some sort over these words, and the insight is forever lost because I cared only about one thing, finding out what magic power the spectacles held. I tried to read a cuneiform tablet; as usual, the language gave me an embarrassing amount of trouble, and there was something strange about what it said that completely lacked the allure of being exotic. Wishing I had a better command of languages, I moved about from one serpentine passageway to another, looking at places, even improvising on the organ, and enjoying none of it. Everything looked exactly as if I were looking through a children's toy. Had Benjamin been watching too much *Dumbo* and given me a magic feather?

After a long and fruitless search, I went up into my house, put the spectacles in your pocket, and sat in my chair, the lights off, fatigued in mind and body. I do not recall know how long I stayed there. I only know that I jumped when the doorbell rang

that I jumped when the doorbell rang.

It was Amber. She said, "The supermarket had a really good sale on strawberries, and I thought you might like some."

"Do you have a moment to to come in? I have Coke in the fridge."

I had to stifle my urge to ask her opinion about the spectacles' virtue. I did not know her to be more than meets the eye (at least not in the sense that could be said of Benjamin or me), but the Illusion was much weaker in her than in most people, and she seemed to pick up on things that I wished others would as well. We talked for a little while; she described how she took her family to a pizza restaurant and her son "walked up to a soda machine, pushed one of the levers you're supposed to put your cup against, jumped in startlement when soda fell on his hand, and then began to lick the soda off."

"I've got to get home and get dinner on, but—ooh, you have new glasses in your pocket. Put them on for a moment."

I put my spectacles on, and she said something to me, but I have no idea what she said. It's not because I was drained: I was quite drained when she came, but her charm had left me interested in life again. The reason I have no idea what she said to me is that I was stunned at what I saw when I looked at her through the spectacles.

I saw beauty such as I had not begun to guess at. She was clad in a shimmering robe of scintillating colors. In one hand, she was holding a kaliedoscope, which had not semi-opaque colored chips but tiny glass spheres and prisms inside. The other hand embraced a child on her lap, with love so real it could be seen.

After she left, I took the spectacles off, put them in their case, and after miscellaneous nightly activities, went to bed and dreamed dreams both brilliant and intense.

When I woke up, I tried to think about why I had not recognized Amber's identity before. I closed my eyes and filtered through memories; Amber had given signals of something interesting that I had not picked

AMBER had given signals of something interesting that I had not picked up on—and she had picked up on things I had given. I thought of myself as one above the Illusion—and here I had accepted the Illusion's picture of her. Might there be others who were more than meets the eye?

I came to carry the spectacles with me, and look around for a sign of something out of the ordinary. Several days later, I met a tall man with cornrowed greying hair. When I asked him what he studied in college, he first commented on the arbitrariness of divisions between disciplines, before explaining that his discipline of record was philosophy. His thought was a textbook example of postmodernism, but when I put my spectacles on, I saw many translucent layers: each layer, like a ring of an oak, carried a remnant of a bygone age. Then I listened, and his words sounded no less postmodern, but echoes of the Middle Ages were everywhere.

I began to find these people more and more frequently, and require less and less blatant cues.

I sat in the living room, waiting with cans of Coca-Cola. I enjoy travelling in my nephews' realms; at a prior visit, Nathan discovered a whole realm behind my staircase, and it is my loss that I can only get in when I am with him. Brandon and Nathan had come for the fair that weekend, and I told them I had something neat-looking to show them before I took them to the fair.

I didn't realize my mistake until they insisted that I wear the spectacles at the fair.

I didn't mind the charge of public drunkenness *that* much. It was humiliating, perhaps, but I think at least *some* humiliations are necessary in life. And I didn't mind too much that my nephews' visit was a bummer for them. Perhaps that was unfortunate, but that has long been smoothed over. There were, however, two things that were *not* of small consequence to me.

The first thing that left me staggered was something in addition to

the majesty I saw. I saw a knight, clad in armor forged of solid light, and I saw deep scars he earned warring against dragons. I saw a fair lady who looked beautiful at the skin when seen without the spectacles, and beautiful in layer after layer below the skin when seen with them. The something else I saw in addition to that majesty was that this beauty was something that was not just in a few people, or even many. It was in every single person without exception. That drunken beggar everyone avoided, the one with a stench like a brewery next to a horse stable—I saw his deep and loyal friendships. I saw his generosity with other beggars—please believe me that if you were another beggar, what's his was yours. I saw the quests he made in his youth. I saw his dreams. I saw his story. Beyond all that, I saw something deeper than any of these, a glory underneath and beneath these things. This glory, however disfigured by his bondage to alcohol, filled me with wonder.

The reason the police kept me in the drunk tank for so long was that I was stunned and reeling. I had always known that I was more than what the Illusion says a person is, and struggled to convey my something more to other people... but I never looked to see how other people could be more than the grey mask the Illusion put on their faces. When I was in the drunk tank, I looked at the other men in wonder and asked myself what magic lay in them, what my spectacles would tell me. The old man with an anchor tattooed to his arm: was he a sailor? Where had he sailed on the seven seas? Had he met mermaids? I almost asked him if he'd found Atlantis, when I decided I didn't want to prolong the time the police officer thought I was drunk.

This brings me to the second disturbing find, which was that my spectacles were not with me. I assumed this was because the police had locked them away, but even after I was released, determined inquiry found no one who had seen them. They looked interesting, oddly shaped lenses with thick gold frames; had a thief taken them when I was stunned and before the police picked me up?

The next day I began preparing for a quest.

It filled me with excitement to begin searching the black market,

both because I hoped to find the spectacles, and because I knew I would experience these people in a completely new light.

I had dealings with the black market before, but it had always been unpleasant: not (let me be clear) because I did not know how to defend myself, or was in too much danger of getting suckered into something dangerous, but because I approached its people concealing the emotions I'd feel touching some kind of fetid slime. Now... I still saw that, but I tried to look and see what I would see if I were wearing my spectacles.

I didn't find anything that seemed significant. The next leg of my journey entailed a change of venue: I dressed nicely and mingled with the world of jewellers and antique dealers. Nada.

I began to search high and low; I brainstormed about what exotic places it might be, and I found interesting people along the way. The laborers whom I hired to help me search the city dump almost made me forget that I was searching for something, and over time I chose to look for my spectacles in places that would bring me into contact with people I wanted to meet...

Some years later, I was returning from one of my voyages and realized it had been long (*too long*) since I had spoken with Benjamin. I came and visited him, and told him about the people I'd met. After I had talked for an hour, he put his hand on my mouth and said, "Can I get a word in edgewise?"

I said, "Mmmph mph mmmph mmph."

He took his hand off my mouth, and I said, "That depends on whether you're rude enough to put your hand over my mouth in mid-sentence."

"That depends on whether you're rude enough to talk for an hour without letting your host get a word in edgewise."

I stuck my tongue out at him.

He stuck his tongue out at me.

Benjamin opened a box on his desk, opened the ivory case inside the box, and pulled out my spectacles. "I believe these might interest you." He handed them to me.

I sat in silence. The clock's ticking seemed to grow louder, until it chimed and we both jumped. Then I looked at him and said, "What in Heaven's name would I need them for?"

A Dream of Light

You pull your arms to your side and glide through the water. On your left is a fountain of bubbles, upside down, beneath a waterfall; the bubbles shoot down and then cascade out and to the surface. To your right swims a school of colorful fish, red and blue with thin black stripes. The water is cool, and you can feel the currents gently pushing and pulling on your body. Ahead of you, seaweed above and long, bright green leaves below wave back and forth, flowing and bending. You pull your arms, again, with a powerful stroke which shoots you forward under the seaweed; your back feels cool in the shade. You kick, and you feel the warmth of the sun again, soaking in and through your skin and muscles. Bands of light dance on the sand beneath you, as the light is bent and turned by the waves.

There is a time of rest and stillness; all is at a deep and serene peace. The slow motion of the waves, the dancing lights below and above, the supple bending of the plants, all form part of a stillness. It is soothing, like the soft, smooth notes of a lullaby.

Your eyes slowly close, and you feel even more the warm sunlight, and the gentle caresses of the sea. And, in your rest, you become more aware of a silent presence. You were not unaware of it before, but you are more aware of it now. It is there:

Being.

Love.

Life.

Healing.

Calm.

Rest.

Reality.

Like a tree with water slowly flowing in, through roots hidden deep within the earth, and filling it from the inside out, you abide in the presence. It is a moment spent, not in time, but in eternity.

You look out of the eternity; your eyes are now open because you have eternity in your heart and your heart in eternity. In the distance, you see dolphins; one of them turns to you, and begins to swim. The others are not far off.

It lets you pet its nose, and nestles against you. You grab onto its dorsal fin, and go speeding off together. The water rushes by at an exhilarating speed; the dolphin jumps out of the water, so that you see waves and sky for a brief moment before splashing through the surface.

The dolphins chase each other, and swim hither and thither, in and out from the shore. After they all seem exhausted, they swim more slowly, until at last you come to a lagoon.

In the center, you see a large mass; swimming closer, you see that it is a sunken ship. You find an opening; inside, all is dark, but you find a passageway.

After some turns, you come up in a different place. You come up through a fountain in a public garden; the bushes and ivy are a deep, rich shade of green, and sheets of water cascade down the yellowed marble of the fountain. It is ornately and intricately sculpted, with bas-relief scenes of a voyage.

As you study the pictures, day turns to night, and all that you see is

bathed in moonlight. You are looking upon a statue: a delicate, slender, elfin nude, whose long hair cascades over her shoulders and about her body. She is reaching up to the sky, as if to touch the moon and stars. She is carved out of white marble, which looks pale blue, almost luminous, in the moonlight. It looks as if she was taken from the moon, and is rising up to touch it again.

The statue is on a tall pedestal of black marble. In the moonlight, the forest has a very deep color, a green that is almost blue or purple; the dark beauty of the night makes the statue seem almost radiant. Off in the distance, you hear a high, melancholy, lilting song; it is played on a harp and sung by a voice of silver. There is something haunting and yet elusive about the melody; it subtly tells of something wanted and searched for, yet not quite reached. And it is beautiful.

You sit, looking at the statue and listening to the song, for a time. They seem to suggest a riddle, a secret - but you know not what.

You walk along; fireflies begin to appear, and you can hear the sound of crickets chirping. There is a gentle breeze. The sky stands above like a high and faroff crystalline dome; the trees and grass below surround you, like little children who see a beloved elder coming, and run clamoring for a kiss. The grass is smooth and cool beneath your feet. There is a sweet, faint fragrance in the air, as of lilacs.

A round little girl, wandering through the forest, sees you and comes running. She is dark, with olive skin, and her black hair flares out behind her. She is wearing a dark green robe, the color of the forest, and her step is almost that of a dance - as if she is from a people where moving and dancing are not two different things. She is holding, in her hand, a simple bouquet of dandelions. "Look, look!" she says, "I have flowers!"

She jumps into your arms, welcoming you. Her touch is soft, and gentle. It is not near the softness of a grown woman; it has rather a ... simplicity. It is hard to find the right word. Then you recognize what it is. It has something of the carefree play of a child, but there is more than even abandon. She is holding you with complete trust. You do not doubt that she could fall asleep in your arms.

She begins to talk to you about many things. She talks about the forest, about people, about the stars, about God. After a time, you realize that she is not merely talking, but singing, as if the first words she heard were the words of a song. After another time, you realize that you have lost her words completely, and are entranced by the song. Presently she stops, and says, "Spin me! Spin me!"

Little children everywhere like to be held by the arms and swung around; this one is no exception. After you are both very dizzy, she takes you by the hand and begins, leading you along a path, to show you little details of the forest that you had never noticed before. Apart from the little details, there is something else which you begin to slowly see in the forest. The song by which she speaks, the dance by which she moves - and not just her, you do not doubt, but her people - seem to be echoed in the forest... and then you realize that rather they are echoes of the forest. Hearing, seeing, feeling that beauty from another person - you still do not doubt that they come from her, but they also help you to see what was always there but you had not noticed. As you walk along, you are lost in thoughts about the genius of all great artists... and begin to think about visiting an art gallery, not so that you can see what is in the gallery, but so that you can see what is not in the gallery.

The path widens out, around a shimmering pool. The golden flames of torches around the pool glimmer when reflected in the pool. There is singing - singing like that of the little girl, but the sound of a whole orchestra as next to the sound of a beginning flute. Men and women together pour fourth a rich harmony. The air is sweet with a delicate fragrance of incense; one of them brings you a cool wooden cup. Inside is a strawberry wine. It is sweet, and sour; the taste brings back memories of earliest childhood.

A circle forms among the people, then another, then another. Soon all of the people are spinning and weaving in a joyful dance. After a time, you realize that you are at the center; they are softly singing, "Welcome, Somebody," and listening intently. Arms and hands reach out, and sweep you into the dance. The dance is ordered, but also free; it draws you in, and, as you move, you feel that you can do no wrong.

How long the dance lasts, you do not know; still filled with its bliss, you find yourself sitting and talking with the people. One of them finds a soft seat of moss for you to sit on; another brings you a plum. Its taste is tart, and it has the texture that only a plum has — and, when you bite into it, you know that it was still on the tree when it was chosen.

The night winds on, and, after a time, you are led into a building woven out of living trees, with a bed of loam. Into it you sink; it is soft and deep...

You find yourself standing at the edge of a forest and a grassy plain. The mouth of a cave descends into the earth, and just before this is an old man sitting on a three-legged wooden stool. He is wearing a coarse grey-green robe, and has a long, flowing white beard. He is staring intently into the forest, with a concentration you have never seen before. It is like a gaze into a lover's eyes — nay, even deeper, a probe into the soul.

He shifts positions a few times, in his sitting, and at last stands up, takes the stool, and begins to walk towards the cavern. When he was looking into the forest, you were absorbed in watching him; now, you notice another man, a young one, approach the former.

"Is it Senex?"

"I am he."

"Senex, the great teacher?"

You see the old man's hand move to cover his mouth, but not quite quickly enough to conceal the faintest crack of a smile. The young man stands attentively, waiting for words to come.

The old man's frame shakes once. A second passes, and then it shakes again and again. Then sounds the laughter that he had been attempting to conceal. Soon, the old man is convulsed with mirth, and making no attempt to conceal it.

After a while, almost doubled over with laughter, he begins to pull himself up. You can see his face from a different angle, and you see a

merry twinkle in his eye. He places his arm over the young man's shoulder.

"Forgive me, brother, but it has been ages since anyone has addressed me as 'teacher' or 'great'. You cannot imagine how funny it sounds to me."

"Are you not Senex, who has traveled the seven seas, who has seen visions and been visited by angels, who has written treatises and instructed many?"

The man chuckles, and says, "Yes, I am all that, and much more. I am the image, likeness, and glory of God. I pray, and in my prayers I touch the stars and shake the foundations of the kingdom of Hell. I am a king and priest. I am a son of God. My name is written in the book of life. I am a god."

"Then why do you find it funny that I address you as 'great', or 'teacher'?"

"Because I am more than a great teacher, as are the children who dance through this field, as are you." Here the old man smiles at the young. "Come, now. Do you doubt that you are God's own son? What teaching, or miracles, or visions, or conquests, or exploits compare with that?"

"But if you are so great, why should you object to being called a great teacher? Surely the title is not false."

"My dear god - and now I am not addressing the Creator, but you yourself - what is wrong with the title is not that it says that I am a great teacher. I am. What is wrong is that the title implies that there are others who are not so great," and here the old man gave a great belly laugh, "when the truth of the matter is that the other people are so much more than a great teacher. I will not mind being called 'teacher' by you, if you agree to address everyone else as 'god' and 'goddess'. But if you will not call them 'god' and 'goddess', then simply call everyone 'brother' or 'sister'."

The young man stands in silent reflection for a time. "I came in search of a man who could share with me profound wisdom; I see now that I have found him. So now I ask you: Give me a profound insight, that I may contemplate it for the rest of my life, and grow wise."

"Do you not know that God is love, that God loves mankind, that we have the new commandment to 'Love one another'?"

"All of this I have believed since I was a little boy."

"Then I give you one more lesson, to contemplate and learn for the rest of your life."

The young man listens, eager with expectation.

The old man bends down, plucks a blade of grass, and holds it in his outstretched hand.

The young man takes it, and waits for an explanation. When, after a time, the old man says nothing, he says, "This blade of grass is like the blade of a sword. Have you given this to me as a sign that I should contemplate spiritual warfare, and be ready with the sword of the Spirit?"

The old man says, "You should, but that is not why."

The young man thinks for a time, then says, "This grass is nourished by the sun, and so tells of it. Grass and sun exist as God's creation, and tell of him. Is this why you have given me the blade of grass?"

The old man says, "What you said is very true, but that is not why, either."

The young man says, "When Christ lived on earth, he lived as a carpenter, and observed and was surrounded by the birds of the air, the grass of the field, the lilies, and ten thousand other things. Have you given me this blade of grass to remind me of Christ's time on earth, or of his humanity, or that this is a place he passed by?"

The old man says, "You are still right, and you are still wrong."

The young man says, "Then what profound truth can you be teaching me? What secret key escapes my grass? I asked if you had given it to me as a symbol of a profound spiritual truth, and you said, 'no'. Then I asked you if you had given it to me that I might deduce by logic what it tells about God, and you still said, 'no'. Then, after that, I asked you if you had given it to me as a historical reminder of what has happened about blades of grass, and your answer is still the everchanging 'no'. What can I possibly be missing? What am I leaving out?"

The old man turns to face the young, and looks deep into his eyes. "This blade of grass I have given you," he said, "because it is a blade of grass."

There is a look of puzzlement on the young man's face, which slowly melts into dawning comprehension. He steps forward and kisses the old man, with a long, full kiss on the lips, and then steps back and bows deeply - and the old man bows to him - and says, "Thank you." When the old man has responded, "You are very much welcome, brother," the young turns, clutching the blade of grass as if it were a diamond - no, more than that, as if it were a blade of grass - and walks back into the forest. There is a smile on his face.

You walk off in the field, and lie down on the grass. The day is growing warm and sultry; a faint breeze blows.

The breeze carries with it a small, white feather of the softest down. It gently falls on the sole of your foot. The breeze blows this way and that; the feather catches here, rolls there on your foot, brushing ever so lightly, up and down, up and down.

You feel a finger, cool as marble, just barely touching the back of your neck. It tingles; you can feel the sensation radiating up and down your spine. The feather brushes against your foot, and the finger just barely touches the back of your neck. It is a slow, lingering, tingling sensation; as time passes, the sensation becomes more and more real, and just won't go away. It tickles so.

A time passes, and you find yourself walking along a beach. It is almost dusk, and the rainbow colors of sunset are beginning to spill

almost dusk, and the rainbow colors of sunset are beginning to spin across the sky. It is autumn, and the many-hued leaves of the trees fall about, twirling this way and that in the wind. There is a smell of mist and brine in the air; the waves run and twirl about your toes.

A bird flies off to the right; its flight is light and agile. It flies to and fro, this way and that, until it disappears into the sunset.

There is a feeling of wistfulness, of a presence departed. To the left, you see a grayed swing, rocking back and forth in the wind; its rusty chain squeaks. It is in the yard of a boarded up house, with a garden long overgrown in weeds.

On a whim, you slowly walk up the path into the yard, and sit down on the swing. You rock back and forth; there is a feeling of emptiness. Images form and swirl in your mind.

A tree is felled; from its trunk are taken the staves of a barrel. Fresh and white, the staves are slowly covered with dust; each time the dust is disturbed or brushed off, the wood underneath is darker, grayer, rougher.

People are born, walk hither and thither, grow old, and die. Generations come and pass, and the earth grows older. People learn how to live - and then die. Vanity of vanities.

Everything is dreary, desolate, fleeting. The walls of your vision grow narrow and dark; your mind and imagination seem to protest the motion. It grows darker and darker.

After a time, you see a light - a little light. As everything around grows darker and more drab, the light does not grow brighter, but neither does it grow dimmer.

A voice sounds in the shadows - you do not doubt that is the voice of the light - says, "Come closer."

You come closer, and you see that she is a flame. A little flame.

A thousand questions form in your mind. They pour forth from you - Why is it all so meaningless? Why do things wither and decay? Why does

Why is it all so meaningless. Why do things matter and decay. Why does evil run rampant?

The flame listens patiently, and then speaks. "Look into me."

You look into the flame, and you see everything you saw before, but it looks different. The boards of the cask are no less grey. But you see that inside the cask is wine - wine which grows rich and well-aged. The people still die - and now you see an even darker death for some. But you also see past the death, past the mourning and grieving, to a birth into life - a richness and a fullness that could not be imagined from before.

"Flame, can I step into you, so that I may be delivered from the unpleasant things?"

"No, dear one. That is not the way of things."

"Then what can you give me?"

"I give you this: that you may always look into me, and that I will never be quenched."

"Flame, what is your name?"

"My name is Hope."

You look into the flame, and again see the outside world. There is still the sadness, but there is an incredible beauty. An ant crawls across your finger; you sit entranced at the wonder as its little body moves. Then you look at a rose bush, quivering in the wind - it is covered with thorns, but at the top of each stem is a flower that is still God's autograph.

You get up and walk further.

You see a little girl on her knees, and standing against her, a man holding an immense sword. The man raises his sword over his head, and brings it down.

Then you see the sword stop in the middle of the air. There is a clanging sound; the man's powerful muscles ripple in his exertion, but

the sword does not move an inch further.

Then you slowly see a shimmer in the air, and there is another sword - a sword that seems to be forged of solid light. A sword that is blocking the first. As you watch, you see an angel beginning to become visible. It is powerful, majestic, and terrifying. The man drops his sword, and runs in blind terror.

You can see the angel's sword here, a hand there, the hem of his luminous robe. But what you see is fleeting, and you cannot see the whole angel.

"Why cannot I see you? I can see the grass, and see the girl. Are you not as real as they?"

You see a little boy, walking on the beach, picking up a pebble here, a shell there, a piece of driftwood every now and then, and putting them into a sack.

Then he comes upon a fallen log. And he grabs one protrusion, and then another, trying to lift it. But it will not budge.

"Some day, you will be able to see God himself. But now, you can not see things that are too real for you to see."

You see a diamond, slowly rotating, in light. One facet after another seems to sparkle.

As you watch, not just what appear to be the facets, but what appears to be the diamond, seems to change form, shift, and sparkle in different ways. The light itself seems to shift color, direction, focus.

Then speaks an almost silent voice: "You are looking upon the one thing which never changes, in a light that has been the same since before the creation of time."

There is a moment of silence, and you feel a surge of power rush about you, and tear through your very being. It is like a blast of wind, throwing you off your feet so violently that wind itself is knocked out of

you. It is like the liquid fire that explodes out of a volcano. It is like a flash of light beyond intense, light that is so much light that you cannot see. It bears like an immeasurable weight and presence on your mind and spirit; its might and force fills you with awe - no, more than awe, fear - no, more than fear: terror. It is a reality which lies beyond imagination.

A booming, thunderous voice commands, "Fear not!" Then a hand reaches out and touches you, and you are filled with strength. It holds and stills you; you dimly realize that you have been quivering as a leaf. You somehow find the strength to stand, and if anything see a greater glory and majestic power than before. This being before you is like a storm in solid form. His feet press into the earth with the weight of a mountain, and shine like the sun in full glory. He wears a robe woven of solid light, and at his side hangs a sword sheathed in fire and lightning. His hands radiate power; they seem by their energy as if they are about to tear apart the fabric of space. You dare not look upon his face. Suddenly, you find yourself falling at his feet.

Again booms the voice: "Do not worship me! I am not God!"

A hand lifts you up, and sets you on your feet. His touch is more intense even than his appearance - you are sure that it will destroy you - yet somehow it makes you more solid.

It is all you can do not to fall down again. Somehow the words come, "Who are you?"

"I am a spirit, formed before the foundation of the world. I am a star, who sang for joy as the world was created. I am a messenger, who stands in the presence of God himself and then flies out of the heavens to wage war against the darkness. I am your servant. I am an angel."

Suddenly, images flash through your mind, images to which it would be merciful to call surreal and bizarre. You see chubby little boys fluttering about on birds' wings. You see voluptuous women, suspended in mid-air, whose clothing is perennially falling off. It is as if you have all your life seen pictures of Don Quixote wearing a wash-basin as a helmet, holding a dull sword and sitting astride poor, plodding Rozinante - and then, suddenly and out of nowhere, find yourself staring the paladin

Roland, with his sword Durendal drawn and the rippling muscles that have torn trees out of the ground, face to face. You find yourself babbling and attempting to explain what you remember, and suddenly see the angel shaking with a booming, resounding laughter.

"What, my dear child, you would wish me tame and safe, like a little pet?"

It would be much easier to face a creature which was safe, which one could predict. It would be a great deal less disquieting, and a great deal less disturbing. Yet, somehow, you feel a feeling deep within you that it would be an immeasurable loss.

He stretches out his hand. "Come, take my hand. I have something to show you."

You extend your hand, and find it engulfed in a force that is like electricity. Yet somehow, you feel something else as well - a touch. The angel spreads out great, glorious, golden, many-hued wings, and with a mighty jump launches into the air.

You speed along, both of you. Colors and forms speed by. Then, suddenly, you are at a place that is absolutely still, absolutely silent, and pitch black. "Where are we?"

"That is not a question that I can answer in terms that you will understand. Only watch."

You begin to see a pair of hands, They are together, and facing outward. Then they slowly move outward - and behind the hands is left a rainbow, in all its colors. The hands turn, move along, complete a perfect circle. It is the most perfect rainbow you have ever seen.

Then the left hand strikes the rainbow, and it shatters into innumerable miniscule fragments. The right hand takes the shards, and with a single motion scatters them across the blackness. Each piece of the rainbow glows with light, a little reflection of the whole, and then you see a faint, pale, crystalline blue glow. The pieces are scattered irregularly, and one looks almost like - here an insight comes like a flash - a

and she looks almost like here an insight comes like a flash a constellation.

There is no horizon, no landscape, no other light. There are stars in every direction and from every view. The view is the most breathtaking view of the sky that you have ever seen.

Then the angel takes your hand again, and says, "Do you understand what you saw?"

"I think I do."

"Good. Then let me show it to you again."

Forms shift and move, and you see a faint, nebulous sea of matter spread about in every direction. It is not still - no, it is moving. You look deeper, and you can see that it is dancing.

Then you see a circle forming, and spinning. And another around it, and another. Soon many circles shift and melt together. The ones on the inside seem to move with more speed, vibrancy, energy. Then you can see a kind of a ball forming.

The swirling matter around it spins inward, more and more tightly, until a fire seems to light inside - and fills the new-formed sphere with radiance. Flashes of light, bursts of glowing forms, like water on a pot boiling, seethe and foment. In your silence and stillness watching it, you begin to realize that spheres are forming, coming to light, becoming stars, all around - and, just as the stars formed out of forms dancing, the stars themselves are forms dancing, in a great, glorious, majestic dance.

The strains of a Christmas carol ring in your ears: "Fall on your knees. O hear the angel voices!" Suddenly you realize that you and your host are not still at all, but swept into the great dance - and, about you, you can see shimmers of... you know not what.

After a long, glorious, blissful time, the angel again takes your hand, and again you find yourself swept away. When you find yourself at rest, you are again in pitch black.

"And why am I here?"

"To see what you have seen, for the third time."

You wait with eager expectation, to see what could be next. Inside you, the images foam and mix. The rainbow, containing each piece and found in each piece, the colors, the moving dance, the energy... You try to push it aside, so that you may attentively perceive whatever changes may be happening...

Time passes, with still the forms fermenting in your mind. You feel serene and at rest; the place is a place of profound peace. After a time the images begin to fade, leaving behind a feeling, a wholeness, a satiety. It is like, after a vivacious dance has ended, sitting down, cooling off - and, then, at rest, finding the joy and the intoxication of the dance still in your heart, and your head floating in the air. It is like, after finishing a meal, sitting with its feeling of fullness.

After a time, you break the silence. "Why has nothing happened here? Why have I seen nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing? Am I here to wait?"

"Has nothing really happened here?"

"Nothing that I can perceive. I haven't seen, or heard, or felt anything."

"Really? You have perceived nothing?"

"Perhaps I have perceived something so subtle and ethereal that I can not notice it. I do not doubt that this place holds something wonderful. But I have not noticed anything."

"Really?"

"Why do you answer my questions with other questions, with riddles, instead of telling me anything?"

"Do I?"

After a time, pondering what this could mean, you ask, "Am I here to wait, for something that will happen? If I am, can you tell me when it will happen? Or at least tell me if you can tell me?"

The angel is silent for a moment, and then says, "When you have seen one of these things, you have seen more than one thing. You have seen the shattering of the rainbow; one of its fragments is the one near your home that shines light on your fields and mountains. But the rainbow is also the one, beautiful, perfect language that was before man took upon himself a second time the quest to become gods."

"But did not the sage say that we are gods?"

"Yes, you are gods, and more than gods, and will become more than you even are now. But the man who would exalt himself to godhood, blasphemes. Would that men could learn to be men, without trying to ascend to godhood or even be heroes."

"Should I not learn to be godlike?"

"Learn to be a god, not in the way of the man who wills to be the highest of gods, but in the way of the God who was willing to be the lowest of men."

After a time, the angel continues on.

"In a way, each shattered piece of the rainbow - including the language that you now speak - contains the pattern and image of the whole. But in another way, it has lost some of the colors. There are things that were in the whole rainbow, that are not in the piece.

"So I will answer your question, about waiting, with a word from another language. The word is not a word which answers the question, but rather which un-asks it. So I answer you with this word: Mu."

"But why do you un-ask the question, instead of simply answering it?"

"That I will tell you, if you first tell me, to use an expression from the

child's' words of your land, if the elephant in your refrigerator is eating peanut butter. Is the elephant in your refrigerator eating peanut butter? Yes, or no?"

Your mind is quite full; it is slow work, pondering and absorbing all that you have seen and heard. Finally you ask, "Before anything happens, may I wait here and ponder, and digest things?"

The angel says, "Yes indeed; that is why you were brought here."

A time passes in the silence, the stillness, the darkness. It is the beginning of the slow growth that makes a newborn experience into a full-grown memory, and brings it into who you are. It is the rest which makes every work perfect.

This lasts you know not how long. After a time, you realize that you are in a different place. You are with a man of sorts - if 'man' is the correct word to use. 'Man' is not a wrong word, but there are many others. He seems to be of no particular age. He is fully what every simple child is; he is fully what every ancient sage is.

After a time, you begin to wonder what his age is, and how long you have been there. You see him smile, and then burst out laughing. "Come," he says, "Let me show you what I see." He places his hand on your head, and suddenly you see an image - of a little child, in a magnificent and wondrous cavern full of rubies, and emeralds, and sapphires, and diamonds. He is off in a corner, picking up lumps of coal.

"This place is full of diamonds; come, enjoy, take and carry off as much as you are ready to carry."

Then you begin to look around, and see that you are indeed in a cavern of sorts. It is filled with a brilliant, powerful light; the walls and ceiling, full of irregular bulges and niches, seem to be gilded and encrusted with glowing gems. The space is full of forms magnificent and wonderful - fountains, statues, pedestals, crystalline spheres, animals. Everything in the room seems to have the breath of life.

You begin to gather gems; each one, luminous, seems to have its own

particular feel, its own particular energy - you can almost hear a music when you touch them. Their cool, crystalline forms seem to be of congealed light.

After you have gathered a great many, you notice a peculiar phenomenon: the more you carry, the easier it seems to be to pick up even more. The gems embrace each other, and begin to form a vast interlocking structure about you. It forms a great, shining suit of armor - a scintillating armor of adornment, a living form that is as light as thought. As even more time passes, the gems begin to melt into you. As each flows into your body, you feel its energy and light, and soon, a high, subtle, ethereal music courses through your veins.

At last you stand, armored with an armor that is flawless. It gives, you do not doubt, a protection against blows that a man of iron would envy. Yet the armor is not dark and cumbersome; it is light and energizing. Your skin is as soft and sensitive as ever, and you feel the unfettered lightness of nudity, free as Adam - no, you realize, a greater lightness, for a nude person is only not fettered by clothing, but this armor fills you with the freedom of which fetters are but a crude attempt to oppose. Carrying this armor leaves you more free to move and dance, and fills you with a positive energy.

You revel in the fullness, the intoxicating lightness. After a time, you realize that the man is looking upon you. He is smiling.

You begin to ask how much you owe for this wonderful treasure, and he breaks forth in peals of merry laughter. "These treasures are not for sale. They are a free gift. Come and fill yourself to overflowing with these treasures as often as you wish."

"Then they cost nothing?"

"No, they are very costly. They are more costly than you can ever imagine. But they are given freely, like water and light and breath, and a thousand thousand other treasures that no money can possibly buy."

"Then why are they given freely? Surely such things are worth a price!"

piece.

The man laughs again. "You are beginning to grow alive - just beginning. When you are truly alive, you will dance so freely that you will need no one to tell you these things, because the answers will be in you."

After a while, he hands you a chalice. "Here, drink this, that you may remain dreaming." You drink it, and have a flash of insight that waking is not the only aroused state. In a moment, you reach out and touch a star.

You find yourself inside a castle of ice. It is cold, elegant, pure. It is night-time, and the deep blue of the starry sky provides the light. You walk about in a magnificent structure, through halls and archways, around pillars and doorways, all the time in a great silence. The place is majestic and massive.

The coldness of the ice fills the palace with a deep peace. There is a rest here. You cannot see, nor feel the presence of, yet you somehow sense a kinship to the resting dead, sleeping, awaiting the dawn when sleepers shall rise.

As you step, as you breathe, you hear your echoes, and then the echoes of your echoes. The silence has a presence.

It is a timeless place. There is no hurry, no rush, no clutter. The sparseness of the architecture is matched only by the stillness of the air. You stand and walk, footfall after footfall penetrating the vastness. For it is vast and large; it is ordered, and yet unknown.

Through the glassy ceiling above you see the stars, and as you look at them, you can begin to hear the faintest tinklings of ethereal music. Your ears listen with a new keenness, flowing from the crystalline armor, and you can hear, not a music breaking the silence, but a music in the silence. It is, like the palace, sparse, and simple. It has an order and structure, and yet not time; it is a music which sounds as if it has always been there.

After a time, you realize that you are singing a song - sparse, simple, crystalline, and beautiful. It would not be quite right to say that you started a song: rather, that you have joined a song - a song that always has been, and always will be, a song which is sung not by you alone, but

has been, and always will be - a song which is sung not by you alone, but by angels and archangels, by the living and the dead, by the rocks and stars and trees themselves. And for the tiniest fraction of an instant, you can almost see the song rising, as incense, in the presence of He Who Is.

As you walk through a corridor, a transformation begins. Tendrils of mist curl about your feet as a shroud slowly rises from the ground. The walls become the walls of tall, narrow buildings lining the sides of the road. They are like ancient, cracked vellum, and ivylike bushes of yellow roses climb the sides.

All is still as you walk the streets; the only motion you can see is that of the mist dancing about you. Every now and then, you catch, out of the corner of your eye, what seems to be the form of a person just disappearing around a corner - but you are never sure.

After a time, you come upon a massive, dark Gothic cathedral. It is carved out of black marble. As you pass through the doors, the air becomes very dry; there is a feeling of imminence.

As you step into the sanctuary, the building itself is rocked by a blast of sound. Your body vibrates as you hear the deep, rich sounds of an organ resound all about you. The song is a fugue, turgid and complex. You hear three parts playing, then four, then six - interwoven, turning about, speaking to each other. It is in the key of E minor.

The song continues for almost an hour, woven with a deep sense of mystery. Like the building, like the city, it is filled with a dark majesty. There is a strain you are listening to hear - and you seem almost to have caught it, now here, now there, but then it vanishes. The song comes to a climax, and then a thunderous resolution. Then the sanctuary becomes as silent as before.

A shaft of light falls, and you see a man walking towards you. He is tall and lean, and wearing a black robe with golden edges. He has black hair, and a thin, close beard. His step is stately and regal, but does not make a single sound. He reaches you, and, bowing deeply, says, "Greetings."

His eyes meet yours, and you see that he has a piercing, probing gaze. It is intense, looking deep into your eyes - no, more, deep into your soul. And there is something else - you can not tell what. You begin to gaze back, and you realize what it is. His gaze is gentle.

He reads the questions on your face, and after a time says, "I cannot tell you everything that you wonder now. If I were to say the answers, answers that I am only beginning to understand, they would sound like trivia, or sound meaningless. And if I could make you understand them all, I would do you a great disservice."

"Why?"

"Because the questions you ask are the right questions, but they are also the wrong questions."

After a time, he begins again.

"But there is something which I can do. I can lead you to the library."

He leads you through a twisted passageway, then down a stairwell. The stairwell alights in a room with shelves upon shelves upon shelves of dust-covered tomes.

"And," the man says, "I can give you this."

He reaches into the folds of his robe, and gives you a black rose.

It is a queer feeling to be alone with that many books. You reach on one of the shelves and pull one out. It is an illuminated manuscript. It tells a story deep, and detailed, and rich, and subtle. What you can read of it is like barely seeing the ripples on the surface of a lake, while untold forms move about below in the depths.

You replace it and look at another. It is a manual of philosophy and theology. It tells something about God - but it is also too subtle and complex to understand. And there is something else... It is like reading a book about arrangements and variations of color - to a man who has been blind from birth.

Then another... You can tell from its form that it has a sort of reason, or structure to it, but you cannot tell what. At first, you find what seem to be logical errors - and it does contradict itself, sharply and in many ways... and yet... you have the feeling that you are like a man, versed in logic and philosophy but devoid of emotion, poring over a joke, trying to understand it as an argument - and having no idea why others read it and then do something called laughing.

Another book, and another. Each time it seems like you understand something, you find yourself more confused than before. After a time, it becomes words upon words - and the more words are added, the less meaning there seems to be.

You sit down, exhausted and bewildered. After a time, you realize that a woman is standing some distance off. She is wearing a robe that is purple and black, with long sleeves and a long, flowing skirt. Her long hair, which falls behind her to a length you cannot tell, is jet black, and yet her skin is almost luminous.

She steps forward, and, embracing you, gives you three kisses on alternate cheeks. "Have you learned anything yet?"

"Nothing. I can't understand anything in the books."

"Have you thought to see what you can learn?"

"I have thought, and I do not doubt that there is a lesson, but it is seven times over too subtle and too complex for me."

"There is a lesson that you are missing, but not because it is too subtle and too complex. You are missing it because it is too simple and too obvious."

"I have read from two and ninety books, and cannot share with you the least shred of wisdom that is found in them. I do not understand. So in what wise am I to claim that I have learned?"

"Is there not even one thing you can claim to have learned?"

It is with frustration that you say, "Only the littlest thing - that I do not understand."

"That is not so little as you think."

She looks at you for a second, and now you can see, as well as a probing gaze, a hint of a smile. "Come; you are fatigued. Let me take you so that you can eat and rest." She places an arm around you - her touch is soft and responsive - and leads you through other passageways into a room with a table.

The table is set with plates of clear glass; the table is set with bread, fish, and white cheeses, and there are two glasses of white wine. She leads you to a chair, which offers a welcome rest, and then sits down opposite you.

After you have eaten a couple of pieces of bread, you see her again gently looking upon you. "I can see the question in your eyes. You are wondering, are you not, why you were not simply told that you do not understand."

"Yes."

"Would you have understood that you do not understand? As you do now?" She pauses, and takes a sip of the wine. "A mouse can only drink its fill from a river, and no man can learn what he is not ready to understand."

The rest of the meal is eaten in silence. It is a calm, peaceful, prayerful silence. The bread is flavorful and dense; the cheese is mild; the wine is dry and cool.

After the meal, you both sit in more silence. It is a time of rest... and also of community. There are no words and there is no touch, and yet you can sense a kind of attention, a welcome, from the lady.

When you feel refreshed, she leads you through another passageway, and out to a door to the street. She gently embraces you, and says, "It is time for you to go, and begin to taste some of the other secrets of this city."

I do not know if we shall meet again, but I suspect that it will come to pass. Fare Thee well."

The street is different from the one you first saw - it also is enshrouded by a cloak of mist, but it is wider, and there are people passing by. Their clothing varies some, but much of it is variation on a dark grey theme, almost seeming to be mist in solid form. A young woman passes by on the other side of the street; a cascade of ebon hair hides part of her face - yet you can still see, in one corner of her mouth, a hint of a smile.

You come across an open square, with an intricate pattern of stone tiles in the center. Two opposite corners have trees - gnarled, angular, and leafless. One of the corners has a fountain; cascading sheets of water fall between many-leveled pools, in which silvery and golden fish swim about. The opposite corner has a statue.

The statue is on a large pedestal of dark grey marble; the statue itself is of blackened bronze. It is of a man, gaunt and haggard, and clad in rags. His arms are raised up to Heaven, as is also his head, and yet his face bears a look of despair. The pedestal bears the inscription, "I am thirsty. Who will give me something to drink?"

You find a jug, and, filling it at the fountain, climb up the statue and pour water into the statue's mouth. You hear sounds of water flowing, and then there is a click. It is followed by a whirr of moving clockwork, and, getting down, you see that one of the sides of the pedestal has turned inwards, revealing a shaft descending into the earth.

A lantern is at your feet; you light it, and begin to climb down the ladder at one side. It descends into a passageway; taking one direction, you come to a four way intersection. The left path turns into a circular room, with a domed roof, and a pool in the center. You test its depths - and find it descends below the floor.

Inside, you find an underwater passageway. You swim through it, and surface in a room with rough walls. Climbing upwards, you find the room to narrow into a shaft, which turns into a low passageway, and then opens into another room

opens into another room.

This room is lit by the glow of torches; it is large and rectangular. At the center is a thick, low stone column, about three feet tall, with some protrusions bulging from the top. When you come closer, you see that it is an intricate clockwork device; working with it, you find a pattern in its motions, and work with it until there is a click, and a segment of the far wall slides into the ground.

The passageway is dark, as was the room and passageway which you traversed without your lantern, and it opens shortly into another room. At first you cannot see; then, as you step in, your eyes slowly adjust to the darkness. Inside this room, you see another statue.

This statue is a male nude. It is an iron statue; it is immense, and the figure is powerfully built. It is in the middle of a stride - a long, powerful stride, one which seems almost to shake the ground. His eyes bear an intense gaze, one which seems to almost flash lightning, and one arm is raised, and hand outstretched, in a gesture of authority. The surface of the statue is rough and unfinished. There is something in this statue that seems to almost radiate power and energy and weight and light.

And yet, when you look closer, you notice something different. The eyes seem sad. And then, looking closer, you suddenly realize that the statue is bound by shackles. The shackles are a monstrosity, a violation; they threaten to wear down his energy and burden his strength. You grab at the shackles to see if you can pull them free, and feel a chill and drain run through the body. You drop them in shock.

As you stand in the room, you seem to even more be able to see - not only the forms, but the absurdity and injustice. The man's great strength - it is straining against the binding chains. Your eyes trace the shackles to where they are engulfed by the floor.

Then you realize that there is another set of shackles, empty, open. You shudder to look at them; the touch of one of the chains sapped your soul; breathing felt as if you had been forcefully struck on the chest. You begin to back out of the room... and you see the statue's eyes.

.....

He is not pleading; he is not begging. If anything, his eyes say "Go far away; that these chains imprison me is bad enough, without one more." You do not see pride, of someone unwilling to receive help, or the cowardice of one who dare not ask. It is rather the compassion, of someone who would not wish his worst enemy to feel the misery he feels. You feel a stirring inside your heart. What the man does not ask, conscience and every noble instinct demand. And you walk in.

A chill sweeps through you as you cross the threshold. You can almost see a presence that is unholy. At each step you are jolted. And yet... you have the strength to follow.

You fasten one of the open shackles about your feet; it stings like the sting of a scorpion. The other, and you feel as if you are sinking into the ground. A shackle is fastened around one hand, and it is all you can do not to fall down. You place your other hand in the last, and begin to close it...

The shackles fall from the man's feet, and you see a surge of power ripple through his muscles. He crouches down, and then jumps up with a force that shakes the earth. He raises his hands upward, and there is a blinding flash of light.

Your sight slowly returns, and you find yourself on a grassy knoll bordering a field. A small grove of saplings is to the left, and a field of dandelions is to the right. From somewhere near come the sounds of birds chirping, and a babbling brook.

You see the man who was shackled, standing nearby. He is looking upon you, and smiling. He picks you up and gives you a hug - a crushing, invigorating bear hug that makes you feel very much alive - and a big kiss. Then he sets you down and opens a large leather pouch. He fills two large stone bowls with stew, and draws two draughts of cider from a small barrel. The stew is a piping hot, well-spiced, and hearty beef stew, but the cider is cold and mild - you could drink quite a lot without getting drunk.

He tells you of how he came to be imprisoned - he let a love of probing mysteries become a love of secrecy, and a love of the beauty in natural darkness become a love of evil, so that what was wholesome and

free became perverted and enslaved - and then asks of your story, how you came to rescue him. He listens eagerly and intently.

After a time, he says, "There are many people who knew of my disappearance and do not know that I am free; it is time for me to go and tell them that I am free, and how you rescued me. But before I go, I give you this." He raises one hand to Heaven and places the other on your head, and speaks a blessing. You cannot understand the blessing, but there is something about it that strikes you... and then you see, in an instant, not just one little fragment in the blackness, but the whole radiant rainbow. He is speaking the first language, before it was broken, and - though you cannot understand it - you are moved by its power, its love, its light.

He presses slightly harder on your head, and your spirit surges with joy. Then he runs off into the distance, bounding like a stag.

After a time, you begin to walk along, into the forest. It grows thicker, and the colors richer and deeper. You can feel warmth, and humidity, and wind.

As you walk along, the forest opens into a wide, grassy clearing, with thick, long bluegrass. A few small raindrops sprinkle on your face; thunder rumbles, and soon there is a heavy and torrential rainstorm. The rain is warm, and in it you begin to run and play.

A woman, short and with a full and rounded figure, begins to dance with you, and soon you are swinging around, and dancing in the rain. Sheets and columns of rain fall, and in the lightning flashes you can see the trees, the leaves - the whole forest - dancing and spinning in the wind.

The woman is laughing; you can hear the laughter in her voice and see the laughter in her eyes. On a whim, you reach and pinch her side; she laughs and squirms. She jumps and tackles you - it is half a tackle and half a hug - and knocks you over.

After wrestling around for a few minutes, she turns and walks towards a large, ancient, gnarled oak tree, and sits on a large bulge a little distance above the ground. As she sits, you vaguely realize that the tree's

distance above the ground. As she sits, you vaguely realize that the tree's form has almost the shape to welcome a human - your eyes did not pick it out, but she seemed to have walked to it as naturally as if she were breathing. She is leaning a little to her left; a ledge of wood forms almost a cushion for her to lean on - one might say that her body is curled into the wood.

You begin to look on her, and see how beautiful she really is. Her skin glistens with little drops of water. She is dark, with olive skin and large, soft, welcoming eyes that seem to enfold you, taking you in as the waters of a lagoon take in a swimmer. There is something that draws you about your hands.

Her hands are small, and seem to contain the beauty of her whole body in miniature. They are rounded, curved, and Rubenesque. You can see soft skin gently enfolding the inside of her hands; it has a looseness and amplex so that you do not see vein and bone, only the rich color of skin. Her fingers are tiny and thin, with very mignonne nails and fingertips. The texture of her hands is subtle, yet gives her hands reality; you can see the strata and shapes in the tiny wrinkles on the back of her hand, the dark, faint hairs, and the many sheets of lines that twist and turn over the inside of her hand. Through her fingernails, you can see a glimpse of white, pink color which contrasts brightly with the rest of her hand.

And yet the shape is only half of the beauty that is in her hands, for they are not still, but in motion. It is a slow, still, lyrical motion, an adagio dance. It does not overpower the senses or make a clamoring demand for your attention, but it is yet deeply moving. Her fingers, palm, and thumb slowly move, in a rich harmony. You can see waves in her fingers as they wend back and forth. The motion is extremely simple, and has a periodicity that comes back to a single thing, yet somehow you do not wish it to be more complex, or do something new - at the moment, you would have difficulty understanding why anybody watching this slow undulation would want to see anyone else. It seems that she is speaking in a language with her hands, and you long to understand what her hands are saying, to put it into words. Then you look deeper, and you realize that you do understand what her hands are saying, and you cannot put it into words because it is a truth different from what words express. You

into words because it is a truth different from what words express. You rather feel and sense... peace... rest... stillness... the motion of breath... the beating of a heart... the music that lies in and beyond silence... the ebb and flow of water... day and night and the four seasons turning in cycle... the rhythm of a song that does not pulse, and yet has order... tufts of long, dry grass, resting in a field... the tops of trees, blowing in a wind... a rock, buried deep in the earth, remaining a rock, in the process of not-changing... the light at dusk, and yet not the light of dusk for the sunlight at dusk fades, and this, even in its softness, would not rightly be said to fade.

She begins to walk along a path, leading you, and takes you to a small hovel. You step inside, and as your eyes adjust to the light, you see a very old woman. She is emaciated, and in her face are etched lines of pain. She begins to try to get up, and say something, but the sounds are hardly understandable as words, and the young woman gently places her hand over the old woman's mouth and leads her to lie down. Reaching up to the wall, she brings a flask of wine to the old woman's lips, and helps her drink a little. After that, she goes to a chair, and picks up a wooden recorder, and plays it. It is the same song as her hands danced: soft, still, and beautiful. It has a very soft, woody sound, and the notes themselves are... like the color grey, like a gentle light, like a friend's voice. You are lost in the music, carried away by its beauty. Slowly, the song tapers into silence, into a rest allowing the music heard to sink in. You look at the old woman, and see that she is still, absolutely still. Her eyes vacuously point into space.

The young woman gets up, with infinite gentleness, and with her hand slowly closes the old woman's eyes. She turns to you, and, speaking so softly that you can barely hear her, says the first words you have heard from her: "She was my grandmother." You can see the tears forming in her eyes.

It is dusk, and the last rays of the sun ebb into darkness, into a dark and moonless night.

The next day, you begin to build a pyre in the middle of the field. Some people come by from the wood and help; they are bearing little gifts and each embrace her. There is not what you would understand to

gins, and each embrace her. There is not what you would understand to be a ceremony; they each come and go. After a time, you realize that the animals also come, and pay their respects in their own ways. Dusk comes again, and she takes a lantern and sets it at the bottom of the fire. Flames begin to lick upwards, and then touch the grandmother's body. Then the young woman screams, a piercing, dissonant, discordant scream of which you would not have thought her capable. She begins to sob uncontrollably, and weeps the whole night long.

The woman stands up to greet the coming of the dawn, the tears still streaming down her face. The first rays begin to break over her face, and then you notice something... different. Something that you had not noticed before.

You see pain in her face; it is of no effort to see that a great hole has been torn in her soul. And yet there is something else. She is beaten, but not crushed; wounded, but not destroyed. If she is bleeding, it is because there is living blood coursing through her veins. It would not be quite right to say that she is not too badly hurt because she is a deep person; rather, she is very badly hurt because she is a deep person. And yet... you cannot quite tell what it is.

She turns to you, and sees the puzzlement in your face. She reaches, and with one hand touches your eyes; her lips move in silent prayer. Then she takes her hand back, and you slowly see something else. You see angels all around, and feel the Spirit of God. One of the angels - great, mighty, magnificent - has wrapped his arms around her. The angels are still, and... intent. It would be a gross distortion to say that one of them waves a magic wand and makes the pain go away, and yet...

You cannot quite see, and yet in your spirit you sense, prayers, around and under and in her. You cannot understand all of what is going on. The pain is not taken away, and you share the pain as well. And yet... Though you cannot say what, you can sense someone, and something happening, which is infinitely greater than the pain. And you, again, hear singing.

Sister, let me be your servant. Let me be as Christ to you. I will laugh when you are laughing. When you weep, I'll weep with you.

Pray that I might have the grace to Let you be my servant, too.

When you feel so weak and burdened, When the world is harsh to you, Know that Christ has gone before you, Felt the pain and shed the tears. As Christ has so giv'n to others, So he will also give to you.

And e'en with Christ you're not alone, For we are Christ's body, too. We are all brother and sister. Your burden is our burden, too. As you have so giv'n to others, So we all shall give to you.

A little boy runs up with something clutched in his hand, and kisses her. He says, "I love you. Sorry you hurt bad. Havva big gift. Look!" He opens his hand.

Inside is a blade of grass.

Firestorm 2034

Acknowledgments

When I read a book, I usually skip or maybe skim the acknowledgements; I find a long list of names of people I've never heard of to be deadly dull. There have been two times that I've read a list of acknowledgments that I've actually liked. One was written by a very witty writer who could, and did, make even technical documentation interesting to read. (Making someone want to read a list of names is only slightly more difficult than writing interesting documentation, and I don't consider myself a good enough writer to do either.) The other time was an acknowledgement that personally named and thanked me, and that was my favorite part of the whole work. Apart from that, I don't think that a list of strangers' names is fair to inflict on the reader. So I'm not going to try it.

Of course this is not solely my work; many others paid a role in it. You know who you are. I do wish to explicitly thank one person, though, whom many authors omit from their long lists. I wish to thank *you*, the reader. Of course the people who helped me write this are important, but they are not nearly so important as the people who take the time to sit down and read it, let the story live in their imaginations, and (I hope) tell a friend if they think it's cool. My work is only half done when, I write down my thoughts and put them on the web. It is finished when you breathe life into the story as you read it, and consider its ideas and make them a part of you. Only then can my story be complete. I therefore give

my thanks to you, the reader.

In the Glade

"I still do not understand," Grizelda said, "why you asked your father not to find you a wife, if you are not going into a monastic order. And why he listened to your request."

"As Solomon said, he who finds a wife, finds a good thing," said Taberah, and then paused. A quotation from a written source came quickly to him, but a more substantial reply would take a moment's thought. *I am at home among most all of the people I have visited, Taberah thought, but I am not like any of them. And explaining myself is difficult.*

Grizelda stopped and looked at him; her pale blue eyes bore a gaze that was intense and probing, and yet not piercing. Her hair was pulled back from the sides of her head, and fell darkly onto her blue dress. The people at the castle spoke highly of Grizelda; some said she had a mind like a man. Her husband, Melibée, stood at her side, listening. They were in a forest glade outside the town walls, and were nearing the banks of a river.

Taberah nimbly climbed a tree, and tossed down two large pears. Then he climbed down, an even larger pear in his teeth.

"One good need not be the only good; even God, when he was the only good, chose to become not the only good. That is what creation means. For a man to have a wife is not the only good; there is also good in a man being single."

Melibée spoke up. "But then why not enter a monastery? Surely that is a good place."

Taberah shook his head. "Being celibate is good, a good that monastic life embraces; it does not follow that being celibate requires entering a monastery. I see another option; marriage and monkhood are not the only possibilities."

Grizelda began walking again, followed by the others. "There is still something in it I question. The different kinds of heretics often see other options, and the Church has condemned them. I know you don't have condemnation from the Church, but I don't see why you don't."

Taberah thought for a moment about whether to explain a logical principle, but decided not to. "All of the monastic orders were also started by people who saw other options; if you will think on the saints' lives, you will see that God led them outside of what everyone else was doing."

Grizelda stopped, and asked, softly, "You claim to be a saint?"

"Hardly," Taberah said. "I try to serve God, but I do not reach that standard. The reason I brought them up is that they are examples of how God wants us to live life. They play by the same rules as us; they just do a better job. I am not married because I am serving God in a way that does not involve marriage, at least not yet; I seek to follow him."

Grizelda began to speak when there was a thunderous boom. The ground shook, and a luminous being stood before them. Around the being was a presence, a reality of terrifying glory, as solid and real as if the weight of a mountain were pressing down on their spirits, and then more real. It was like a storm, like the roaring of a lion. The three friends fell to the ground in fear.

The Presence spoke with a voice like roaring water. "Fear not! Stand up!" As the quaking bodies heard those words, the command gave them the power to rise, and they did rise, and bow low. Again he spoke: "Never!"

As the friends stood in awestruck fear, the being turned towards

Taberah and said, "Taberah. Will you go wherever God leads you? I have been sent to call you to come on a voyage, to a land you do not know and have never heard of, a voyage you may never return from. Will you come along?"

Taberah closed his eyes. In an instant, time stopped, and Taberah was thinking, neither in his native Provençale nor erudite Latin nor any of the dozen other languages he had worked with, but beyond words, beyond language. He looked into his own heart, and into God's, and a single word formed on his lips, without effort or volition: "Yes."

There was a tremendous flash of light, and Grizelda and Melibée fainted.

An Encounter

Taberah looked around. Four immense young men were throwing around a dinner plate — or at least that's what it looked like on first glance. They were brawny, and the plate had something unearthly about it —

One of the men shouted something, and hurled the plate at Taberah. He dodged, and then watched in amazement as it bounced off a tree but did not shatter. It was red, and it had an unearthly symmetry, symmetry like he had never seen before. He went over and picked it up; it was light, and felt vaguely like leather or wood.

One of the men walked over, and said something in a language he did not recognize. Taberah said, "Taberah," and looked at him. The man extended a finger towards him and said, "Taburah," and then took the artifact and tugged on his arm. He was standing on the edge of a forest, and was being led into a clearing with buildings. The architecture was alien, and looked like a slightly grotesque simplification of what he was used to. There was a strange precision to the buildings, and a smell like smoke and roasting flesh — though he could see no firepit, nor any animal.

The man took him out into the open field — the grass was strangely short and uniform in height, lacking the beautiful variety in the fields he was used to seeing. He bent over, and plucked a blade of grass. It had been clipped. Not grazed by animals, but painstakingly clipped.

Looking around, he saw the men tossing the strange plate between each other. It sailed through the air, almost as if it had wings. One of them caught his eye, and tossed it over. Taberah snatched it out of the air with one hand, and then tried to throw it. It fell like a stone.

One of the men came over, and made the motion of throwing it with exaggerated slowness. It was different from how one threw daggers, or stones, or much of anything else; it vaguely resembled skipping a rock. Taberah took the plate and held it properly; one of the men took it and turned it upside down. Holding it upside down, Taberah tried to imitate the throw he'd seen; the plate wobbled and fell to the ground. The people clapped.

One of the people said something that he didn't understand; seeing Taberah's incomprehension, he repeated his words, only louder. When Taberah didn't understand that, they beckoned him over to where the smoke was coming from. There was some sort of miniature fire, above which geometrically shaped pieces of meat were roasting; one of them gave him a large piece of meat — they were all large — wrapped in bread, with some brightly colored liquids poured over — some sort of decoration? He wondered what the feast was, that they were eating meat, and had such a sumptuous banquet. The meat tasted slightly strange, although fresh, and the bread was finer than anything he had ever tasted. It didn't have any pebbles, and it was softer than cake.

Not knowing the local language, Taberah expressed his gratitude with his eyes; he listened intently to the conversation, trying to see if he could make sense of the language. Every once in a while, he heard a word that sounded vaguely like Latin, and by the end of the conversation he had figured out these people's names. The man standing by the fire was very old, so old that wisps of silver hair were beginning to appear among the black locks of his temple. He looked mature, regal, venerable. He must be a king, owning the small palace nearby and the ones around it; he could look in the windows (fitted with *glass* — and glass so smooth you could barely see it), and see the illumination of a thousand candles. Or was he a servant? He looked mighty, built like a great warrior, and was even taller than the other men. And it was a lordly thing to give food to anyone who came. He was cooking, but the demeanor of the other men

treated him as their elder, and not just in years. By the end of the conversation, Taberah had conveyed his name, and knew their names. After the effort of listening to the conversation and trying to see if he could hear any words related to ones he knew, he sat down in one of the chairs — at least he thought it was a chair; it was sturdy, but so light he could lift it with one hand.

Taberah sat down in this chair, happy to sit and think as the others romped on the plain. Where to begin thinking? The language had Latin words, but it did not sound like any Romance language; that was confusing. And these people owned massive wealth, wealth far beyond anything his lord owned, and different goods than he had seen before. And they were immense. But that was only the surface of what he was sure was there. These people seemed to treat him hospitably, but what struck him wasn't exactly hospitality so much as something like friendship. Why were they treating him as a friend when they had just met him? When he watched them, he was puzzled at seeing respect in the younger men's treatment of the elder, but not etiquette. How could this people have respect without having its form? They did, but how? Or was their etiquette merely strange? They were not accustomed to wayfarers; they didn't look like heathen, but they didn't recognize Latin — or Greek, or even Arabic, for that matter. And what would motivate anyone to cut grass at a uniform, mathematically precise height? What strange symbolic gesture would be manifested in that way? Or was it a symbolic gesture? It seemed more like a rash vow. Or was it something stranger still?

To the eyes around him, Taberah looked lost in thought. And he was — he saw certain things that were human, but there were other parts that he could not understand at all. What did they mean?

First Clues

Aed looked on the stranger as he gazed. He was unbelievably short and scrawny, not to mention gamy; his clothing looked like a getup from the Middle Ages, a tunic and hose with irregular stitching and any number of holes. He could readily believe it when he walked by and saw lice. He had a thick, scraggly head of hair with a very thin beard. And yet, for all this, Taberah was quite attractive. He had a merry, comely face, with a deep, probing gaze. It was a penetrating gaze; Aed had the feeling that if he stared at a piece of paper too long, it would catch fire. Taberah had been listening intently, and was now off in his own little world.

I must look up one of those charities that deals with foreigners, Aed thought, as he seems quite lost. For now, he can have the guest bedroom. It's a good time it's summer; I have a little more free time to deal with him. He looks a little older than my children. Aed began to gather up the food, called his son and daughter to help, and then they went in; it only took the stranger a couple of times to learn the gesture that meant, "C'mon! You're invited over here!"

The stranger looked with some bewilderment over the contents of a room, and then his eyes lit up over a chess table packed in the corner. He started to pull the pieces off and walk over to the table; Aed stopped him, pulled out the table, and arranged a game before them. *The international game, he thought. We don't know a common language, but we have a common game.*

Aed's first thought upon seeing the stranger play was, "He has seen

this game before, but does not know how to play." This was revised to, "He does know how to play, but he cheats — making moves that are almost legal and always to his advantage." Then a moment of dawning comprehension came, and he realized that the stranger was not cheating — he just didn't understand that chess was played over a grid. Aed groaned, and picked up the pieces and arranged them on the table, understanding why Taberah had made such a bizarre action as to take them from what he now understood was taken as a storage place, and decided to play it his way.

Aed was rated at 1975, although on a good day he could give almost any chess player a run for his money. He was therefore stunned after he lost five games in a row. The young stranger was very, very cunning, and saw things that would never occur to him. After the fifth game, he felt quite tired, and he could see that the stranger was tired—

—and was therefore quite stunned as, in the living room and in the presence of his teen-aged son and daughter (his wife was away at a conference), Taberah took off all his clothes and lay down on the floor. He sent his daughter Fiona out of the room, and then covered Taberah with a blanket that lay at hand. Taberah's face told a thousand words; shocked as Aed was, he saw at once that Taberah's action was not sexually provocative, or for that matter done as anything significant; he apparently saw that he had made a social blunder, but was at a loss for what. He did not feel any shame or guilt, but perhaps regret that something he had done had upset his generous host — and gratitude to be given a blanket, and puzzlement at why his host had invited him into his house but not to crawl into his family's bed. Puzzling, but Taberah had enough to think about already, and was sure that tomorrow would have enough puzzles of its own.

Aed, for his part, could see how to send him out, but not how to tell him to put his clothes on first; he went to bed, grumpily thinking, *He may stay tonight because he's here, but tomorrow night he's spending at PADS. What kind of manners is it to strip in front of your host's daughter? ...* He had a feeling of shock, of wrongness, of indignation at a transgression against reality; he told himself that this was culture shock, but that did not make things easy.

He drifted in and out of sleep, and was awakened by the sound of someone vomiting. Habits of a father, habits stronger than the weight of his grogginess, marched him out to the living room, where he stared in horror. Taberah was shaking, shivering in a cold sweat.

What shocked Aed most was not that one side of Taberah's face was wet with his own vomit.

What shocked Aed most was that Taberah looked so miserable that he didn't seem to even care.

The Hospital

The hospital was a nightmare. Taberah had no insurance, no paperwork and no legal guardian; it was only because of the dire nature of the emergency that he was admitted at all. In the absence of identification or any ability to speak English, the hospital was by law required to file paperwork with the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services; an embarrassed hospital representative explained that Taberah was in the eyes of the law an illegal immigrant and nothing more; if there was a way for him not to be deported to his country of origin, he didn't see it.

Aed came back each day for a week, during which his whole parish was speaking with him; his conversation with the doctors was alarming.

"I am baffled by this young man's condition. He is sick, but no test has been able to tell what he has. It might be a virus."

"Do you have any ideas of what it is?"

The doctor looked slightly embarrassed.

Aed stood in silence and prayed.

"Uh, have you read Ahmik Marison's *How the West Was Lost From a Medical Point of View?*"

"Never heard of it."

"Off the record, this young man is suffering from one — or several — of the conditions that ravaged the American Native population when European settlers came."

Aed stood in stunned silence. This did not make any sense at all. Or (he had the exacting honesty to admit to himself) it made sense in a way he couldn't believe.

An Anthropologist's Visit

"Noah, he doesn't speak any English." By now, Dr. Pabst and Dr. Kinsella were at the doorway to Taberah's room; they turned in, and saw him looking with interest at a book. Taberah looked up and said, "Grace and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." His accent was thick, but mostly understandable.

"I'm an anthropologist and not a linguist," Noah said, "but that sounded an awful lot like English to me."

Aed opened his mouth, closed it, and said, "This isn't the first time he's surprised me." He explained about Taberah playing chess, and undressing.

Dr. Pabst turned to the young man. He said, "Do you understand me?" The man scrambled off his bed with remarkable speed, and crouched in front of the anthropologist, and said, "I thou under stand."

Dr. Pabst simplified his language, and spoke slowly, separating his syllables. "How speak English?"

"English, that is what?"

"This language."

"Language, that is what?"

"How we speak now."

Taberah's eyes lit up. "I am in read Bible."

The anthropologist scratched his head. The young man appeared not to be lying, but even for a genius, learning a new language was difficult, and learning from a book written in the language without any people to help, unless—

"What you call Bible in your language?"

"No Bible in language."

Noah scratched his head. Then he said, "Have you read Bible before here?"

"*Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*. I not know not how to say in English."

Aed said, "The lad is tired from concentration, and perhaps he shouldn't have jumped from his bed to —" Dr. Kinsella cleared his throat, "—under stand you. Perhaps we could talk out in the hallway?"

In the hallway, Aed said, "So, what nationality is he?"

Noah said, "I haven't the foggiest idea. He looks Western European, perhaps Mediterranean, by ancestry, Third World by nourishment. His accent is that of a Romance language, but I don't know. Picking up an alien language by studying a text in that language is next to impossible; the Mayans have left behind three codices that we still haven't deciphered for the most part. Or at least, it's almost impossible unless you already know the text in another language. I don't know how to coalesce my observations into a coherent picture. He — is it OK if I change the subject slightly to recommendations?"

"Certainly."

"He's very bright and is picking up English quickly. He probably knows multiple languages, which makes it easier to pick up another; I'd get him three Bibles — one in the Latin he knows, one in a literal

rendering in modern English, and a free translation to contemporary English. And continue to visit him. My summer class starts tomorrow, so I won't be able to visit, but in brief: speak slowly; in-it-ial-ly break up the syl-la-bles; pay attention to what words he uses. (And, when he understands it, speak as you would to another American.) Contrary to intuition, he might understand you better if you use big words."

"What?"

"He already knows Latin, or perhaps some other language or languages derived from it; there are a lot of common roots in the bigger words. They came over with the Norman invasion of England; small words change much more quickly, and many of our small words are Germanic in character. And you know the artificial intelligence findings that big words are impossible for a computer to deal with, and small words doubly impossible? What is easy for us and what is easy for him may be two very different matters."

"Yes, I see," Aed said.

"Oh, and one more thing. Keep me posted; if you want, I may be able to send in a grad student. He's a puzzle, and I like puzzles. Maybe something will click about him."

"I'll keep the grad student in mind; maybe later, when I have more to tell. Actually, why don't you give me the net address of a student whom I will be able to talk with? I'll probably have some questions. Or should I ask you?"

"Feel free to ask me. Just keep it down to a few minutes a day."

Trouble

After a phone conversation with Dr. Pabst, Aed began to understand how the universality of good will he believed in coexisted in an arbitrariness of manners; he restrained himself from knocking on the door before entering, and saw Taberah bright-eyed as he entered.

"Hell!" Taberah said eagerly, jumping up. He had a long tether from his intra-venous tubes, and he was becoming stable on his feet. (He still felt slightly dizzy as he rose.)

"What?" said Aed and the other visitor.

"Hell! Hell!" Then Taberah saw their puzzlement, wondered what was wrong, and then reminded himself of how important pronunciation was. "Hello!" he said.

Aed laughed, and said, "Hello! Taberah, I'd like you to meet my wife, Nathella. She is—"

Taberah grinned, said, "Beautiful!" and jumped up, pressing up against her and kissing her on the lips.

Nathella stood in paralyzed shock for a second, then drew back and ran out of the room, Aed on her heels.

She slowed to a brisk walk after they reached a second corridor, and said, "I don't know why you let him in our house. I don't want to see him again. There are differences between cultures but that lust is

again. There are differences between cultures, but that just is unacceptable in any culture."

Aed said, "I am sorry he did that. I was not expecting that when I brought him in."

They walked on in silence, Nathella setting a fast pace in silent fury.

"You're holding out on me," she said. "You're not telling me something."

"His eyes," Aed said.

"What?" Nathella said.

"Did you see his eyes?" Aed asked.

"I assure you, I was quite occupied with his lips!" she snapped.

"What do you think was in his eyes?"

"Lust. Selfishness. A lack of any caring and decency."

"I saw his eyes," Aed said.

They walked on in silence, now a bit more slowly.

"You're waiting for me to ask you what you saw in his eyes. Out with it," Nathella finally said.

"I was watching his eyes, and I didn't see the faintest trace of greed or lewdness. I saw a rambunctious energy, the same rambunctious energy Clancy uses when he's picking on Fiona."

"Are you saying that what that man did to me was right?"

"No; I'm saying that he didn't know what he was doing."

Confusion

As Aed walked back, he processed through a memory, and realized the look in Taberah's eyes after Nathella had run out of the room. He looked like a hurt puppy. Aed had promised his wife not to have the man back on their property without talking with him and then talking it over with her.

The conversation that ensued between him and Taberah was maddening. It wasn't just the language barrier, even though they got a good half hour into the conversation before Aed realized that Taberah thought Aed was talking about something else entirely. It was rather that Aed was just beginning to see an alien conceptual map, an alien interpretation of the world. After clearing up the initial confusion, Aed managed to paraphrase "You don't have the right to go around kissing women on the lips," in different ways until Taberah appeared to understand, when he got to the second difficulty: "What is a right?" Taberah seemed not to think in terms of rights, to find them an alien philosophical concept; this difficulty was not surmounted so much as circumvented, in being told, "It is wrong to go around kissing women on the lips." That was met with a third difficulty: "Why not?"

After a long and involved conversation, Aed pieced together the following observations:

- Taberah regarded his actions as being a very warm greeting, meaning roughly what Aed would have meant in sending someone he'd just met a virtual card. Taberah could envision a concept of "too warm

and friendly, to the point of being unpleasant and unwelcome" if Aed led him to see it, but it was not a natural concept, much as "paying too many compliments, to the point that they are an annoyance that occupies too much time" would be an understandable but not natural concept to Aed — when Aed complimented a friend on her shirt, it never occurred to him to ask "Is she receiving so many compliments that this one would be unwelcome and repetitive?"

- Taberah was saddened to have made a *faux pas*, but bewildered as to what was wrong about what he did. (He initially wondered if she was upset because he had not greeted her with words first.)
- Taberah did not regard the breast as being a body part that especially symbolized sexuality, and would consider a woman not wearing a shirt to be less significant than one of the nurses in long miniskirts — to the extent that he found seeing body parts to be arousing, which was not much.
- If Taberah's reasoning on one line were translated into 21st century concepts, they would not so much be "A man has a right to invade a woman's touch-space," so much as really a non-concept of "There is not enough of a personal touch-space for there to be an invasion necessary to a question of whether a man has a right to do so" — in many regards, like Aed regarded tapping shoulders.
- Taberah had a very different understanding of sexuality and touch; his line of acceptable touch was drawn so that it included a great deal of touchiness in contexts that Aed's culture did not even consider regarding as acceptable.

Taberah looked crestfallen when Aed told him not to touch women without asking permission; Aed revised this to, "Don't touch people in a way you haven't seen," knowing full well that this would lead the door open to further confusion. When Aed told Taberah in an authoritative tone of voice, "Don't kiss anyone you don't know well," and then thought and added, "Don't touch women's breasts," the hurt Taberah cried for a few minutes, and then asked, trembling, why he was not ever to give a woman a hug. Aed was puzzled as to why Taberah would make such a connection, and then when he saw the very straightforward reason why, it seemed that his explanation of why it was OK to touch a woman's breasts with his chest but not his hands caused more confusion than it alleviated.

Aed's head was spinning when he left the room. He was barely able to call his friend Noah and explain what had happened.

Dr. Pabst cursed himself for not coming himself, and had his graduate student teach the first day of class so he could try to provide the young man with band-aid coaching for at least one cultural land mine.

Taberah sat, shaking in sadness. He knew he would make mistakes, but to make such a big mistake so soon, and then not be able to understand why he was wrong — this was the most confusing place he had ever been in. He closed his eyes and cried himself to sleep.

Immigration and Naturalization Services

Aed had barely slept, and when he returned early the next morning with Dr. Pabst, he found three men in dark suits standing near Taberah. "Good morning. I am Dr. Kinsella, a professor at the University. Who might you be?"

One of the men showed a badge and said, "Salisbury, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services."

A chill ran down Aed's spine. "May I ask what your interest in this young man is?"

"This patient is an illegal alien. We are here to deport him to his country of origin."

If I thought, I could make enough publicity to hurt the INS badly if they deport this wayfarer, Aed thought, but even then felt a prompting of intuition, that is not the way. Still, he continued thinking, I could say, "I can't stop you from deporting this man, but I can see to it that you will have publicity that hurts you. Do you have authority to stop the deportation? No? Would you rather give me contact information for someone who has such authority now, or have me find out as I create publicity and then contact him and have you fired?" If I think further, I can probably think of something truly Machiavellian...

Even as he thought, he struggled, and Aed resolved to follow his conscience. "I'll be praying for you; I'm an interested party, and if you need to get in contact with me, the hospital has my net address." He decided it better not to give the INS agents a brain dump of the interactions; a description of a rocky adjustment to American culture was sure to hurt the lad. Dr. Pabst didn't think there was any advantage to staying, so they left. Aed returned home and brooded.

Taberah was not well; he was mostly over his sickness, but the INS agents had pressured the hospital staff for a release as soon as possible. He left the hospital weak and slightly unsteady on his feet.

His first ride in a moving room, he had been too miserable to notice what was going on. Now, he was able to observe, see what he had to learn. The room was bouncing around, but not nearly as much as a galloping horse — even though it was moving faster. Through an arrangement of squares and a glass window he could see the city and countryside whizzing past; the speed was unpleasant, and it nauseated him. If he hadn't tried hard to control himself, he would probably have thrown up.

The two men were in the compartment with him, along with some men who looked vaguely like Saracens, only with redder skin, who seemed to be ill at ease. The two men looked — not exactly like soldiers; there was a noble bearing and heroic resolve to even commoners who took arms to war with a neighboring city-state, but these men looked more like mercenaries set to guard. He tried to speak with them, but they would not speak to him; even in the hospital, they had spoken with the hospital staff but never addressed him personally.

Two of the red-bronze Saracens began talking, and he found with delight that they spoke with a familiar accent. He could not recognize the language, but he felt that he could learn their language quickly.

He tried to see what else he could grasp — with his mind; there were some kind of thin shackles about his wrists, which set him ill at ease — was he being taken to the torturer's for whatever crime he had committed against Nathella? There was noise about, a strange alien noise; everything about his surroundings was alien. And the bouncing room made it

about his surroundings was alien. And the searching room made it impossible to think.

Taberah realized he was ready to throw up, and he focused his attention on trying not to throw up.

Aed was sitting in his living room, staring sadly at the chess pieces on the table. Taberah's king had been knocked down, even as the pieces stood to checkmate Aed. Nathella walked into the room, leaned against Aed, and said, "Do you want to talk about Taberah? I've — adjusted; I can deal with his rambunctiousness."

Aed said, "The INS is taking him to be deported. I don't want to talk about it."

Nathella put her hand to her mouth, and then held Aed. "I'll be waiting in the kitchen, when you're ready to talk. I'll be praying," she said, and kissed him.

Aed sat and stared at the dusty bookshelf for a while, and then picked up Taberah's king and set it down. He stared, and realized that he had placed the king in check from one of his knights.

Aed looked at the king and said, "Did you have to leave before I knew you?"

The game gave him no reply. Aed went to the computer room, got in to the computer, and went to a dreamscape where colors and shapes shifted. He watched the forms flow. Maybe that could distract him. No; time dragged, and even the fantasia of images could not fascinate him.

An avatar appeared before him. He looked; the avatar said, "May I speak with you?"

Muttering, "This had better be good" under his breath, Aed said, "Who is it?"

"Salisbury, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services."

Aed winced. He doubted he could go through an interview without hurting both himself and Taberah. "Yes?"

"We have had a number of translators try to talk to the young man, and none of them is able to identify his language beyond something coming from the Romance family. We have run genetic tests on him, and France, Spain, and Romania among other countries have all said not only that he was not born there, but that they do not have any close relations on file. We are therefore unable to identify his country of origin, and are releasing him to your temporary protective custody. Are you at your home?"

Aed caught himself, and said, "Yes, we will be waiting."

After talking about a few technical details, Aed went upstairs. Someone had bumped the table, and tried to set the pieces back up where they were — Clancy? If he did, he was in a hurry; the pieces were not in a similar state. This looked a little different. Taberah's king was now in check from both the knight and a rook, but he had a few moves left to stave off checkmate. And they were not playing on a grid; there were uncertainties. Could Taberah escape?

Home Again

Taberah spent a few days in the hospital, regaining his strength, but the staff could see that he was eager to escape its confines. He avidly read the three Bibles, plus a Latin-English dictionary Aed had procured; Aed for his part was reading a book Dr. Pabst had given him on the art of crossing cultures, both for his own sake and to be able to explain things to Taberah. He had never kissed a man on the lips before — not even his own son — but when he saw how delighted Taberah was at Noah giving him a kiss, he set his mind to enter Taberah's world as much as possible. He slowly realized, with certainty, that his willingness to do one thing against his gut reactions was only a shadow of what Taberah was willing to, and had to be willing to, do. He was not surprised when Noah explained to him that culture shock is one of the top causes of suicide, ranking with divorce.

Getting him home from the hospital bore an unexpected surprise. Taberah was happy to be walking out of the hospital, and then stiffened when he saw that they were walking towards Aed's car, a sleek hybrid between a minivan, a sport utility vehicle, and a station wagon. Noah said, "He's had more trauma in the past two weeks than most of us have in a year; is there any way to circumvent a car trip?"

Nathella looked at Aed for a moment, and said, "We can walk."

Aed winced. "It's eighty-five degrees, and we're eight miles from home. It will take two hours to walk home!"

Nathella said, "I'll walk with him. He has a lot of extra energy. Why don't you drive home and make lemonade?"

Aed said, "Um, you want to be alone with him, even in public? I know he hasn't given us his last surprise."

"I'd rather take whatever risks there are than force that child through a car ride. And trusting people can make them worthy of being trusted. Honey, did he ride in a car with the INS?"

"Uh... I'll walk, too, and we can get the car later."

Noah said, "If you give me your keys, I'll get my son, and we can drop your car off at your house."

Three hours later, the trio arrived at home, hot, sweaty, tired, and parched. They made a gallon of lemonade, and then another; it took two and a half gallons of lemonade to fill them all. Aed expected a conversation of some sort, but Taberah was happy to sit in a chair and smile and fall asleep.

Aed expected it would be an interesting endeavor to teach Taberah to take a shower.

Logical Rocks

Taberah read avidly; he wished to derive as much benefit from the four books he had been lent (*four!* — the *Vulgate Versio*, the *Revised New American Standard Bible*, *The New Message: Complete Text, Revised*, and *Harrah's New College Latin and English Dictionary, Revised*) before they had to be returned to the patron who owned them. He very much wished to meet the man. It was about a week before he began to see that his hosts wanted him to talk with them from time to time — mostly out good manners; he had never been in the possession of even two books at the same time, and never encouraged to read outside! — and another week before Aed sat down with him to try to explain to him that there was life outside of books.

Then Taberah became a fount of unending questions, questions as startling as those Clancy and Fiona had asked as a child — and yet questions that showed the intellect of a sharp adult. They were, nine times out of ten, questions about things he would never think about, and questions he had no ready answer for. At times Aed thought it would have been easier to answer, "Why do things look smaller when they are farther away?"

One day, Aed was sitting in his chair and thinking about how quickly his children were growing up — and he was beginning to think of Taberah as a child, or a foster child at least — and realizing that things had been silent for too long. This was longer than the silence after Taberah had realized that a screwdriver can unscrew the screws that were holding the blender together...

"Aed!"

"Yes, Taberah, what is it?"

"Aed, what is this?"

The sound of his voice was coming from a specific room, it was coming from —

Oh, no! Aed thought. *Anything but that. I am ready to explain anything but—* but his feet had carried him to the room Taberah was in.

"Aed, what is this?" Taberah repeated.

A dozen replies flitted through his mind: a moving picture, something to think with, a hobbyist's delight, a shortcut in talking with people —

"This is a rock that can do logic."

"What?"

"This is a rock that can do arithmetic and logic very, very quickly."

Taberah said, confused, "How numbers they and logic they make a picture move?"

Aed sighed. "Taberah, can I answer another question? This one's awfully hard to explain."

Taberah slowly said, "Yes. What question to answer?" But his eyes betrayed him.

Aed thought, and asked, "Do you know that clock in the living room?"

Taberah said, "Yes. Why have you a clock? And not you use it to pray? It rings bells, but I not you see not pray."

Aed said, "One question at a time, please. Do you know what it has inside?"

"I have seen opened one clock."

If he'd opened the grandfather clock, he had put it back in working order. Aed respected the lad's abilities, but this seemed too much. Or had he opened another clock? "What did you see inside, child?"

"Springs rods gears moving *beautiful!*" Taberah said, his eyes glowing with excitement.

"Do you know how clocks work?"

Taberah said, "Yes," followed shortly by, "No. What?"

Aed moved his forearms like the hands of a clock. "Know why hands turn?" he said.

"Yes! Fixed hands, stopped turning."

Aed said, "You can do many things with gears and pulleys. You can store numbers, add them, make decisions: if this rod is here, turn. A computer is like that, only it uses things besides gears. It uses pictures on tiny rocks. And it is very fast."

Taberah looked at Aed, and then looked at the computer screen. He was trying to believe him, but just couldn't see a connection.

Aed said, "See this wall? Look very closely. There are arranged pieces of color. They are called *pixels*. Do you see them?"

Taberah squinted, and touched the surface. "I see."

Aed said, "The computer uses numbers and rules to decide what color to make each pixel. All of them together make a picture."

Taberah closed his eyes in concentration. He moved his hands, sorting out concepts. Then —

"Why is the picture moving?"

"Because the computer is making many different pictures, one after another, and together they look like they're moving. The moving picture is made up of still pictures like the still pictures are made up of pixels."

Taberah stared at a small patch of the wall as colors flowed. His face met with a dawning comprehension. Then he said, "The computer very, very intelligent! I want talk with computer."

Aed shook his head. "You can't, son."

"Why not?"

"The computer is not intelligent."

"But you said it can do logic!"

"It can do logic, but it's not intelligent."

Taberah ran out of the room, and returned holding the Latin-English dictionary. He flipped through several the entries, several times, and then looked at Aed in puzzlement. "I don't understand."

Aed said, "Can you write?"

Taberah said, "I can write Latin. I not know not the script of your books."

Aed said, "One moment." He returned, holding a notebook and a pencil.

"Write down, with logical rules, how to talk in a conversation. In your language," he said.

Taberah's jaw dropped in shock. "Write *that* on paper?" Taberah would as soon scratch the surface of a painting as write something that unimportant on precious paper.

Aed scratched his head. He didn't see what could possibly be so

offensive about an innocuous attempt to write rules. "Ok, don't write that. But can you think of rules for a conversation?"

Taberah began to translate a Quixotic code of etiquette.

"No, not those rules. Logical rules."

Taberah looked frustrated. "But polite is reasonable!"

"Explain to me how to talk using only if-then-else and while-this-is-true rules, and words you decide ahead of time."

Taberah's gaze bore into him. Then, "I can't. That isn't how I talk."

"That isn't how anybody talks. You can't talk that way. But that's the only way a computer can work. Computers can't think."

"Then how create beautiful moving picture?"

"Some people spent a lot of time thinking of clever ways to explain how, using only math and logic. There are a lot of things we can do, but a lot of things we can't do. We have an old phrase, 'silver bullet', which refers to a way to make everything easy with computers and fix all problems. The term is kind of a joke; calling something a silver bullet is a way of saying that it's supposed to do something impossible. And the same thing has happened with the effort to make computers think — it's called artificial intelligence, and people have learned a lot from trying to do it, but they haven't succeeded. A very great mind named Alan Turing proposed the Turing Test: a computer is intelligent if you can't tell it from a human when you talk with it. No computer has been able to make it."

Taberah looked irritated, flipped through memories of conversations, and said, disgustedly, "Bad reason! False reason!"

"What, Taberah?"

"Is bad think. What human is and what human talks like is much different thing. If logic is not whole human reason, talk is not whole human reason." He flipped through the book, and read out, "Confusion,

accident, substance." He closed the dictionary. "Is accident confused with substance. And is possible cheat Turing Test."

"Cheat on the Turing Test? How? How can you talk like a human without understanding human reason?"

Taberah closed his eyes, and said, "Moving picture? How? How can you move like world without understanding world?"

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "I see how you can think that. But decades of attempts have failed to produce anything that can even cheat on the Turing Test. Most people don't try."

Taberah looked in the book. "Fifty attempts are not many."

Aed said, "Not fifty. Over fifty years' worth."

"Why number attempts in years? Is not sense."

It took a good two hours more conversation to answer all the questions Taberah came up with, and afterwards Aed padded off to his bedroom, exhausted, but at least happy to have gotten *that* conversation out of the way. He drifted off to sleep in blissful happiness that tomorrow was Saturday, and he could sleep in until noon.

At 10:00 he was awakened by a voice calling, "Aed! Aed! How to use computer?"

Thinking About Logical Rocks

"Taberah, can I please get a couple of hours' sleep? This is Saturday, and I'd like to sleep in."

Taberah was puzzled as to why one should sleep in on a particular day, but thought this a poor time to ask. "Okay!" he said, and went to try to memorize parts of the dictionary. He was beginning to feel accustomed to the books — their size, their print, their light weight, their smooth sides — at least, although he was still puzzled about why someone had bothered to make a book for the sole purpose of keeping track of words. Were there not scholars who could be asked about these things?

Aed woke up some time later, and looked at the clock. It was 13:00. Taberah had given him a fair amount of time. He lay in bed, ruminating about how to explain how to use a computer. Taberah knew enough of how a computer worked — explaining memory and parallel computing should not be that much harder — but how to explain how to use it?

Space would be the first major obstacle to overcome. The computer gave a virtual reality environment, with the walls of a room as screens; when you put on a pair of goggles, it was as if the walls were transparent and you could see through them to the world, as if the walls were only a glass box. But space behaved differently than in the real world. Aed thought for a moment about the mathematical abstractions by which the space worked — the classic introduction described taking a tessellation of cubes, and then cutting them apart and connecting the sides arbitrarily. You could take two windows of a bedroom, and attach them so that

looking out the North window gave a view as if you were looking in the East window, and vice versa. It was fantastic and dreamlike; it allowed portals between different areas of space, so that there were no difficulties in taking a room in Chicago and making a doorway open out of a subway closet in Paris. Aed remembered the first time he played a game with a labyrinth connected in this manner; he had been awed when he walked around a pillar again and again and never came to the same place twice.

Space might be the first obstacle, but it wouldn't be the only obstacle. How could he describe the richness of the environment? And how could he describe its weak points?

Aed thought over the many things that contributed to the richness of the environment. There were:

- Jump points. These were like travel locations, but with all manner of portals to interesting places. One was a long hallway full of doors, through which a person could step into other areas. Another was a library full of books which, when opened, would expand into other places. (How would he explain to Taberah that objects were putty-like, able to expand and contract, that you could push a button and have a menu pop out?) Another still was a slide show, where you could jump into the show at any point and be where it portrayed. There were others; there was not yet a standard.
- Programming workshops. Programming constructs behaved like any other object; one could assemble them as objects, algorithms, constructs, patterns. It was also possible to take programmable objects and pull off the skin to reveal the structure underneath, and tinker with it. It had taken Aed a long time to get used to this interface — it was a bigger transition even than moving from text-based languages to graphical development and intentional programming — but even then he objectively realized that it was a simpler environment to use, and now it was second nature. Aed realized another thing to explain to Taberah — that objects were not permanent; they could be modified, extended, simplified, cloned at will, and the many implications — there was nothing that had the status of gold, of being something valuable because it was scarce. Taberah had enough difficulty understanding that paper was cheap;

what would he make of this?

- Virtual brothels. Aed winced at the time Taberah would stumble on one of these; the freedom to avoid porn was hard to come by; it was like avoiding advertisements when he was growing up. There were perennial attempts made to curb porn, but — even when it was widely acknowledged fact that the vast increase in rape since the web's second successor appeared was due to sexual addicts who got their start online, and then ravaged real women because porn could only go so far — they always fell on the rocks of a freedom of speech argument. Aed grumpily muttered to himself that household appliances were in some sense sculpture, in that their designs involved commercial artists, but the banner of freedom of expression did not make for any exemptions from environmental regulations in manufacture; it was recognized for the commercial product that it was. Why wasn't porn recognized as a commercial product? Had the news ever carried a report of a pornographer who lost business because of making an artistic statement that was less arousing? Had there ever been a site where the valerie was glaring in hate at the voyeur? It seemed a funny form of expression that could only express itself in ways that coincided with a calculated commercial product. But the courts had argued that brothels popping up everywhere you wanted them and everywhere you didn't want them was sacrosanct free speech, and 'censorship' (that pejorative term) was tantamount to violating the Constitution. Well, not exactly. The phrase, "The illegal we can do right away, the unconstitutional takes a little longer," was obsolete, because the Constitution was a dead letter. In *Roe v. Wade* in 1974, the Court had made a strained argument finding an unnamed right to privacy to make the question of an unborn child's right to life irrelevant, skirting even the issue of whether that entity was a person or a part of another person. When the decision was reviewed in the late 1990s, the ruling recalcitrantly acknowledged that the 1974 ruling was wrong, but said that it would be wrong to take away the sexual freedom that young people had gotten used to. In *Purdie v. Braverman* in 2024, fifty years after *Roe v. Wade* to the day, the courts had ruled infanticide legal, "up to a reasonable age", and specified neither what a reasonable age was, nor even a contorted lip service argument as to why the Constitution

justified infanticide — perhaps because they could find none. It had not surprised Aed two years later when the courts legalized euthanasia, with only the vaguest and most confusing guidelines as to when it was permissible and when consent was even necessary — he shuddered when he remembered the definition of implied consent. Now, it was 2034, and the date had passed when Aed was no longer surprised by anything the courts did. He — Aed suddenly realized that he was not thinking about computers. He tried to focus his thoughts — what else after brothels?

- Society for Creative Anachronism re-enactment arenas. These places set up an environment to resemble that of a time and date in the past, and then people attempted to live and interact as people of that era and place. Even the avatars looked like people from those times — avatars were another thing to explain to Taberah. An avatar was the moving image which represented a person in the world — like the piece that represented a king in a game of chess. The image was completely customizable and configurable, with the effect that many people looked like a supermodel, although it was not uncommon to encounter unicorns, dragons, mermaids, cybernetic organisms, anthropomorphic robots... but never a person who was fat or ugly. Human-like robots had never materialized, any more than the anti-gravity devices imagined of old; the development of technology had shifted direction towards a primary focus on information technology, but this and all manner of fantasy appeared in the virtual worlds. Aed reflected that there was a good sense and a bad sense to the word 'fantasy', and both of them were amply represented in the virtual worlds.
- Bedrooms. A bedroom was a place with one person's very personal touch; there were elements there that would never surface in an institutionalized setting. There were not exactly bedrooms *per se*, so much as creatively developed spaces that had personal sharing. Because it was possible to let someone in a room without being able to easily do damage, you could go and visit people's bedrooms. There were quite a lot of interesting sites to see.
- Clubhouses. If a bedroom expressed the spirit of a person, a clubhouse expressed the spirit of a group of people. These had both function and decoration to them, and almost always had something

of a personal touch.

- Museums. There were museums of almost every sort to visit. Because a painting could be in more than one place, and it was not nearly as expensive to build them, there was a much more vast diversity of museums, many which were much more specialized. The low expense of creation made for a much greater diversity, with many more excellent things available, but also a much lower average quality. Sturgeon's law applied *a fortiori*: "90% of everything is crap."
- Special museums which had disassemblable and scalable models of human and animal bodies and machines. Aed's children had not dissected animals in school; they went into museums where it was possible to strip off skin, strip off muscle, double the size, half the size, make everything but the skeletal and nervous systems translucent...
- Role play arena. In the 20th century, the basic unit of time-consciousness was the decade; now it was the semi-decade, or semi. Role play was one of the trends that was in this semi, and there were virtual worlds for all kinds of different role playing games.
- Dreamscapes. In these places, there were a number of momentary images, represented by blocks something like the Capsella toys Aed had played with as a child. One put them together in a particular way, and then set the composed dreamscape in his pack. Then nothing happened, until you hadn't done anything with the computer for a while. The computer would then begin "dreaming" — start a random walk that began with one block, and shift, images flowing, to a neighbor, and then a neighbor's neighbor... Aed had seen some truly beautiful artwork that way.

Aed wondered, "What time is it?" Then he looked at the clock. 15:00. Yikes! He got up, got dressed, and looked for Taberah.

Taberah was reading the bilingual dictionary with rapt concentration.

Using Logical Rocks

Aed walked over to the computer room, grabbing two pair of goggles. He showed Taberah how to put one of them on, and then said, "Sit down and wait here for a moment."

In a few minutes, an avatar appeared before Taberah and said, "Take my hand." Taberah reached for it and grabbed, but felt nothing. He was confused. The scene changed, and he saw that he was inside a sunny field, with forest to the east.

Taberah asked the avatar, "Who are you?"

The avatar said, "I am Aed."

Taberah said, "But you not resemble not Aed. You look — your clothes are different, and skin different, and —"

Aed said, "Never mind that. Do you see my hands?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Aed said, "Move your hands like mine."

Taberah did, and found himself moving rapidly through space. His stomach lurched; he put his hands over his eyes.

Aed said, "Take your hands off your eyes, son."

Taberah did, and saw he was a good fifty hands off of the ground. He braced himself for the fall, and put his hands over his eyes again.

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "We're going to try something different. It takes a little while to get used to moving about, but you'll learn. In the mean time, I'll let you see through my eyes."

Instantly the perspective changed. Taberah looked down, and saw a pair of hands pull a book-shaped object from a pocket, with a picture on front. The hands pulled on the book and expanded it, then pressed buttons, flipping through pictures. Taberah saw a picture of a stag, and said, "Ooh!"

The picture expanded, and they fell through it. They were in a forest glade; a stag was looking at them curiously.

Then Taberah saw himself walking rapidly to a door with a picture over it; he said, "Too much of fastness!" and the pace slowed. He was through, to a dark forest with unfamiliar plants, and a large snake slithering towards them. Afraid, he said, "Snake!" and saw himself walking towards another door with another picture, and he looked around. The landscape was alien; it was rough terrain covered completely by snow, and he saw fat black and white birds walking around, and some big black fish-like animals on the ice.

Taberah looked intently at all that was around him; it was strange, but none of the animals began to threaten him. After a few minutes, he said, "I have sick of sea." He wasn't feeling very good.

There was moment of nothing happening, then a jar of perspective, and then stillness. Taberah closed his eyes to shut out the view. Then he heard Aed calling, and touching his shoulder. He was holding a tiny cup of the thinnest glass, with something that looked like wine. "Drink," he said.

Taberah drank it, and the nausea began to go away. Had he been given a magic potion? He was confused, but pushed this question to the back of his mind. He wasn't sure yet what was magic in this land and what wasn't — that seemed a confusing question here, and the people

treated the moving rooms as something as believable as a horse! Aed asked him to step out and sit on the sofa.

Aed was trying to think of how to explain the way space worked. He was expecting a question about why there was a door, all by itself, in the jungle, and the moment you stepped through it, you were in Antarctica. When Taberah remained silent, he asked, "Taberah, was there anything you found confusing about that world?"

"Yes, movement."

"Ok. Anything else?"

"Yes, doors."

Aed went into a long and involved attempted explanation of how different parts of space were connected, and saw the confusion on Taberah's face growing with each step. Finally, he said, "Taberah, why are you confused?"

"What is it that the pictures?"

"Huh?"

"Pictures on doors. Why?"

Aed said, "I don't understand. Could you rephrase that?"

"Pictures. Doors. Top."

Aed said, "One moment," and went over to the computer to look at one of the doors. "Aah," he said, returning. "Those are advertisements."

"What is advertisement?"

"An advertisement is a message from a company telling a customer about one of its products."

"I not understand not. For what is it that advertisement needed? Is it that townspeople not tell not where merchant is?"

that to his people not tell not where merchant is.

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "Advertisements exist to stimulate sales, to help a company sell things to people that otherwise wouldn't buy them."

Taberah looked even more confused, thought for a moment about wording and grammar, and said, "And which of the seven deadly sins is it that this custom embodies?"

In the ensuing discussion, Aed slowly realized that Taberah had not been troubled by the nature of space. He had been able to accept as perfectly natural a portal between two different regions of space, and Aed wondered what kind of conception of space his culture had to let him accept that at least quite placidly. The first time he had entered that kind of virtual environment, Aed had been thrown off by the conception of space. And he had felt nauseated, his head spinning after — suddenly he found Taberah's "sick of sea" more understandable. And he began to see something that he had not thought about, not for a while: that advertisement does not exist for the customer's benefit, but for the company's benefit, so that it can get more money out of the customer; this practice clearly ran contrary to Taberah's way of thinking, and at the end of the discussion, Aed walked away, for once, with his head not spinning, and thinking not only that Taberah's way of thinking was understandable, but that he might have a point.

A New Friend

The next few days saw animated discussions, a lot of reading on Taberah's part, and a few more minutes using the computer — at Aed's urging; Taberah wanted nothing more to do with it.

Taberah was sitting on the ground outside, drinking a glass of nice, warm water, when he saw a large, black, almost grown Newfoundland puppy come wandering by. And gulped. Such a beast would be a prime candidate for a dog race.

Dog races, in his homeland, occurred when people would gather together stray dogs, tie metal pots to their tails, and then let the dogs go. The dogs would start to walk, then hear the sound of the pots scraping against the stones of the road, get scared, and start running to get away from the noise. When the noise grew louder, the terrified dogs would run, and run, and run, and run — until they dropped dead from exhaustion. The winner was the boy whose dog ran the farthest before dying.

Taberah hated the dog races with a passion. They made him sick; after his protestations, his lord issued a rule that no dog races were to be held while Taberah was around, but that was the best that had happened. He was humored at best; nobody else save Grizelda shared his objections to the races. Most people were so blazé that they didn't see what the big deal was in the first place. Yes, it was his homeland, but it wasn't his homeland. It was the place he was from, and the place where he had spent most of his life, but he wasn't at home there. In a way, he could adjust to almost any place — was adjusting to the kingdom he was in now

(what was it called, and who was its king?) — but in a way he was never at home. There was always something about him that didn't fit. Why was he the only one who cared about dogs? Francis of Assisi was venerated, but the people who venerated him did not imitate his treatment of animals. Well, he could try to save at least one dog from the races —

Hastily setting down his glass, Taberah sprinted at full speed after the dog, which ran away from him, barking. He continued chasing the dog for a full hour, his toughened feet pounding on the asphalt until they were sore, until he dropped in exhaustion, panting and thirsting. It wasn't until he stopped that he realized the exquisite pain in his feet. He looked down, and realized his feet were cut. Where was he? The buildings looked different; the outside looked more like buildings than outside. He was by a room of sorts with two walls missing, but with a ceiling. It was raining; he crawled over to a puddle, and began to lap at it.

He looked up, and saw the dog drinking from the other side of the puddle. It came over and sniffed at him; Taberah hugged and kissed it. Beginning to feel chilled, Taberah crawled under the shelter, holding the Newfoundland next to him. He could not get to sleep, both because of all the moving rooms passing by, and because he had plenty to think about.

Taberah felt happy and comfortable as he had not felt in a long time. The wealth he had been in was strange to him; it did not seem real. Out, even in a strange, semi-open place (why would someone build two walls and a roof of a room, and then make the inside part of a thoroughfare?), finally next to another warm body (even if only a dog's), Taberah felt happy. He settled into a slumber, thanking God for bringing him to a place that felt a little home-like.

Midnight Oil

Aed drove around, trying to see if he could find where Taberah had gone. Fiona had run and told him that had seen a dog and bolted; as he drove around, he called the police and summarized what had happened. The dispatcher explained that he could not be classified a missing person until he had been gone for twenty-four hours; that was twenty-four hours in which to brood. The family looked until three in the morning, and then went home because both Aed and Nathella were too tired to continue driving.

At four in the morning he was awakened by a call. Groggy, Aed turned on the videophone and said, "Yes?"

A police officer in a car sent a still shot and said, "Officer Shing, State Sheriff. Is this the man?"

"We found him sleeping under a bridge, along with a dog he refuses to part with. He had lacerations to the soles of his feet; the EMT thinks he ran barefoot over broken glass. We have taken him to Mercy Memorial Hospital; he is presently in the emergency room, waiting for treatment."

Aed said, "Thank you. Why did you take him to Mercy? I don't understand that. Mercy is almost fifty miles away from here."

Shing replied, "Mercy is the closest hospital to where we found him. Is there anything else we can help you out with?"

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "Not now, but I might call you

Aed thought for a moment, and said, "Not now, but I might call you if I think of something else. I'm going to grab a few coffee beans, and then go to pick him up. Is there anything else I need to know?"

The officer said, "No, but you might want to take him shopping for some clothing and shoes. He's wearing a ragged getup, and — the hospital will be able to tell you about his special needs to heal from the lacerations."

Aed said, "Thanks. Over and out."

Nathella rolled over and said, "You weren't thinking of getting him without bringing me, were you, honey?"

Aed said, "Get dressed, and come along. I'll get the coffee beans."

Two voices from below said, "Me, too!"

The emergency room was fairly quiet; doctors were removing glass shards from Taberah's foot and stitching up the cuts. Taberah looked confused; there was something in his eyes that even Nathella didn't understand. He was under local rather than general anaesthesia, but he still started nodding off to sleep.

He received some soft "shoes" made of bandages, and the doctor told Aed to keep his feet bandaged and give him high top athletic shoes a couple of sizes too large. When it was time to go, everybody climbed in to their van, the dog brought along as well. Aed tried to ask why this attachment to a dog (it belonged to a neighbor, and periodically ran loose), but could find out nothing beyond that Taberah did not want it to be raced. Aed let that be; he wanted to get back to sleep, and wait until tomorrow to tackle the puzzles. Taberah agreed not to leave the house without having someone else along, and seemed relieved to learn that this kingdom didn't race that type of dog. He was even happier to find out that the dog belonged to someone nearby, and would be taken care of; he wanted to meet the neighbor the next day. "Very well," Aed said, "but we need to get some sleep first." This time, Taberah joined everybody else in sleeping in until the afternoon.

I Can't Believe...

Nathella and Fiona were working in the kitchen; good smells came upstairs. The Kinsellas (and Taberah) settled down for a late dinner, a family complete, such as it were.

They sat in silence around the table; there was a simple joy in everyone — or almost everyone. After Dr. Kinsella said grace and the food was passed around the table, Taberah broke the silence by saying, "Nathella, would you pass the *I Can't Believe It's Not Better?*"

Nathella smiled and passed the spread, and made a mental note to buy butter the next time she went shopping. As she passed it, she saw something in Taberah's face. "Taberah, are you homesick?"

Taberah looked at her. "What is 'homesick'?"

Nathella thought for a moment and said, "Homesick is when you aren't comfortable in one place, and you miss the place that is your home."

"I don't know if I'm homesick. Maybe. Yes. No. I don't know if I have a home; maybe if I understood the word better..." His voice trailed off, but the others remained silent. "It's just a bunch of little things, like strange foods and too soft bread without any rocks and no touching, not even wrestling, and... Or maybe that's not a little thing." He stared at his food.

Clancy said, "Cl'men out back dinner. We can roughhouse in the

Clancy said, "Come out back dinner. We can roughhouse in the back. Fiona and I wrestle a lot, only not recently. We've been busy with you, and we didn't know you liked to horse around. Fiona's in the house to be picked on," Fiona made a face at him, "and I'll flip you around. I would pin you, but you need to be soft on your feet."

Taberah's face brightened.

Nathella said, "Is there anything we can do that will bring you a little piece of home?"

Taberah hesitated, and then said, "Have you no wine in this country?"

Nathella smiled gently and looked at him. "Yes, we do, but not in this house. I'm an alcoholic."

Taberah asked, "What's an alcoholic?"

Nathella said, "Do you know the word 'drunkard'?"

Taberah said, "You're not a drunkard! I haven't seen you drunk. I haven't even seen you drink wine."

Nathella said, "Not now, but once my life was given over to alcohol. Escaping alcohol was the hardest thing I ever did, and if I start to drink, I won't be able to control it. It would control me. So I can't have alcohol in the house."

Taberah looked disappointed. He said, "Then it is good of you not to drink."

Nathella said, "Thank you, Taberah. Maybe sometime when I'm visiting with one of my friends, Aed will buy a small bottle of wine for you two to have. He likes a good drink, and he will have a beer when he's out with his friends. But he doesn't drink in the house. He doesn't want to tempt me."

Taberah smiled. He was warmed with a patient assurance that he would have wine, and was in no particular hurry. He looked around, and

then his gaze settled on Fiona. "Why are you homesick, Fiona?"

Fiona smiled, and said, "I'm not homesick, at least not for a place. I wish it were Christmas, with the family and gifts and wassail and — ooh! the music. I miss the music."

Taberah said, "What kind of music?"

Fiona said, "One is, O come, O come Emmanuel. Do you know it?"

Taberah thought for a moment, and then thought a little more, and said, "Could you sing it for me?"

Fiona sang, in her thick countertenor,

O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lowly exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Taberah said, "I think I know it. Let me sing it as I know it." He took a sip of milk, and then stood up on the chair, and began to sing:

Veni, veni Emmanuel!
Captivum solve Israel!
Qui gemit in exilio,
Privatus Dei Filio.

Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.

Veni, o Sapientia,
Quae hic disponis omnia,
Veni, viam prudentiae
Ut doceas et gloriae.

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, veni Adonai!
Qui populo in Sinai
Legem dedisti vertice,
In Majestate gloriae.*

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, o Jesse virgula,
Ex hostis tuos ungula,
De specu tuos tartari
Educ et antro barathri.*

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, Clavis Davidica,
Regna reclude caelica,
Fac iter tutum superum,
Et claude vias inferum.*

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, veni o Oriens!
Solare nos adveniens,
Noctis depelle nebulas,
Dirasque noctis tenebras.*

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

*Veni, veni, Rex gentium,
veni, Redemptor omnium,
Ut salvas tuos famulos
Peccati sibi conscios.*

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascetur pro te, Israel.*

Taberah sat down and was very still. The room was very still — one could hear a pin drop. His singing voice was a tenor, but there was nothing flimsy about it; it was rich and powerful, like silver, like something between a stream and a waterfall, and for the moment he had looked like a bard. It was hard to believe that such a mighty voice, filled with silent strength, could come from such a tiny body — and yet, somehow, after that song, Taberah did not again look tiny to the Kinsellas. Nothing about his physical appearance was changed, but none the less the way he looked to them was different.

Aed finally broke the silence by saying, "I never knew you could sing like that, Taberah, and I should very much like to have you over for Christmas. Is there any way I can thank you for that song?"

Taberah said, "Over for Christmas? All twelve days?"

Aed thought. School resumed classes from winter break on the third of January; getting permission to take time off through the seventh would involve some major administrative headaches. "All twelve days," he said. "I'll make sure of it."

Taberah said, "Then what I would most like for my song is to go out and wrestle."

Clancy bolted out of his chair and had Taberah in a fireman's carry before anyone else knew what was going on; Taberah was out of Clancy's grip and bolting out the door before Clancy knew what was going on. It wasn't until later that Aed wondered how he could run with healing, stitched lacerations in his foot; soon they were all outside, a crazy, happy, moving, squirming bundle of arms and legs with grass stains on its shirts. And Taberah was happy, happy as he could ever remember being.

It was only a few minutes before they were all sitting and panting; Taberah did not understand why they wanted to rest so soon, or why they didn't give him more resistance in the fray, but he basked in the afterglow. The memory of that moment would be a treasure to him as

undergrowth. The memory of that moment would be a treasure to him as long as he walked the paths of the earth.

A Guided Venture

Nathella said, "We need to give him some of Clancy's old clothes so he's decent, and then take him to one of the old-fashioned clothing stores — he won't be able to try stuff on online. Clancy, would you come with to help him with the clothing?"

They arrived at the store, and Nathella said, "Here we are, to get some clothing. You can take anything in the store."

Taberah looked, and bright colors caught his eye. He went over and started to stare at a rack of shirts.

"Not there," Nathella said. "Those are children's clothing."

Taberah thought it strange that there should be special clothing for children, but said, "I am a child. You're a child. Clancy's a child. Want children's clothing."

Nathella, who had felt almost guilty about her age since her thirtieth birthday, said, "That's sweet, honey, but I am not a child. Neither are you. And Clancy's not really a child any more."

("Thanks, Mom!")

("Shut up, dear.")

Taberah looked puzzled. "Are you not born of a woman?" he asked.

Nathella said, "Uh, of course I — ooh, I see. Taberah, we use the word 'child' to mean someone who's younger than Clancy, and 'adult' to mean someone who's older than Clancy. Clancy's — in between."

("Thanks, Mom!")

("Shut up, dear.")

Nathella continued. "And children wear different clothing than adults."

Taberah said, "Why?"

"Because children are different from adults."

"Why?"

"Have you seen a tadpole?"

"Yes."

"Have you seen a frog?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that tadpoles turn into frogs?"

"Yes."

"But tadpoles and frogs are different, right?"

"Yes."

"Children and adults are different in the same way, right?"

"How?"

Nathella did not reply to the question. Clancy, in a particularly mischievous mood, would be able to ask a series of questions like that while keeping a perfectly straight face, and he often managed to catch his

rather. But she could sense a complete honesty in Taberah's questions; they were as honest as a child's. And as unending. She was beginning to realize that he did not perceive anything approaching a sharp demarcation between childhood and adulthood. "Come over to this section. I want you to pick out a shirt from one of these racks, and a pair of pants from one of these racks."

By the second or third try, Taberah had picked out clothing that would fit him; it seemed a bit loud to her, but she did not want to argue with that. He went into a fitting room, and, with Clancy's help, put the pants on properly and the shirt on backwards. He came out, and said, "I like it. Let's pay for it."

Nathella said, "Hold on, Taberah. I want to pick up a week's worth of clothing."

Taberah said, "This clothing will last for a week, more."

Nathella said, "I want to buy you enough clothing so that you can wear different clothing each day and not have to wear the same clothing for a week."

Taberah's jaw dropped. He had a vague realization that the others' clothing looked different over time, and he knew that some of the people of his home town were wealthy enough to have two sets of clothing — one for summer and one for winter. He had not, in his greediest dreams, ever wanted to wear different clothing each day. He asked, "Why?"

The trio arrived at home, carrying a large bagful of clothing. Aed asked, "Hi, guys! How was the shopping?"

Clancy asked, "Would somebody stop the room, please? I'd like to get off."

I Envy...

Taberah asked Aed, "What is your trade?"

Aed recalled a moment in graduate school where one of his colleagues had said, "I envy people in nuclear physics. They can tell other people what they do for a living." He said, "I teach — do you know logic?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Aed asked, "Have you done geometry?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Aed said, "What I do is like geometry and logic; logic and geometry are examples of it."

Taberah said, "Give me an example."

Aed thought of the three rules of a metric space, then thought how little those rules illuminated what he was thinking — as little as a list of chess rules gave any obvious feel for deep strategy. Aed had learned long ago that it was possible to understand the rules of a game completely without having the foggiest idea what its strategy was like — human understanding never included instant sight into logical depths, any more than good eyes enabled you to see infinite detail despite distance and twilight! In the classroom at the university, Aed would have to bow to custom and labor over the basic rules, but Taberah was not a student at school and — "I am studying collections of objects where you can tell

school, and I am studying collections of objects where you can tell how far apart two objects are."

"Like geometry!" Taberah said.

"Yes, but it includes many things that do not have the structure of a space. Like words. 'Man' is close to 'woman', farther from 'dog', farther from 'tree', and farther still from 'rock', and very far from words like 'move'.

Taberah said, "Yes! That's how to cheat on Turing test!"

Aed winced and said, "Uh, how?"

Taberah paced the room in thought. "Can computers record conversations?"

"There are many, many conversations on record. I can download a collection of them now, if you wish."

"Well, first find out how to measure the distance between two words," Taberah said.

Aed nodded. The artificial intelligence literature had found a way to map the distance between words by measuring frequencies of words occurring before and after them in a histogram.

"Then have something that will look through conversations, matching up by words and grammar, and return the closest match!"

Aed looked at Taberah hard, and then said, "Son, how'd you like to learn how to program?"

Hacking Away

Aed led Taberah into the computer, and then left him; Aed's avatar soon appeared nearby. "Put your hand on that picture on the wall," Aed said, and when Taberah reached out, he was in a large room, with alien artifacts on the walls and shelves.

Aed flew through the room, touching partially assembled objects; they vanished, leaving an open space to work in. "The first thing to do," he said, "is to make a Turing test room. Touch that bin over there."

Taberah touched it; it grew to fill half the room, and then its sides vanished. "See that red thing? Take it out of the bin, and then touch the button on the bottom of the bin; it will shrink back to its normal size. That is a room object; say 'Options.' See that popup menu? That's the thing that looks like a sheet of paper. Turn on the one that says 'Maximum occupants'; set the number to three. Then press the 'recording' button. I'll come back and record messages for the three users; the first user is the tester, and the second and third users are trying to convince the tester that they're human. Initially they'll both be human; later, one will be an avatar for our program. Pick up a dialogue slate; say, 'Record: Which user do you think is human? Now touch choice one, and say: Contestant one. Choice two: Contestant two. Choice three: Can't tell.' Ok; expand the room, and place the dialogue levitating in the center, in front of the tester's door. Wait, put three doors on for the user to enter. Oh, that looks funny because you have a bug. You have the buttons switched. You should —"

After the room was completed, Aed summoned the chancellor of the university and asked him to make an announcement of a Turing game. He recorded the announcement, and, after the chancellor disappeared, said, "This will give us some time to work out the artificial intelligence decoy. If you give me a moment, I will find the metric for words..."

It took Aed and Taberah a long time to get to sleep that night; it took them a long time to stop tinkering, but even after that, they were filled with an excitement of discovery, of uncertainty, asking, "Could this be? Have we really discovered what we think?" Their excitement was raised in the morning when Nathella said, "Why don't we go downtown this evening for a Tridentine mass? Taberah, it's in Latin; I think you'll enjoy it."

Taberah was not sure why the Kinsellas went to mass every week; it had not been any special holiday, so far as he could tell, and he could never get out of them a straight answer as to why they went to mass when there was no particular reason to do so. But now he was in such high spirits that he wanted to go.

Another Era

Nathella walked in to the massive church. It was plain, and all was still. As the liturgy began, the stillness was not broken; the majestic Latin spoken by those up front only augmented the silence. Each step was majestic; she lost herself in its familiar details.

After the service, she put her hand on Taberah's shoulder, and asked him, "So, whatchya think?"

Taberah's eyes were misty. He closed them, then opened them, saying, "I don't understand. I did not see the guest of honor. Was he a theologian?"

Nathella said, "What?"

"Was the guest of honor a theologian?"

Nathella reminded himself that Taberah sometimes approached matters strangely. "I would rather think of him as God who told stories. What do you think?"

Taberah said, "Not Jesus, the person the — now I remember the word — funeral is being held for. Was he a theologian?"

Nathella withdrew, slightly surprised. She said, "Why do you think this was a funeral?"

Taberah said, "It was so mournful. People were silent; they did not

say anything, and the person up front was impossible to hear. There weren't any changing songs. And I didn't hear any instrument music, no organ. And this church had its walls stripped — no statues, no color in windows. Does this building have anything besides funerals?"

Nathella accepted that Taberah's perception of the Latin mass was very different from her own. No, that wasn't quite right. He wasn't responding to the Latin, *per se*; it was something else that accompanied the Latin. It — she decided to stop musing and respond to him. "At home we have a machine that can make organ music; would you like to come home?"

At home, they sat down on a sofa and set the computer to play music. Taberah listened to the sound, the familiar sound of an organ — no, it was not; it had range and voices and a perfection of sound such as he had never heard, and such speed! Then it unfolded, into two voices, three, four. Taberah felt dizzy with the complexity, or more accurately, giddy, drunk; he heard wheels within wheels within wheels within wheels. It was alien in many ways; most of all, he felt that he had never encountered such a mind. He never knew that such music existed. When the moment wound down after several pieces, he said, "I awe," and then, "Who was that?"

Nathella smiled and said, "That was Bach."

"May I speak with Mr. Bach? I would very much like to meet him."

"Honey, Bach has been dead for almost three hundred years."

At this, Taberah was surprised. "If Bach is dead, how did he play that?"

"Bach wrote his music down, then someone else played it on an organ, then the computer kept and transported the sounds so we could hear them."

"How can a rock transport sounds?"

"Aed, would you explain that?"

As Aed explained, Nathella observed Taberah. He no longer seemed so completely homesick; his face bore the excitement of discovery. Taberah was adapting to his new land.

Angels Dancing

"And all they were doing," Nathella said to Aed, "is endlessly debating 'How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?!'"

"That's the best question," Taberah said. "That's a very good question."

"What?" Nathella and Aed said together.

"'How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?' is a good question."

"Why?" Nathella said.

"Do you know how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" Taberah asked.

"Um, I don't know. Five? Twelve? Seventeen? I have no idea." Nathella said.

Taberah looked displeased. "I don't think you understand the question. Say seventeen angels can dance on the head of a pin, but not eighteen. Why?"

Nathella said, "I don't know. That's why it's a silly question."

Taberah said, "Ok. How many people can dance on the head of a pin?"

Nathella answered, "If the pin was lying on the floor, one."

"Why not two? Why not three? Why not five?"

"Because people have bodies, and they'd bump into each other."

"Do angels have bodies?"

"No; they're spirits."

"Can angels bump into each other?"

"No; there can be as many angels in the same place as want to be, because spirit — ooh! Two, or five, or seventeen, or an infinite number of angels can dance on the head of a pin at once, because they don't take up space the way we do."

Taberah smiled. "Is that a silly question?"

Nathella hesitated, and said, "If you are asking an abstract question, why embed it in a concrete and silly-looking facade? Why not ask it abstractly?"

Clancy burst in the door, out of breath, and said, "Hey, Mom! How many field service engineers does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

Nathella was about to say, "I'm in the middle of something, dear," when Clancy said, "Two. One to find a bulb, and one to pound it into the socket."

Nathella giggled for a moment, then her face showed confusion, which slowly turned into dawning comprehension. Clancy watched her, and said, "*Et voila!* It took you long enough this time, Mom!"

Nathella said, "It's not that, honey; I got the joke immediately. It was just that Taberah had asked an abstract question in a way that looked simple and silly, and I had asked why he did that, and now I realized that our light bulb jokes work the same way. The canonical 'How many morons does it take to screw in a light bulb?' 'Five. One to hold the bulb

minutes does it take to screw in a light bulb? Five. One to hold the bulb, and four to turn the ladder,' is only incidentally about ladders or even lightbulbs. It's about stupidity trying to do things in an ineffective and unproductive manner, and it provides an illustration. Wouldn't you say so, dear?"

Aed said, "I was just thinking about what impact such a presentation might have on my teaching at school. A concrete capture of an abstract idea is harder to make than an abstract decision, and much more powerful to understand. Whether I have the political strength to get away with a non-standard treatment of content is —"

Clancy cut him off. "What was the question Taberah asked? Was it something like 'How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?'"

Beyond a New World

Taberah was sitting on the lawn, resting, thinking — when he realized that he had never explored the computer. He had gone to a couple of its rooms when Aed had led him, but he had never set out to see what there was to be seen.

That was strange. When he was little, Taberah had explored every building he was allowed in with a sense of fascination; he still remembered the wonder with which he had imagined a door opening, beams of light showing from behind. He asked Aed if he could explore the computer; Aed would have liked to accompany him, but was thinking about a problem he was researching. So Aed said, "Go ahead. Touch the picture with a gold border."

Taberah went in; he was in a gallery of pictures, and reached out for one of them. He was drawn to it

was through it.

Taberah looked around. He was in an immense labyrinth; he started to fly around, the walls shifting and changing as he walked. There were statues, and fountains, and shadows lurking; there was something strange about it that felt like home.

Taberah turned a corner, and looked around. He was in a circular room with no doors; after looking around for a moment, he saw a knob at the side of a large black disc in the middle of the floor. He reached for it,

and pulled; downwards was a brick tunnel, reaching into fathoms of darkness. After thinking a moment, Taberah left the annulus and tumbled down.

It was dark, or almost dark, around him; it looked like a room with candlelight. As his senses adjusted, Taberah heard crickets chirping, and realized there was the sound of the ocean; he looked around, and saw starlight. Which reminded him — but he would have to do that later. He started to fly about, and realized that he was in a huge forest. He came to the water's edge and dove down.

It was scary to see the water close above him; Taberah held his breath before reminding himself that he was just surrounded by moving pictures. He went in and down, in and down.

After a little while of pitch darkness, Taberah could see a faint blue light. He flew towards it, and saw color dancing. He saw thin slivers moving by twos and threes — fishes, he thought, and then went closer and saw that the swimming creatures were mermaids and tritons. Then he recognized the light: it was a vast city of sunken stone, an alien ruins. A mermaid swam by; he reached for her hand, and then he realized that he could not touch her. He followed her around, through streets and doorways and tunnels, between walls with runes glowing blue-white. The mermaid swam off; he opened one door, and saw a decorated room which made him forget he was underwater. Then he saw a strange picture on the wall; it puzzled him. He reached for it —

What is This?

"Aed!" Taberah called. "Aed! What is this?"

Aed came running, muttering under his breath, "This had better be good!"

Aed looked at the screen — a nude female avatar was writhing in sexual ecstasy — and, after staring a moment, turned the video off. "That's a valerie," he said. "I should think that her purpose should be obvious enough."

Aed looked at Taberah, and then realized that he had misjudged the look in Taberah's eyes. Taberah had been staring at the valerie in fascination, but not exactly lust. He had rather been staring in puzzlement, and in the same horrid fascination that he had seen on Clancy's face, looking at a car wreck. Aed began to realize that an off the cuff response was not going to work here. After collecting his thoughts, Aed said, "Well, what do you think the picture was about?"

Taberah said, "I do not understand. She looked on her face like a woman wanting to be bounced, but she had her clothes off, and what a horrid body! Her breasts were enormous; they were ten times as large as beautiful breasts, and the rest of her body looked like a muscular boy's body, or a man's." He paused a moment, and then his face was filled with a flash of insight. "Aed! Was this valerie made for lust by a pedophile who wanted to pretend that he was looking at a woman instead of the boy's body he was looking at? He must have been trying very hard to fool

himself, to have put on such huge, ugly breasts! But why make a picture to lust at in the first place?"

Aed mulled over this response, and mentally compared the valerie's body with his wife's — and then looked into his own reactions. "Taberah," he said, "a valerie looks like that because that is what my nation thinks a beautiful woman looks like. I don't know how to explain it, but even though I try to love and honor my wife, the trend is strong to me; the valerie looks better to me."

Taberah turned green, and said, "Why? And I still don't understand why to make pictures for that purpose. Do you not think God's way of making women is beautiful?"

Aed thought for a moment and said, "Taberah, the culture we are in is sick. It is dying. This is one of many signs of its sickness."

Taberah said, "Then why not heal it?"

Aed said, "I don't know."

In the Stars

After taking some time to rest — Taberah was still quite confused — he asked Aed, "When was the day of your birth?"

Aed said, "It's really not that important."

Taberah said, "Why should a man of your age not want to tell when he was born?"

Aed said, "I'm old enough, Taberah. Why do you want to know?"

Taberah was puzzled; Aed had attained a very respectable age, and Taberah could not understand why he looked uncomfortable about it. Maybe to explore later...

"I want to go outside at night," Taberah said, "and gaze upon the stars and the crystalline spheres, and know the influence of the planets when you were born upon your life and at the present day."

Aed took a moment to parse this sentence, and said, "You want to cast my horoscope?"

"Yes."

"I thought you were a Catholic."

"I am."

"Then why do you want to cast my horoscope?"

"In order to understand you better."

"Don't you think there's something wrong with astrology?"

"What?"

"What do you think astrology is?"

"Natural philosophy, exploring the interconnected world in which we live."

"Taberah, astrology is not science. It's magic, or like magic. It belongs to the occult."

Taberah was trying to sift this apart. "Why?"

"It is divination. It does not work according to the basic laws of science. Astronomy is science; it studies how the heavens go. But it does not believe in influences, any more than looking at the entrails of a chicken will tell the future."

Taberah said, "Aed, what's the difference between science and magic?"

Aed was caught completely off guard. The disowning hostility of science to magic, *The Skeptical Inquirer*, the use of the word 'scientific' to mean 'rational' and 'working' and 'magic' as a pejorative metaphor for technology that did not appear to behave according to rational principles — Taberah might as well have asked him to explain the difference between light and darkness. But his question deserved an answer; science does not include divination — no, that would exclude weather forecasting; science provides theories and laws about how the world works — so does magic; science is about exploring the forces of nature — no, magic claimed to do that as well; science is reductionistic and magic holistic — no, that was, if true, looking at the surface rather than the nature of things, and that wasn't true; it excluded psychology; science produces predictable results according to its theories that — well, that

also rules out psychology as science...

"Taberah, what can astrology tell you about a person?"

Aed listened to Taberah's explanation, and slowly stopped fighting a realization that this made more sense than what he was taught in his undergraduate psychology class, particularly behaviorism — he felt he would be much better understood by Taberah's astrology than by a behaviorist account. Astrology at least accounted for the stuff of common sense — emotions, tendencies, thoughts, good and bad timing — while behaviorism reduced him to an unbelievably simplistic account of just a black box that does actions. Listening to Taberah's account sounded goofy here and there, and the idea that the influence of the stars and planets controlled matters was straight-out hogwash, but Taberah's explanation overall gave him the impression of a rational account believed by a rational mind.

Science did experiments rigorously, and its standards did not validate any claims of magic — no, wait, the dice were loaded on that question; in Taberah's explanation, Aed saw a wisdom that just wasn't found in psychology; science did not meet the standards of interesting magic. No, that was not quite right; when did science really begin flourishing? At the same time as magic began flourishing, and often in the same people; Newton's discovery of physics was almost a vacation from his work in alchemy. The two enterprises were born out of the same desire, to control nature and gain power, and in both people would readily engage in practices that had been hitherto regarded as impious and disgusting, such as digging up and mutilating the dead. Still, there was a difference, a difference which Aed felt if he could not think. They —

Aed came to himself and said, "I can't tell you the difference between science and magic, Taberah. I can't tell you, but I do know it. You shouldn't be doing astrology. You shouldn't be doing divination. If you're not sure of whether something is science or magic, you can ask me." Aed thought about buying him a psychology text, but decided not to, at least not for the moment. The psychology text he'd read, he was beginning to realize, was parochial and in many ways backwards; of course it was written by psychologists at respected schools, but the zeitgeist was —

Taberah would encounter enough of it on its own, without having it embedded in something Aed told him to have replace his belief in astrology. Aed felt vaguely guilty about destroying a treasurehouse of lore, but let this go to the back of his mind. Once Aed had explained a simplified version of physics and astronomy, it was with some deflation that Taberah saw why Aed placed astrology among divination, but not weather forecasting.

Taberah stepped out that night, and lay on his back to look at the stars. He could not see many of them, and those badly, because of all the light. It seemed to him that something had departed from their song, but he could almost see something new. It was beautiful that the planets should revolve around the sun and not the earth; just as there were nine orders of angels — the highest six of whom gazed continually on the glory of God, and only three of whom were sent out among men — there corresponded nine planets, six of which were further out in the Heavens, the third of which contained life, and all of which revolved around the Light! His head went dizzy when he realized what it meant that he lived on a planet, and the sun was a star.

The Trial

A representative from the Turing Society called Aed. "We hear that you have a program that is trying to pass the Turing test. I would like to administer the Turing test to your program at 2:00 PM on Tuesday, with observation. Is that acceptable to you?"

Aed's heart jumped, and he had to force himself to stand still. "Yes. I will look forward to it."

The test room was modified to support an arbitrary number of lurkers, and excitement built around the university. Quite a number of eyes were watching as the tester strode into the room. One of the contestant avatars looked like a unicorn; the other looked like a dragon. The tester managed to conceal her surprise, and said, "Good morning. How are you today?"

The unicorn said, "I am doing quite well. You?"

The dragon said, "I've had a lousy day, but it's getting better. I love playing the Turing game."

The tester said to the dragon, "Have you ever lost the game?"

The dragon said, "I've lost once, to a salesperson. I was really mad when the judge said I was a computer."

The tester repeated to the dragon, "Have you ever lost the game?"

The dragon repeated, "I've lost once, to a salesperson. I was really mad when the judge said I was a computer."

The tester asked the unicorn, "What about you? Have you ever lost the game?"

"Yes, frequently. I guess I don't sound very human."

The tester repeated her question to the unicorn. "What about you? Have you ever lost the game?"

The unicorn hesitated and said, "Um, is there a reason you're repeating the question?"

The tester did not answer. Instead, she said to the unicorn, "Tell me a bit about yourself."

The unicorn said, "Uh, I like woodworking, and I like to collect things. I've got a roomful of bottle caps, and I have one of the biggest collections of visual textures on the net. And I like fantasy."

The tester turned to the dragon and said, "What about you? How are you like?"

The dragon said, "I'm an optimist. It's too sunny out to be crabby. And I like collecting stamps."

The tester asked the dragon, "What is your philosophy of life?"

The dragon said, "My philosophy is one of many sides. There are many sides to life; there are many sides to being a person. I am many different things as the occasion merits."

The tester turned to the unicorn and asked, "What is your philosophy of life?"

The unicorn said, "Could you ask me another question? I'm kind of nervous now, and I'm having trouble thinking straight."

The tester said "Ok What is the one question you most fear me

The tester said, "OK. What is the one question you most fear me asking you?"

The unicorn shivered, and said, "The one you just asked?"

The conversation continued for two hours, unfolding, unfolding. It was about that time that the tester asked the unicorn, "What was your scariest childhood moment?" and the unicorn told a story about getting lost on a camping trip, and then twisting an ankle. Then the tester turned to the dragon, and said, "How about you?"

The dragon said, "Personally, I'm partial to seltzer water. And you?"

The tester pushed a button and left for the conference room Aed was in. She said, "You have quite an impressive achievement there, but you have a long distance to go before passing the Turing test. I tried to give two hours' testing to be sure, but I knew the dragon was a computer within five minutes of speaking with it. The clues that gave it away were —"

Aed cut her off and said, "Sorry, you guessed wrong."

"*What?*" the tester asked.

"You guessed wrong."

"Can you tell me with a straight face," she asked, "that the dragon was a human? Do I look that gullible?"

Aed gently said, "No, I'm not saying that the dragon was human. I'm saying that they were both computers. The dragon was merely an old version of the program."

The woman's jaw dropped.

Aed added, "I should also like to say that most of the ideas were my guest Taberah's; I mostly helped out. The achievement is his, not mine."

Detained

A knock sounded on the front door. "I wonder who that could be at this hour," Nathella said. "A reporter?"

She opened the door. There were several men outside, holding badges. They looked familiar, and smug; one of them said, "Officer Salisbury, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services."

Nathella sank back. Aed said, "What are you doing here?"

Officer Salisbury said, "We have come to detain Taberah, before transporting him to his country of origin."

Aed thought for a moment about an English translation, and said, "What right do you have to do this?"

Salisbury said, "We are enforcing the law. If you —"

Taberah popped his head in the window and said, "What is this?"

Officer Salisbury said, "You need to come with us."

That shoots any remnants of search-and-seizure concerns, Aed thought. "Could he have a moment to gather up his possessions, at least?"

"That won't be necessary," the officer said. "We do not transport possessions beyond clothing worn. We are not a shipping service."

Aed, Nathella, Clancy, and Fiona each gave him a hug, their eyes filled with tears. Then Taberah was handcuffed and led away to a car. Nathella could see Taberah steeling himself against the ride.

Wrong Person

In the middle of the night, the videophone rang. Aed got up, turned off the video, and said, "Yes?"

The voice on the line was unfamiliar. She said, "Hello, is this Aed Kinsella?"

Aed said, "Yes."

The woman said, "I'm calling to tell you that you and Taberah Kinsella have won the 2034 Turing Award for your joint work in artificial intelligence."

Aed blinked, and said, "I'm sorry; I think you have the wrong person."

The woman laughed, and said, "I'm positive I've got the right person. Can you get Taberah?"

"I'm sorry; I can't; Taberah is being 'detained' by the INS."

"What? Who are the INS? Do the police know about them?"

"Yes; the INS are part of the police. They are the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services, and they just took Taberah. He is now en route to a jail, to have his head and his beard shaved, be stripped and put in a de-humanizing uniform, and sit in a cold cell with nothing to do while he waits for the INS to decide what country to deport

him to."

The woman was silent for a moment, and said, "What country is he from?"

"I don't know. Dr. Pabst, an anthropologist I know, said that he doesn't seem to be from any culture currently existing. He has learned English, but besides that — why?"

The woman said, "Please wait a moment; I'll get back to you."

Aed had just crawled back into the covers when the phone rang. It was a journalist. And then another. And then another. After the first dozen times trying to explain that it was Taberah's work and not his, and that Taberah had been taken by the INS, he unplugged the phone.

At four in the morning, the doorbell rang. And then rang again. And again. Aed swore, and fumbled about for Nathella's keychain — a keychain with pepper spray. He threw on a bathrobe, and padded out to the door. "Who is it?" he shouted through the door.

"Officer Salisbury, returning Taberah to your house."

"*What?*"

"When we came last night, we did not realize that he held a United Nations passport. We apologize for the inconvenience."

Aed opened the door. Taberah looked weary, frightened, relieved, and very happy to be back. Aed picked him up, and held him in thanksgiving. Then he said, "Let's both of us get some shuteye; we've got a speech to write."

A House Abuzz

There was a great deal of excitement around the house; friends and colleagues from church, the university, and other places stopped by, and some of them brought meals. Aed was excited by the activity; Nathella was wearied, and climbed into bed as soon as the last party had left.

One of the things that Aed insisted was that Taberah and all of the Kinsellas would appear through avatars, and that Taberah be referred to by a pen name — John. This was big enough news that Aed did not want strangers on the street recognizing them from a compucast or rebroadcast, nor calling them up. While Aed was in the living room explaining details of the work to his colleagues, and Nathella and Clancy were occupied with the hospitality, Fiona was occupied with Taberah. The two of them were in the computer, talking about what Taberah's avatar should look like.

The question was a bigger question than it seemed at first. The avatar should not be recognizable as him, but it should reveal him, his bearing. "It should be a mask," Fiona said. "It should be like a Halloween costume, changing yourself in such a way that you shine through."

"What's Halloween?"

"Later, Taberah. We don't have time to explore that now, although you'll see in a few months. Now, to start off with, do you want a human-looking avatar, or a fantastic avatar?"

"I think I'd like a fantastic one."

"I — I don't know. Could I look at some of each?"

"Fiona said, "Hmm... There is something alien about you. Would you like to see what aliens look like?"

Taberah looked at several bodies of aliens, and recoiled. "Those aren't aliens," he said. "They're humans made to look grotesque. That's not what being alien is about."

"Ok," Fiona said. "How about fantasy? Do you like fantasy?"

They looked through a faun, a centaur, a unicorn, a dragon. "How old do you want to look?" Fiona said. Taberah didn't know. "Not that knight in armor; that would only be for going out to war. Not — *there!*" he said, with excitement.

"You don't want that," Fiona said. "That's a court jester. They acted like fools for other people to laugh at."

"I want that! I was a court jester once!"

Fiona wondered about Taberah's statement, but this was not time for long questions. She looked through colors, and guided Taberah towards a jester's outfit that was darker and had more muted colors. It was unmistakably a jester's outfit, but it had an air of gravity about it — which Taberah liked. "Ok," she said. "Now what do you want to eat?"

"Roast boar," Taberah said.

"Taberah, boar is awfully expensive, and there will be a lot of people there. I —"

"Give me two swords and I will kill one!" Taberah said, grinning.

"No, Taberah. You can't do that."

"Why not?"

"To start with, there aren't any boars here. You'll have to think of something else."

"Roast pig with an apple in its mouth!"

Aed stepped in. "Taberah, would you come out for a minute? There are some people who want to see you."

Fiona said to Taberah, "We can't have pork. There will be a lot of Muslims at that dinner."

"Is this country overrun by worshippers of Mahomet? Is there no one to drive them out?"

Aed stopped in the hallway. "Taberah, a couple of things. First, Muslims are not worshippers of Mahomet, any more than Christians are worshippers of John. They believe Mahomet was the greatest prophet, but not the man-god we believe Jesus was. Second, Muslims are citizens here. They are powerful, and their power is not all to the good — it is awfully hard to do things that Islam disapproves of, and there have been not-so-subtle manipulations against Christian evangelists speaking to Muslims, for one thing — but they are people, citizens of this country like anyone else, and not invaders. It is sad that Christianity has let Islam take its place, but the solution is not to run them off. Third, we may have wine available at th—"

Taberah interrupted. "Spiced wine, piping hot? And cider?"

Aed said, "Spiced wine, piping hot, and cider, if you want, might be possible, but the food has to be something that Muslims may eat." Aed declined to mention the headache that would be involved in getting alcohol served...

Taberah said, "Do Muslims eat hamburgers?"

Aed threw up his hands and said, "I have guests waiting. Why don't you have *filet mignon*? It's the same kind of animal as hamburger, only much better."

Taberah was tired after the people met. He had not realized the intense energy it takes to connect with people from another land — he

and the Kinsellas had gotten used to each other through intense contact. Nathella picked up on his fatigue faster than anyone else; she encouraged him to go to bed and get a good night's rest before the big day. Everything was in place; Aed had finally managed to convince the Turing society that he did not deserve the award, and accepted the privilege of introducing Taberah. Everyone slept lightly — everyone but Taberah; he slept like the dead, and got up to protest the stiff clothes he wore to the banquet.

Accolades

Taberah was cheered at the meat and drink; the meat reminded him of home. He was equally delighted to sit down and drink wine with Aed, and his spirits did not flag although people asked him questions that struck him as rather odd. At the end of the dinner, Taberah was pleased to have (so far as he could tell) avoided making any *faux pas*. He felt a sense of accomplishment, and felt at home.

The chairman of the Turing Society looked at Aed and pointed to his watch, and Aed nodded. He took a sip of water, and then climbed up the steps to the podium.

Nathella could not see that her husband was nervous, but she knew it. He had thrown out his introduction a dozen times. Neither of them were worried for Taberah, though; Aed and Taberah had worked out a speech, which Taberah memorized with remarkable facility.

"I would like to begin this introduction," Aed said, "by apologizing for giving an introduction not worthy of the occasion. I would very much like to give a traditional introduction, in which one perhaps starts by saying 'The person who is going to speak is a man who needs no introduction,' and then spends five or ten minutes detailing education, awards, and accomplishments. It would perhaps sound grander if I were to say that such an introduction was inadequate to him, but the truth is that I don't know enough about him to give an introduction of that sort. I don't know if he went to school at all; he appeared on my doorstep, became deathly ill, and has since then been turning my world upside

down.

"His first surprise for me was in chess. I am rated at 1975, and when I invited him in, him looking dazed and confused, he took my chess pieces to the table (at least after I let him), and began to play his way — at first I thought he didn't understand the game or was cheating, but then I realized he wasn't playing on a grid. He beat me five times in a row.

"Different members of our family have had conversations with him that left our heads spinning; my wife Nathella is the only one who has not had that experience, and I believe that is because of her ability to understand people. There's only been one time that I've been able to understand Taberah better than her, but I won't detail that here.

"Taberah is brilliant, and approaches life in ways that would never occur to me. Wherever he comes from, and wherever he was educated, he somehow had the intelligence to look at the problem of artificial intelligence in a way nobody else had seen it before. If I cannot vouch for his education or accomplishments, I can vouch for this one accomplishment. Taberah has worked into a special place in my heart, and not only because of his brilliance. Without further ado, here he is."

Taberah strode up to the podium; on the screen behind him, his avatar looked quizzical and dignified at the same time. "I was going to say," he began, "that my discovery has taught us nothing about human intelligence. But I began to reason, and realize that it has.

"Men have always wanted to create other men like themselves. I once wished to make an assemblage of gears that would make a mechanical human, and I saw no reason why not. If gears could make a clock, with continual motion controlled according to its construction, why could the best crafted gears not make a man? Certainly myths came of gods who had made mechanical men. So I do not find it to be at all surprising that, when people found a way to make a machine that could do arithmetic and logic, they thought they had made something that could think.

"Chess is something that is difficult for people to do. So it was thought. If we can only make a computer that can beat the best humans

thought, 'If we can only make a computer that can beat the best humans at chess, then we will have achieved intelligence.' The day has long past when a human could beat the best computer, but if that achievement has taught us anything about human intelligence, it is that humans do not play chess like a computer. Making better and better computer chess players did not make computers intelligent any more than making more and more realistic-looking statues will make them alive.

"Conversation is something humans do, so Alan Turing, a brilliant mathematician, thought, 'If we can only make a computer that can pass for human in conversation, then we will have achieved intelligence.' Now the day has come when a computer has passed for human in conversation, and if it has taught us anything about intelligence, it is that intelligence goes beyond conversation as it goes beyond chess. Those are both activities humans can do, but mimicking or even beating human performance does not a person make, any more than a collection of lifelike statues can be improved to the point of achieving life.

"I do not think that this calls for a new test to determine intelligence. I think it calls for a realization that human intelligence is too rich and too deep to reduce to a simple test. When a test has been proposed to measure intelligence, the test gains a life of its own, and suddenly people stop thinking about intelligence, and start thinking about how to pass the test. Chess playing programs became sophisticated with speed and advances that were not even approximated by efforts to understand how humans play chess, let alone how humans think.

"But this is enough. It is bad speaking to cram so much into your audience's heads that things are falling out; I have criticized enough for an award recipient. The field of artificial intelligence is a fertile area of thought which has brought many good things; even if artificial intelligence is never achieved, its failure will have enriched the soil of human endeavor. I thank you for this award and the other assistance the Turing Society has provided me, and, Aed, Nathella, Fiona, and Clancy for their help. God bless, and have a good evening." He returned to his place.

The chairman of the Turing Society stepped up to the microphone and said "There is one more thing Mr Kinsella The Turing Society has a

and said, "There is one more thing, Mr. Taberah. The Funding Society has a fund, out of which to give prizes to its award recipients. The funding might buy research equipment, or a sabbatical, or perhaps access to online research libraries. Is there something we can get for you? Do you need a home?"

Taberah said, "I have everything I need now. But if there was one thing I could have — do you have a troubadour's lute?"

There was a moment's pause; the chairman, Dr. Bode, spoke on his cell phone for a moment and then said, "One of the members of the audience has one now, which she will lend you while another is delivered." A small woman walked up; Taberah was puzzled, as she was holding a small black bag, but otherwise empty-handed — there was no room to conceal a lute, even a small one. She reached into the bag, and pulled out a thick black belt and two long black gloves, long enough to cover an elbow. He could see that there was something else in the bag. She looked at him and said, "Put the belt around your waist, and the gloves on your hands."

Taberah did so, feeling some puzzlement.

"Now," she said, "play as if you were holding a lute."

Taberah looked at her, confused.

"Like this," she said, moving her hands in a strumming motion.

Taberah moved his hands, as if to play a chord — and jolted in surprise as notes sounded. Then he moved his hands again. There were some sounds of jarring dissonance, like a piano being played by frostbitten fingers losing their numbness, and then a simple, high, pure, aching sound. It pierced by its beauty, and with the music, words, in a voice that filled the room:

*Once there was a little lady,
Fair and pure and elfin bright.
Her light skin shone like burnished silver,
Blazing light throughout the night.*

*Her soul it was a filled with music,
Her body was a filled with dance.
Her long hair was black like ravens,
All blazing was her countenance.*

Taberah's otherworldly song filled an hour; in his song, he carried with him a feeling of home, a moment of Heaven, and all of the strangeness of the land about him, of his aching at no place that felt home, vanished. The music he made in his trance brought its listeners into another time, into another world; to those in the room, the song so filled their consciousness that they did not think of anything else. When the song began, the netcast of the awards ceremony was brought into focus, and the avatar who had looked slightly strange speaking about artificial intelligence now fit perfectly into place: a court jester — and more than a jester — holding a lute, telling a tale and weaving a song.

When it was over, even the silence was musical, because it bore the silent echoes of the music's spirit. Taberah walked back to his seat, and asked, "Can we go home?"

With that, the meeting was over.

Where Do You Come From?

It was the first day of classes; Aed had returned home late, to a house filled with a marvelous scent. It smelled of tomato, and basil, and bacon, and beef. Clancy said grace at Aed's invitation, and they began to pass the pasta.

Fiona looked at Taberah, and said, "Where are you from, Taberah? I don't think you've ever told me that."

Taberah said, "I am from — Provence, or at least half from there. My father is a merchant, and we have travelled to the ends of the world, and beyond — but never to a place so strange as this. I am used to mountains, and seas, and strange people and barbarian tribes — even worshippers of Mahomet —"

Aed said, "*Muslims.*"

"— even Muslims, but there are many things here that are strange to me."

"Like what?" Fiona said.

Taberah thought for a moment, and said, "It is hard for me to think of and harder to say in words."

Nathella said, "Can you think of it in your words in your own language? And then maybe translate?"

Taberah concentrated for a moment and said, "No, I can't. Not even in my own language. I will tell you later. After I think."

Aed said, "Don't worry too much if you can't answer. It was a friendly question, not a probe."

Taberah said, "It is a friendly question, and a probe, and a good question. That is why I want to answer it. Maybe after I research on the computer."

Fiona said, "Taberah, have you ever been to my Dad's campus? Tomorrow's a half day, and I could take you there. You might see more of the world."

Taberah said, "I would be happy to do that. But ooh! I miss home. I have never had a place that was completely home. Whether riding away hotly pursued, or haggling down the price of salt, or opening an illuminated manuscript — I was at home for a moment, but over time not at home. Even in stealing a relic from a nearby cathedral —"

Fiona said, "You *stole* a *relic* from a *cathedral*?"

Taberah said, "Yes. The saint wanted to move; otherwise, he wouldn't have let his relics be moved. And I can move swiftly and silently —"

Fiona said, "Taberah, would you steal a fork from this house?"

Taberah looked surprised. "Never!"

Fiona said, "Why on earth would you be willing to steal a relic?"

Taberah had no real response to this question. He said, "If another city had a relic, and you needed it, wouldn't you assist it to your place?"

Fiona said, "I can't explain all my reasons why not, because I have to go to bed in four hours. But to start it off, that would be dishonorable."

Taberah thought, and said, "I'll have to think about that. I never met a knight who thought it dishonorable to steal a relic. Oh, I know how to

a knight who thought it dishonorable to steal a relic. OK, I know how to explain. A relic does not belong to a living man or a place; it belongs to God and to the saint. Stealing a relic is a very different matter from stealing corn or grain. The corn really belongs to the person who has it; the relic belongs to the saint, and then to the saint's followers — so if the people here worship a saint and want his relic more than the people where it is kept, then if the saint allows the relic to be moved, it should be moved."

Fiona said, "I can't believe this rationalizing. The bigger a sin, the more rationalizing there is, and you have rationalized an unholy theft on top of starting it in the first place!"

Nathella turned to Fiona and said, "Honey, I don't understand Taberah, but he's not rationalizing. He does not have a defensive air about him. And something tells me that he would not steal anything from this house — nor steal anything from another place and bring it here. Right, Taberah?"

Taberah said, "Yes. I would never steal if it were dishonorable."

Clancy looked around and said, "Taberah, did you hear the joke about the cathedral that was so blessed that it had two heads of John the Baptist, one as a boy and one as a man?"

Taberah said eagerly, "No. Please tell it to me; it sounds very good!"

Fiona groaned and said, "Mom, would you please explain it?"

Nathella said, "Taberah, did you notice anything funny about there being two heads of John the Baptist?"

Taberah said, "No. It sounds like a great providence indeed, for which God is to be praised."

Nathella said, "What would have had to have happened for a cathedral to have the head of John the Baptist as a boy?"

Taberah said, "I suppose for him to have died as a boy."

Nathella said, "If there was a skull of him as a man, did he live to be a man?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Nathella said, "So there's a logical contradiction for a cathedral to have two heads of John the Baptist, one as a boy and one as a man. Right?"

Taberah said, "Yes."

Nathella looked at him. "You still don't get the joke."

Taberah said, "I'm still waiting for the joke to be told. So I don't get it."

Nathella said, "If there's a logical contradiction, then it couldn't have happened, right?"

Taberah said, "If there's a logical contradiction, there's a logical contradiction. It doesn't mean that God can't bless a church with two heads of John the Baptist. God moves, and his ways are beyond our understanding. He has done greater things than bless us with two heads of a saint!"

Fiona said, "Taberah, if we go out for a walk tomorrow, do you promise not to confuse me?"

Taberah said, "Am I confusing you?"

Aed got up, placed his arm around Taberah's shoulders, and said,

"Wild thing!
You make my head spin!
I think I love you."

Music From Another Age

Fiona took Taberah by the hand, eagerly leading him as if she were a small child. The university's square was filled with a noisy, jostling, laughing group of people, chaotic as any bazaar. The excitement was tangible. "Today is the first day of Student Activities Week. All the student organizations are clamoring to find new recruits from among the freshmen, and anybody else who cares to come. It is a lot of fun."

Taberah walked over to one stand where several people were talking. He read the sign overhead, *Humanist Hacker's Guild*, and asked, "What is a hacker?"

One of the men looked up from a portable computer and said, "The first hackers were people in software who like solving problems and believe in freedom and helping each other. They produced a lot of computers and software. We are a special kind of hacker, hackers in the humanities. We produce artwork, music, and literature, and share it with other people. In a way, there have been humanist hackers for ages, but interaction with computer hackers has brought an awareness and a fertile field for sharing. Would you like to have a copy of one of my poems?"

Taberah said, "If I am here, why would you give me a copy? Why not just recite it?"

The hacker said, "Um, because I don't have it memorized?"

Taberah said, "I'm puzzled."

The hacker said, "Why?"

Taberah said, "How could you compose a poem, even writing it down, and then forget it?"

"Quite easily, I assure you."

Fiona put her hand on Taberah's arm and said, "Taberah, please. We are his guests."

The hacker took a sheet of paper and said, "Here. I'll read it to you."

"The Unicorn's Horn," by Elron Ellingswood

I walked out into the deep, dark, forest,
and there, in a clearing, it stood.

Oak was behind it, ferns below,
and atop its head, stood a blazing white horn.

It walked to a shimmering pool,
Its hooves not making a sound.

Around, the silence was broken
by the calling of a hawk.

The wind stirred the tree leaves
and danced softly over the grass.

The Lady of the Lake stirred,
softly,
invisibly.

Taberah looked both impressed and puzzled. He said, "You show the forest as an object of beauty. Why?"

Fiona grabbed his wrist, and tugged on him, saying, "Look over there! Karate!"

An instructor smiled and said, "Not Karate. Kuk Sool Won. Karate is

a single martial art that focuses on punching, kicking, and blocking; Kuk Sool is a comprehensive martial arts system that includes joint locks, weapons, and escapes as well as many kinds of punching, kicking, and blocking."

Taberah said, "What's a joint lock?"

The instructor said, "Throw a slow punch at me."

Taberah said, "What?"

The instructor said, "Do this."

Taberah made the motion and his hand was caught, his wrist twisted.

"But what if I punch you with my other hand?"

"Why don't you try to do that? Slowly?"

Taberah did, and his puzzlement was exceeded by the instructor's, who said, after a second, "Stop. I've never seen someone who could resist a joint lock like that. You must have a tremendously high tolerance for pain."

Taberah said, "I don't understand. I didn't feel pain. I don't understand what you were trying to do."

The color of Fiona's face was beginning to match her long, wavy red hair. She said, "Taberah, come on. Let's find something else."

Taberah began to wander, and then saw — or rather, *heard* — something so positively medieval in spirit that it drew his attention so completely he was aware of nothing else. Up until this point, he had been thrown off balance by a hurry in the people around him — or, at least, that would be a deficient way of putting it. A more accurate way of putting it would be that he was aware of time in the sense of an awareness of something around him, but not in any sense that would let him grasp rushing to get something done, or guilt at sitting at doing nothing. He

vaguely perceived such a quality in those about him, and he was baffled and troubled by it, in the same way as if he were surrounded by people who were constantly thinking about air and in a frenzied haste to try to find some space that had enough air to breathe.

It was the near total absence of this quality in the music before him that beckoned him. It was as if he had stepped into a room of people breathing normally and attending more important concerns and only then come to realize that he had been surrounded by people fretting over whether they had enough air to breathe.

Taberah stood in silence, drinking it in. Then he stepped forward, picked up an instrument, and joined in the song.

At dinner, Aed asked Taberah, "So what did you see today?"

Taberah said, "Today was a happy day. Today I discovered New Age."

Aed suppressed a groan. How was he to begin an explanation? The phenomenon that was called New Age in its current incarnation had occurred many times in the past, and would doubtless occur many times in the future, each time under a different name; it was in spirituality what a logical fallacy is in reasoning. It was heresy — perhaps he was safe in using that word with Taberah. In the word, 'heresy' carried a curious inversion of "a good and original idea which some benighted tradition condemns", the word being a condemnation of the tradition rather than the idea. What a diabolical trick that was! Heresies were neither good nor original ideas; they were propositions that had been weighed in the balance and found lacking, "New" Age being a manifestation of an error that had first occurred two millennia ago and had rotted every time since then. It promised freedom, and was one of the most confining and constricting prisons he had known — a prison like being left all alone in an empty wasteland. You could go as far and wide as you wanted, and still find nothing good.

Aed hesitantly asked Taberah, "What draws you to New Age?"

"The — music — time — you are hurried. They are not."

Aed nodded. New Age music was soothing music. But as to the time — "Taberah, it's a busy time of year for me. What is this about time?"

Taberah tried to explain, and at first failed completely. Then, on the second time through, there was a look of dawning comprehension on Fiona's face, and she said, "I will try to enter your time, Taberah. But it will be difficult; we have been taught to hurry for a long time. I won't be able to do it very quickly, if I can."

Taberah kissed her cheek, and said, "I not in hurry — ooh, did I do right in touch?"

Aed wondered what Taberah was talking about, and then recalled him sternly telling Taberah not to touch others in ways that he had not seen them touching. "It's OK, Taberah. You may give a kiss on the cheek to people in this family."

Taberah walked over, and kissed Aed on the cheek.

The Phoenix

Taberah spent most of the day running through New Age music in his head, and seeing how it would sound on his lute; Fiona had to knock on the door several times before he noticed she was there.

The square was less crowded than before; on the way in, Taberah looked and saw a place where several people were moving their fingertips about on a ridged surface, their hands dancing with energy; on a wall behind them, colors swirled and spun, vibrating with energy. "What's that?" he said.

Fiona said, "Those are visual musicians. They play instruments that do not produce sound, but color. Do you like it?"

Taberah said, "I like it, but why are they spinning so quickly? Why —" he pointed to another booth and said, "What's that?"

A man in the booth next to them said, "Hey, a southpaw! Greetings!"

Taberah said, "What?"

"You're left-handed."

"What's that?"

"It's when someone uses the left side instead of the right?"

Taberah made the sign against evil and said, "Why would someone

do that?"

"You did."

"I might have pointed with my left hand, but I do everything else with my right hand."

The student tossed a pen up, and said, "Catch!"

Taberah looked, and realized he had caught it with his left hand. "I am sorry. I have sins I did not know."

The student now no longer looked so merry, and said, "You're left-handed, but you're ashamed to admit it."

Taberah hung his head.

The student said, "You aren't part of the solution. You're part of the problem. We have a right-handed society, with right-handed machinery and right-handed rules. Even the words are prejudiced — 'right' means correct, acceptable, and good, and 'sinister' and 'gauche' are words meaning 'left', which comes from a word meaning 'weak' or 'broken'. For years, lefthanders have been an invisible and maltreated minority, and now that some of us are speaking out and demanding that society improve, there are people like you who — a gay who was like you would be said to have internalized homophobia. You are —"

Taberah cut him off. "Why are you so angry?"

Taberah listened with horrid fascination to the rant. He began to realize that using the left hand, like turning a wheel the wrong direction or walking backwards, was only a symbol of evil and not its substance, and began (despite all internal resistance to external pressure) to see that the student's conclusions were right, that the world was a right-handed world with subtle and invisible slights to its left-handed members — or at least he tried to accept these things. He still felt guilt over catching the pen with his left hand, and he knew it would take time for him to shift his spirit to what he saw. But all this aside, he also saw an anger that brought far greater misery than any right-handed technology — not confusing

pencil sharpeners, not painful scissors — could possibly cause. He narrowed his eyes, and said, "You are angry."

The student swore, and said, "I'm furious. Why do you need to point that out?"

Taberah said, "Are you happier with your pit of rage than I am with my right-handed society?"

The student was speechless. Another student, who had been listening, said, "I would like to cordially request the honor of your absence at our booth."

Taberah felt anger rising in the pit of his stomach; he felt it, but did not let it master him. He turned, and walked away, taking a long walk around the square before slowing down, and finally stopping at one place. He looked at a group of students who were standing around, talking, laughing; each of them had a necklace with a fiery bird. Taberah asked, "Who are you?"

A young woman with long, curly auburn hair said, "My name is Emerant, and we are the Phoenix Society. The Phoenix Society is a group of brothers and sisters devoted to living in the abundant life that Jesus offers, and extending that life to others. The Phoenix, the bird that ever rises anew out of its own ashes, was a holy symbol in the ancient Christian Church, and in wearing it we recall the ancient church and its life among a pagan world, and allow God to create in us the same life in a pagan world today. We have worship services every Wednesday night. Would you like to come and join us?"

Taberah felt something in the back of his mind, but he could not put his finger on it — but it was something good, he was sure.

A young man with ebon skin placed his arm over Emerant's shoulder, and said, "What's your name?"

Taberah said, "My name is Taberah."

"How can we serve you? Do you have stuff to move in? Do you have a

story to tell?"

Taberah realized what he had felt but could not describe. There was an energy about these people, an invisible love so thick it could almost be felt. The young man was looking at him as if he were a king. The students in the group were all wearing distinctive necklaces, but their air did not treat him as an outside you, not even an outside you that they wanted to bring in. The man's eyes were dark as night, and they glittered like stars; there was something about his face that said 'I' and 'you', but even more said 'we'. Taberah smiled and said, "I should very much like to hear mass with you."

Emerant smiled a crooked smile, and said, "There is something else you want, Taberah."

Taberah closed his eyes for a second and said, "Emerant, I know your name. You, what is your name?"

The young man said, "My name is Abanu."

Taberah said, "Emerant and Abanu, I should very much like to play a song for you."

Immediately, a space appeared among the students. Taberah calmly, without any self-consciousness, walked over to the center and began to sing.

It was a noisy day, but it seemed silent inside that circle. Taberah could fill a room if he wanted to, but he was not singing loudly; still, all the students were aware of nothing else. When the song finished, Emerant looked around and saw that there were some people standing around and staring; she began to talk with him as the students asked Taberah questions.

It was not until seven that Aed found them, and told them that dinner was getting cold; Fiona had lost all track of time, and Taberah never had track of time to begin with. He slept well that night, and awoke in the morning knowing the answer to a question the Kinsellas had asked him.

In Spirit and in Truth

Taberah spent the day reading the Bible and researching on the computer; at dinner, he said, "Nathella, do you remember when you asked me a question about my place and this place, and I said it was harder to think of and harder to explain in words?"

Nathella said, "Yes."

Taberah said, "I was able to find words. In Bible, Jesus was talking with a woman at a well. She asked him what mountain to worship on. He said not to worship on this mountain or that mountain, but in Spirit and in truth. This land knows not how to worship in Spirit and in truth."

Aed's eyes narrowed. Aed and Nathella said together, "How so?"

Taberah said, "I have just begun to see how religion is, and it is not religion. It is private. It is an interest. It is a hobby. It is tame. Where I come from, religion is public because it pervades your whole being; it is who you are, and never has a pagan invader told a Catholic, 'You may be Christian, but make it a small thing. It is —'"

Aed nodded and said, "That criticism has been made before, and it is not to be lightly dismissed. Is there anything else you see?"

Taberah said, "I slowly began to notice, when navigating on the computer — where I am from, when people build a cathedral, they carve the backs of statues. I was shocked when I saw that people here do not do this. When an artist carves a statue in my land, he is not just working on a

ms. When an artist carves a statue in my land, he is not just working on a statue; he is making an offering to God, and his carving is a prayer. He carves the back as well as the front, working on a place whose fullness he may never see, because he is not making something for himself or other men, as much as making a prayer to God, who sees the back of the statue as easily as the front. Here, on the web, people do not do that. They think in terms of making a creation for other people. They do not try for completeness; they want — I do not know the words."

"Good enough for government work?" Clancy said.

"Yes. Except that making something that is 'good enough' does not mean making something that is good. God is only in the compartment called religion; he is not big enough to make virtual reality for — only other people who will not take the site very seriously is that important for."

I cannot make complete sense of Taberah's tangled wording, Nathella thought, but I do not need to. Taberah has difficulties with language when he is concentrating most intensely. She understood the meaning, if the words sometimes eluded her.

Aed said, "Anything else?"

Taberah said, "I hesitate..."

The room was silent.

Taberah continued, "I hesitate, but there is something strange about clothing and nudity. In my land, people wear clothing for custom and for decoration; being without clothing is not much. Here, clothing is for decency (a polite way to put it); there are chaste people and there are nude people, but there are not chaste, nude people. When a woman wears no shirt in an advertisement, her no-shirt means 'Look at me in lust!' She does not have a no-shirt that doesn't mean anything besides 'I don't want to have a shirt now.' There are people who say that we don't need to say clothes, and most of them say that not wearing clothes is not sexual, but few of them are chaste, or even acknowledge chastity.

"That is a symbol of something deeper. You need to cover your bodies, but even more you need to cover God, because you are ashamed of other people seeing them. And so you produce arguments to justify the existence of God, and God does or does not exist depending on whether or not he's covered.

"One of the theologians I know of, Thomas Aquinas, began his great work with five arguments for the existence of God. But these arguments have a very different meaning than yours; they were for adornment, and not for shame. Aquinas was not trying to give a needed proof of God, as your theologians do; certainly he did not think that if he failed to prove God's existence he was not able to believe in God. You speak of justifying belief, as if it needed justification, as if it were shameful if it were not covered by an argument.

"About clothing literally, I will not argue. Your way of looking seems to me a silly limitation that causes a lot of lust, but chaste nudity is not important. It is not one of the great things in life. But about clothing symbolically, I will argue much. You need in your minds to have an unblushing nudity, that can say, 'I believe in God and I accept his providence,' and not have a guilt about it for believing more than matter. You — I am sorry, I should be able to produce more examples. But there are many ways where you do not know how to worship in Spirit and in truth."

Aed was stunned. After a while, and after nobody else said anything, he said, "Son, you've got a brilliant mind. I have a feeling of being held under a microscope. I don't know how to respond, beyond saying that you see things I would never see, and I hope you keep thinking."

Nathella said, "You almost seem like someone from another era."

Taberah said, "What's an era?"

Aed said, "Later, Taberah. Later."

Which Era?

As Aed sat down, Taberah asked him, "So, what is an era?"

Aed thought. He said, "I would better answer that question after looking at an encyclopedia; I've thought about how to explain it, and I realized I knew less than I thought I did. But here's a rough sketch of what I can explain:

"The ancient world was the world that gave birth to Christianity. It is everything before the Middle Ages, or medieval period. It gave us the apex of paganism, and philosophy, and writing.

"The Middle Ages were a thousand years of Christian faith and culture. They saw monasteries, cathedrals, castles, monks, clergy, knights in shining armor, lords and vassals and fealty, chivalry, peasants and feudalism, illuminated manuscripts...

"After that came the Renaissance and Reformation period. There was a rebirth of art and learning from classical, that is ancient, times, and the monk Martin Luther nailed theses for reform to the door of Wittenburg Cathedral, and chaos broke loose. Let's see...

"The Elizabethan time was the time of the great playwright Shakespeare, and vernacular translations of the Bible. The Baroque time saw a flowering of complexity in art and music; aah!

"Modern times began with the Elizabethan era, and started a new secularism in philosophy. It reached its climax in the Enlightenment

secularism in philosophy. It reached its climax in the Enlightenment, with people worshipping the mind and reason, and the bloodbath that followed. Then came Romanticism and Victorianism, one of them a following of emotional sensitivity that often included libertinism, the other managing to be morbidly prudish. After that, came postmodernism, the era that we are in. People have given up the quest for truth, and there has been an increase in fragmentation — Taberah, I just saw a light go on in your eyes. What clicked?"

Taberah said, "I am medieval! What era are you from? Can you tell me how to get to the Middle Ages?"

Aed slapped his palm to his forehead and said, "Taberah, just forget this conversation and let's start over. There are some things about you that are like the Middle Ages, but the Middle Ages are a period of time in the past."

Taberah asked, "What is a period of time?"

Aed said, "It is a time when people have a certain way of living."

Taberah said, "I am from the Middle Ages period of time. And I think you might be as well. You belong to an age of faith, and you are a lord."

Aed said, "It is impossible to go back to another age. It is past. It has already happened."

Taberah would have normally backed off by this point, but there was something inside him that made him certain. He said, "Will you get out of bed tomorrow?"

Aed said, "Yes."

Taberah said, "But you have gotten out of bed in the past?"

Aed said, "Yes."

Taberah said, "Does that stop you from getting out of bed tomorrow?"

Aed saw where Taberah was going, and said, "But with history, it's different. You cannot bring back the past any more than you can make your self younger." As soon as the words escaped Aed's mouth, he remembered the difficulty Taberah had in distinguishing between childhood and adulthood. And he expected Taberah's reply:

"What is the past?"

Aed said, "Everything that has happened so far."

Taberah said, "So, the beginning of our conversation is in the past?"

Aed said, "Yes. No. Not in the sense you're speaking of. It is before the moment now, but it still belongs to the time we are a part of."

Taberah said, "I do not understand. What's the difference?"

Aed said, "Could we just forget this conversation? I know what the difference is between the present and the past, I just can't explain it..." his voice trailed off, and he said, more to himself than to Taberah, "or do I?" For a moment he began to see how someone could not perceive a difference between present and past, and not understand how, if there had been medieval people before, there could not be medieval people now. Aed remembered how, in school, when he read about different times, there was something he could identify with in a great many of them. Then the moment lapsed; Aed suddenly realized the intense concentration it took him to see into Taberah's world, and began to wonder how difficult it might be for Taberah to look into his world. To his surprise, Aed found himself saying, "I don't know, Taberah. Maybe there isn't one. Maybe we could talk about this later? I thought I was going to explain something to you; I wasn't counting on changing the way I think myself. I'm sure you know it's difficult work, changing how you think, and I am at the end of my concentration. Why don't you practice your music? Maybe you can play something for us after supper?"

Taberah looked at Aed and relaxed; it was only then that Aed realized how intently Taberah had been listening. Taberah said, "Sure!" and bounded outside like a nunny

and bounded outside me a puppy.

A Possibility Reopened

"Stop pacing the floor, dear," Nathella said. "You're making me nervous."

Taberah stopped and looked up. "May I walk around in the street outside? I need to think."

"Ok. Don't walk in the street; walk on the sidewalks. And don't get lost. Maybe you can take one of the trails in the forest."

If there is a word-space, Taberah thought, a space in which words exist and can be mapped out into closer and farther words, then there may be a thought-space, one in which thoughts can be mapped out.

Outside, it was dazzlingly bright; Taberah's eyes adjusted, and he saw some little boys throwing a ball around. As he passed by, one of them dropped it, and the children started arguing.

If there is a thought-space, his thoughts continued, then thoughts may be mapped out as paths in that space. Some thoughts can be mapped out from existing classics, and then new paths can be forged like old ones. If this can be done, then it may be possible for a computer to think.

Taberah entered the forest, although he was not aware of it. He felt almost dizzy; he was excited, and so intent in concentration that he lost all awareness of his surroundings.

The core idea for a computer to think is to construct a space of units of thought, measured by a metric arising from that for words — or perhaps similar; words can be sorted out by comparing histograms of words that appear before and after; a self-refining measure might compare thoughts that come before and after. A space can have trails worn in it by existing classics, as a forest develops paths from many people walking through it; the thought-space is then navigable by starting at one point and randomly picking from among the paths that lead out from it. This is how a computer can think.

How can I implement this?

I need to find Aed.

Exploration

Aed was quite doubtful that Taberah had found a way for computers to think; none the less, he regarded Taberah's ideas as interesting, and so set to work on implementing them. He used one of the methods from his own research to take a given metric space and put points into a vector space, so that a position could be described by a list of numbers: put springs between each two points in the metric space, as long as the distance between them, then put the points at random locations in the vector space and let the springs do their work. The actual method used was more complex, taking shortcuts so as to run more quickly, but the core idea was simple. A model of a car made of springs would find its shape as soon as you took your foot off it.

Aed expected it possible to make much more sophisticated measures, but to start off with he used a parser to diagram sentences, trim the sentences to subject, verb, and object, and strung together the lists of numbers to make a vector space with more dimensions. Aed realized that philosophy would probably be easier material for a computer to think about than something concrete; there was less opportunity to bump into the oddities of sense data and the external world. He the program through the philosophical classics online, and then waited to see what its first output would be:

I think, therefore I am. From this may be deduced any number of things. It is clear that the gods are dead. There is nothing but the gods. You, me, everything are the gods. This godlike character is unto the likeness of God. Each of the gods is a facet of God. God is, and

because he is he thinks. Reason is the ordering principle of the universe. I say this because reason gives us what other times sought in God.

The output went on for some length, and Taberah was crestfallen. "Cheer up!" he said. "With computers, nothing works on the first try. It takes time to get all the bugs out."

Taberah said, "I thought computers were logical."

Aed said, "Yes, Taberah, they are logical, and that's the problem. We are not logical; we hear what a person says, and know what they mean. But a computer does not know what we mean; it only knows what we say, and there are all sorts of subtle errors that a human wouldn't even notice, that a computer does not have the ability to correct. That monologue is quite good for a first run; if you aren't listening carefully, it sounds like a philosopher. You should be proud of yourself. How'd you like to have Chinese food for dinner?"

Fortune Cookies

There was a rule in the Kinsella's house against bringing up subjects at dinner that were not understandable to everyone in the house; this rule was bent a bit to allow Taberah to explain his discovery. Dinner was over before they realized it; Taberah unwrapped his cookie, put it in his mouth before anyone could stop him, started chewing, stopped, and then spat out a piece of paper. He said, "What is this?"

Fiona and Clancy were both laughing too hard to explain; Aed said, "It's a fortune. You're supposed to take it out of the cookie before you eat the cookie. Look at it."

Taberah wiped off the piece of paper and read, "Exciting prospects come. Don't miss the opportunity."

He looked at the paper in disgust and said, "Why do you have this in the house?"

Nathella said, "It's a prediction or a piece of advice. It's just for fun."

Taberah looked at Aed and said, "Aed, you told me not to do astrology because divination is sin. This is divination. It is sin."

Aed said, "Taberah, it's not serious. Or at least we don't do them seriously; nobody believes that a fortune cookie will tell the future."

Taberah said, "If you cast a spell just for fun, is it less of a sin?"

Aed said, "I would never cast a spell."

Taberah said, "But you got fortune cookies."

Nathella said, "We didn't ask for them. They come with Chinese food."

Fiona said, "We are studying China in school now, and the Chinese do not eat fortune cookies, but fortune telling is very big in Chinese culture. People will not enter a building if a Feng Shui practitioner was not consulted about where to lay its foundations."

Clancy was looking at his fortune. The expression on his face was slowly turning to disgust. "Taberah is right. Mom, you've talked about how we let sin into our lives without challenging it; this is sin."

Fiona said, "The fortune in a Chinese cookie certainly comes out of fortune telling — and when fortune telling is done, it varies from serious to lighthearted — like we take fortune cookies."

Nathella said, "If you would rather, we can throw the fortune cookies away when we get Chinese, or ask them not to provide fortune cookies."

Aed didn't say anything. He had expected Taberah to know things about whatever culture he was from that Aed didn't — but not to be able to see things in American culture that Aed couldn't. He had shifted, in his mind, from wondering why Taberah objected to fortune cookies, to wondering why he hadn't objected to fortune cookies.

What else would Taberah show him?

Miracles

Taberah had been thinking throughout the day, although not about computers. When Aed got home from work, Taberah said, "This land is very different from any of the other ones I've known. Are even the miracles different? What are miracles like here?"

Aed said, "Beg pardon?"

"What miracles have you seen? What miracles have you been given?"

"Taberah, I've prayed for many miracles in my day, and I have had some prayer requests answered, but I have never been given a miracle — or seen one."

"Why not? Do you not know God?"

"Taberah, I speak to God, and he is with me. But I have never seen a miracle. I'm one of few people who believes they happen at all. Most people believe that miracles don't happen — some Christians believe that miracles stopped after the age of the Apostles."

"What? Why? Do they believe God does not love his children?"

"Of course Christians believe God loves his children."

"Then why do they not believe in miracles?"

Aed was beginning to see another difference between Taberah's

culture — might as well call it 'medieval', not having any better words to describe it — between medieval culture and his culture. One side of Aed's realization was that Taberah's culture breathed the supernatural, might (for all Aed knew) find nothing unbelievable about a mountain being uprooted and thrown into the sea — and the other side was that Aed's culture had fought tooth and nail to exclude any consideration of the supernatural, had struggled to make it alien. There were hints of it in ten thousand places — in words like 'superstitious', which did not simply denote a particular kind of belief (a supernatural equivalent to practical observations such as "A pin will more easily slide into a pole if it is greased"), but a propagandistic condemnation of that kind of belief and supernatural belief in general. 'Rational' was taken to mean 'materialistic', and — the manifestations were legion, too many for Aed to concentrate on one. He recalled with a chill the words of the Gospel, where some manuscripts said that Jesus did not, and others that he *could* not do many miracles in one town, and was amazed at their lack of faith. Aed had a queer feeling that —

"Taberah, I would like to take you someplace tomorrow, and show you something. It is my loss that I have not seen any miracles, that they do not happen when I pray. But I would like for you to see the forces that shape my culture, and are why I have never seen a miracle."

Taberah slept lightly that night; he felt both puzzlement and expectation, wondering what manner of strange sight Aed would show him.

Even if They See

The lecture hall was nearly filled; the speaker walked up to the microphone and said, "Good evening, and welcome to the Campus Skeptics' first meeting this year. My name is Nabal, and this first meeting usually draws a large crowd — usually from hecklers who believe that what we are saying is false, but somehow never manage to prove it. I claim that there are no supernatural forces and never have been, that all of the interaction of nature can be explained by science, and that there is nothing that science can't explain. To prove it —"

Taberah was aghast. He elbowed Aed and said, "Aren't you going to say anything?"

The speaker reached into his backpack, and drew out a pair of pliers, a sheet of paper, and a cigarette lighter. He continued, "I have a sheet of paper and a lighter, and I am going to light this paper on fire. If there is anyone among you who has any kind of faith or magic, let him stop it from burning."

Taberah elbowed Aed again, and said, "Well?"

The speaker held the paper up, silent.

Aed found himself saying, "Nabal."

The speaker said, "Yes? Are you going to stop this paper from burning?"

Aed ignored the question. He said, "Do you know physics?"

The speaker said, "Yes. I am a senior with a double major in physics and mathematics."

Aed said, "If you know physics, then you know that physics says that the electrical charges in that piece of paper, if separated an inch together and released, would create a spark over a hundred times as powerful as a lightning bolt. Is that correct?"

The speaker said, "Yes. Actually, it's a bit more than a hundred."

Aed said, "Very well. If you know physics, separate the particles and let's see that spark."

The speaker did not reply to this comment. He said, "Are there any other comments or distracting rhetoric — perhaps to conceal that the supernatural is not real?"

A young woman said, "I don't know if God will grant my prayer, but I am praying that that paper won't burn — as you would fight in a battle you would rather lose than not fight at all."

Nabal said, "Any other comments?"

Taberah was trying to think of something to say, but he was at a loss for words. The speaker tried to ignite the paper; the lighter sparked several times, but produced no flame.

The speaker walked over to the table and said, "My apologies for the coincidence. Does anyone have other lighters?"

A young man with a large Afro flamboyantly tossed a golden Zippo to the front of the room and said, "Try this, brother."

Nabal took the lighter and struck it. It produced sparks, but no flame.

He adjusted the lighter, and struck it again. A large yellow flame shot out and began to lick up the side of the paper, to turn orange, to grow

out, and began to lick up the side of the paper, to turn orange, to grow stronger, hotter. Nabal turned away from the flame and looked at the eyes around him — some smug, some saddened. The flame died out, became a thin stream of smoke, vanished. Nabal grinned and asked, "And now, where is your God?"

He continued to look, puzzled by the expressions he saw on the gathered faces. Then he looked down, and dropped the pliers in shock. The paper was not burnt to ashes. It wasn't even singed.

Aed looked at Taberah, and saw the one face in the room that was not speechless. He grabbed Taberah's arm, and said, "We need to go. Now." They slid out, leaving behind them sputters of "Chemicals and charlatanism can do a lot."

Taberah said, "Why did you leave? They were about to acknowledge something supernatural."

Aed said, "Taberah, I don't know how you did that, or what was going on, and I don't need to know. But do you remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus? Do you remember how it ended?"

Taberah said, "'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not listen even if a man rises from the dead.' Yes, but —"

Aed said, "Taberah, a man *did* rise from the dead, and those who killed him still did not believe. C.S. Lewis wrote that he knew of only one person who had seen a ghost, and she was positive it was a hallucination. The wind of the Spirit cannot blow where the cracks have been sealed; this age has exerted monumental effort to seal the cracks. You heard them speaking as you left. They are positive it was somebody's sleight of hand. George MacDonald, before Lewis, said, "Seeing is not believing. It is only seeing." Even I, who believe in a supernatural God, am filled with doubts over what I just saw — half of my mind is saying that it was an illusionist stunt. Even in the Bible, seeing miracles did not make people believe."

Taberah said, "I don't understand."

Aed said, "I don't understand either. Maybe you'll figure something out — oh! I just remembered a joke."

Taberah said, "Yes?"

Aed said, "The wars in the Middle East will only be solved by a political solution or by a miracle — by people working out an agreement, or by God telling people to get along with each other. The political solution would be God telling people to get along with each other, and the miracle would be people working out an agreement."

Taberah listened and laughed. "So you're saying it would take a different kind of miracle, a greater kind of miracle, for people to believe."

Aed said, "Yes. And a kind of miracle that doesn't just happen, even in the Bible. A kind that God only gives, if ever, as a blessing on hard human work. Prayer does not annihilate human roles. Maybe God only chooses to work the greater miracles through humans."

Below the Surface

Aed said, "Taberah, there's something I've been meaning to talk with you about."

Taberah said, "Yes?"

Aed said, "What exactly draws you to New Age?"

Taberah said, "Music and time. Or rather, lack of awareness of time. There is something more than hurried time."

Aed said, "And New Age as a religion?"

Taberah said, "New Age is a religion? It seems much more like a people to me."

Aed said, "It's both. It is people who are drawn to a resurfacing of Gnosticism. Whether it is ancient Gnostics, or contemporary New Age, or medieval Knights of Cathare, it — what is on your face, Taberah?"

Taberah said, "I know the Knights of Cathare. It is so sad. Is New Age the same heresy?"

Aed said, "The mask ever varies, but it is the same heresy. The same mistake. The same attempt that has been weighed in the balance and found wanting. It's OK if you listen to their music, but try to stop there —"

Nathella walked in, looked at Aed, looked at Taberah, and said,

"What is it that I see in your eyes, Taberah?"

Taberah said, "New Age music will never sound the same to me again."

Nathella looked into Taberah's eyes, listening, searching. She saw a homesickness and wistfulness, and suddenly thought of the Little Mermaid in Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, before Disney left its mark on the classic. The witch had exacted a terrible price from the mermaid — she would have legs, lovely legs, but she would never be quite like the humans around her. Every step she took would be on sharp knives. In a flash of intuition she saw that the knives never left Taberah. He would always walk on sharp knives.

Nathella walked up, put an arm around Taberah's waist, and said, "Honey, will you come to my room? I want to show you something."

Taberah looked, and saw on the wall a yellowed plaque. He read:

Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of realities that are unseen. It is for their faith that our ancestors are acknowledged.

It is by faith that we understand that the ages were created by a word from God, so that from the invisible the visible world came to be.

It was because of his faith that Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain, and for that he was acknowledged as upright when God himself made acknowledgment of his offerings. Though he is dead, he still speaks by faith.

It was because of his faith that Enoch was taken up and did not experience death: he was no more, because God took him; because before his assumption he was acknowledged to have pleased God. Now it is impossible to please God without faith, since anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and rewards those who seek him.

It was through his faith that Noah, when he had been warned by God of something that had never been seen before, took care to build an ark to save his family. His faith was a judgement on the world, and he was able to claim the uprightness which comes from faith.

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the Promised Land as though it were not his, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. He looked forward to the well-founded city, designed and built by God.

It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise was faithful to it. Because of this, there came from one man, and one who already had the mark of death on him, descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore which cannot be counted.

All these died in faith, before receiving any of the things that had been promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them, recognizing that they were only strangers and nomads on earth. People who use such terms about themselves make it quite plain that they are in search of a homeland. If they had meant the country they came from, they would have had the opportunity to return to it, but in fact they were longing for a better homeland, their heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, since he has founded the city for them.

It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though he had yet to receive what had been promised, and he had been told: Isaac is the one through whom your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power to raise the dead, and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead.

It was by faith that this same Isaac gave his blessing to Jacob

and Esau for the still distant future. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, bowed in reverence, as he leant on his staff. It was by faith that, when he was about to die, Joseph mentioned the Exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his own remains.

It was by faith that Moses, when he was born, was kept hidden by his parents for three months; because they saw that he was a fine child, they were not afraid of the royal edict. It was by faith that, when he was grown up, Moses refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter and chose to be ill-treated in company with God's people rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin. He considered that the humiliations offered to the Anointed were something more precious than all the treasures of Egypt, because he had his eyes fixed on the reward. It was by faith that he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood to prevent the Destroyer from touching any of their first-born sons. It was by faith that they crossed the Red Sea as easily as dry land, while the Egyptians, trying to do the same, were drowned.

It was through faith that the walls of Jericho fell down when the people had marched round them for seven days. It was by faith that Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies and so was not killed with the unbelievers.

What more shall I say? There is not time for me to give an account of Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, or of David, Samuel and the prophets. These were men who through faith conquered kingdoms, did what was upright and earned the promises. They could keep a lion's mouth shut, put out blazing fires and emerge unscathed from battle. They were weak people who were given strength to be brave in war and drive back foreign invaders. Some others submitted to torture, refusing release so that they would rise again to a better life. Some had to bear being pilloried and flogged, or even chained up in prison. They were stoned, or sawn in half, or killed by the sword; they were homeless, and wore only the skins of sheep and goats; they were in want and hardship, and maltreated. They were too good for the world and they wandered in desert and

mountains and in caves and ravines. These all won acknowledgement through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, since God had made provision for us to have something better, and they were not to reach perfection except with us.

Nathella waited until Taberah had finished reading, and said, "Nowhere on earth is home to us. Heaven is home, and you have less of a temporary home than most people do. It hurts to have an earthly home taken away, but the healing of the hurt is not in finding another earthly home, but in finding a heavenly home — and once you have let Heaven be your home, you may find pieces of it on earth.

"That plaque was given to me by my mother; she had it for some time, and it was one of the last things she gave me. Now she's in Heaven.

"Inside your heart — and mine, and Aed's — is a God-shaped void. Only God can fill it. New Age music may bring a moment's relief, but the thirst is one only God can wholly slake." She beckoned to Aed, and the two of them gave Taberah a sandwich hug. "But we will try to make a place where you can be at home."

Taberah said, "Where's Fiona? I want to show her my time."

Taberah's Time

Fiona said, "So, Taberah, how about your time?"

Taberah said, "Why don't we take a walk in the forest, and I'll think about how to explain it?"

They began to walk along the path, Taberah stopping and thinking every so often, but saying nothing. This continued for five minutes, fifteen, thirty, an hour — and Fiona began tapping her toes. Taberah stopped, and Fiona sat down on a log and began drumming her fingers.

"What are you doing?" Taberah asked.

"Nothing," Fiona said. "I'm just waiting for you to start explaining your time already."

"What about your hands and feet? What are you doing with them?"

"I'm just tapping them, because I'm getting impatient waiting for — ooh... Taberah, are you walking around and not saying anything on purpose?"

"No; I'm thinking about how to explain time to you."

"Do you understand why I'm drumming my fingers?"

"No. Why?"

Fiona began to realize something. She decided to try not to drum her fingers, or pace, or tap her foot, but just sit. It turned out to be harder than it sounded. Fiona kept noticing herself fidgeting; even when she thought to herself, "It's been a while and I'm not fidgeting," somehow she realized that her fingers were drumming on her legs.

"Fiona!" Taberah spoke, and Fiona suddenly realized that she had lost track of time — and was not fidgeting. "I do not have a different time awareness, so much as not having an awareness of time. There are moments for me, times with other people, times doing a task, and times waiting — watches are fascinating to me, but even when I watch them, I watch the rhythmic motion, and more often than not forget that the motion is measuring something that's supposed to be time. That time is fickle; it seems to speed up and slow down. The first lesson in medieval time is to let go of it."

Taberah walked a bit further, stopping a few times, and Fiona still caught herself fidgeting — but she began to catch herself completely relaxed at times. Fiona wondered when he would finally speak, and then was surprised when he broke the silence — was he done thinking already? Taberah said, "There are moments — I do not know how to say it in your language — when you are totally absorbed, rapt in concentration, when you lose track of time because you are so completely filled. It is not so much time as a foretaste of eternity. These moments cannot be commanded or controlled, although there is a cooperation with them; they are a gift from God. Those moments are my 'time', if time is the appropriate word. 'Timelessness' is better. That is the apex of the time I live in, and I am sorry not to see you live in that time more."

"So how do I enter this time? You've told me what time you live in, but not how to get in it."

Taberah thought briefly and said, "I can't tell you that. Pray, and God may grant it. But I don't know how to enter it."

Worship

A couple of Wednesdays had passed since Taberah had first asked to worship with the Phoenix Society; something had come up, and Taberah had not been aware that time had passed. This time around, Fiona was free, and they entered the room to be warmly greeted.

The service began with hugs and lively music. Taberah was caught up in the singing; Nathella wondered if one of the moments Taberah described would descend. Or had she always had them and not been aware of them? The music gave way to prayer, Scripture, sermon; as communion came, Fiona could see that Taberah was almost in a trance, but she was not. The worship was followed by a meal; Taberah felt a tap on his shoulder, and wondered why someone would tap his shoulder. He looked up.

The young woman who had spoken up at the skeptics' meeting studied his face closely and said, "You were at that meeting and left right after the paper burned weirdly. What did you do?"

Taberah looked at her and said, "Nothing. I prayed. Same as you. God heard our prayer."

She said, "That's not the whole story."

Taberah said, "It's as much of the story as you'll believe."

She said, "What part of the story won't I believe?"

"That I am medieval."

"You mean that you try to be like a medieval, even growing out a beard?"

"No, I mean that I am medieval."

The student's gaze rested on Taberah. After a while, she said, "I don't know what to make of the claim. You're not lying, you don't seem mistaken, and I can't believe what you say." She paused, and said, "And I didn't believe the paper when I saw it. I prayed for it, but I didn't believe it." Then she blushed slightly, and said, "I've forgotten my manners. My name is Ceinwyn. What is your name?" She reached out her arms to embrace him.

Taberah enjoyed the hug; she was soft, and in her touch he could feel a spirit that was alive. He said, "My name is Taberah. I'm staying with Aed."

"Who? Is he a student here?"

Fiona said, "He means Dr. Kinsella."

Ceinwyn said, "Dr. Kinsella. You mean —" A look of dread crossed her face, and Fiona said, "Yes, he's teaching this young man his corrupt ways." Ceinwyn smiled, and said, "I have respect for anybody who can do that."

Taberah said, "Do what?"

Fiona said, "You know. What you did to win the Turing Award."

Fiona covered her mouth; as soon as the words left her mouth, she realized she shouldn't have said them. Half the room was staring, and the other half soon joined. Then she said, "Um, I would like if you could kind of forget what I said; my Dad's done a lot to try to ensure the privacy of my friend."

A young man said, "He won the Turing Award?"

Another man stood up and said, "I have a strong temptation to ask this brother for his autograph, and I would like to ask you to join me in resisting it. We need to treat him as an honored guest but nothing special beyond that, and treat his award as a matter among brothers. It has to have the highest level of confidence."

Ceinwyn looked at Taberah and said, "I am sorely tempted to ask you something more about the paper, but..." her voice trailed off.

Fiona said, "I think he may be right about being medieval. Or almost right. But there are some things about him that just don't fit. He makes my head spin, and he says the queerest things."

Another student said, "Like what?"

"Like saying that he stole a relic from a cathedral."

The student said, "Hmm... I'm a history major as well as an English major, and medieval culture was very different from ours. My name's Tala, by the way. Stealing relics was actually fairly common. Taberah, did you hear about the conversation between Saint Peter and Saint Augustine?"

Taberah said, "No, what did they say?"

Fiona said, "And that's the other thing. He gets the queerest things wrong. It's not just that he doesn't understand why people who lived in different centuries can't have talked with each other. He didn't understand why a cathedral couldn't have had two heads of John the Baptist, one as a boy and one as a man. He saw the logical contradiction, but didn't deduce an impossibility. Plus, he's so short and scrawny — not at all like the bulk you'd expect of someone from the age of knights in shining armor."

Tala said, "I don't want to explain all of why, at least not right now, but a medieval would be quite likely to make those errors. And medievals *were* that short and scrawny — their diets stunted their growth. It's only in the past couple of centuries that people started to look as tall as you are

me — and (I won't name names) some people today still haven't caught up." He winked.

A short, bearded student said, "I'll have you know that I represent that remark."

Fiona said, "Ooh!" and then, "Diet. He talked as if he had grown up eating mostly bread, bread with pebbles in it."

Tala said, "I think he's about as good of a mockup of a medieval as you could ask for. How and why, I don't know — there've been a lot of queer things that have happened, most of which have an uninteresting explanation. Even with what I've seen, it would take a lot to convince me that he had — Taberah, if you are a medieval, why are you in the twenty-first century?"

Taberah said, "What is the twenty-first century?"

Tala said, "Never mind that. How did you come to be here?"

Taberah said, "I was walking with two of my friends, when an angel called me. I took his hand, and I was in the forest outside Aed's house. Then —" and he started telling the story. It was after midnight when he finished; Ceinwyn said, "Taberah, I have many questions to ask you, but some of us need to get to bed. Would you consider visiting us again?"

Taberah said, "Certainly."

That night, as Tala lay in bed, waiting to fall asleep, strange images flitted through his mind. He saw a doorway between the medieval world and his, shimmering, the door beginning to open. A burst of light flashed around; Tala looked around and saw no one, and then looked to the doorway.

The door had been blasted off its hinges.

Second Birth

Taberah said, "Remember how we were talking about medieval time, and how we left things not finished? I have thought more about your becoming medieval."

Aed said, "Yes. Do you want to can turn back the clock?"

Taberah said, "What does 'turn back the clock' mean?"

"It means reverse the flow of time, undo the changes that have happened."

Taberah looked puzzled. "Why would anyone do that?"

Aed said, "My culture was once, a long time ago, medieval. Now it is not. We have cars, computers, and clocks. Do you want to turn that back to swords and armor? Do you want to un-invent electronics?"

Taberah said, "It is funny that you think of medieval in terms of things. Wealth is not medieval. Wealth is only an avatar; it is not the true person. Medieval is not knights on horseback."

Aed said, "Then what is medieval?"

Taberah said, "Medieval is faith. Medieval is rationality. Medieval is carving the back of a statue. Medieval is a way of life."

Aed said, "But the medieval era is gone. How can people in the four

hundred and seventh semi be medieval?"

"What is a semi?"

"I'll explain it later. How can people today be medieval? We can't just automatically be medieval the way the medievals were."

Taberah closed his eyes in concentration; it took him a long time to get the point. Aed was asking him for the answer to a difficulty that simply didn't exist for him, and Taberah was trying hard to see the matter through Aed's eyes — and at last he did.

"Aed, do you know Jesus talking with Nicodemus?"

"Yes."

"What was the question Nicodemus asked Jesus?"

"'How can someone old be born? Can a man enter his mother's womb to be born again?' I know this question well. It has been ridiculed, but it is a serious question, even profound. Can a man turn back the clock and —"

There was a look of dawning comprehension on Aed's face, and suddenly he was grasping what was *medieval* — not lords and vassals, not illuminated manuscripts, not unending quirks and questions from a visitor whom he still could not wholly believe was medieval — not any of these things, but Aed grasped what was medieval. He saw the force behind cathedrals, the abstraction that showed itself in the question about dancing angels, the community shared between the people and, in all of these things, he saw a little piece of his heart.

Aed saw equally why Taberah had asked the question: that turning back the clock was neither possible nor necessary, that the second birth was of a different type than the first one, and one that could still happen with much water under the bridge, that the passage of time in itself had almost nothing to do with being medieval. He saw that the fundamental beauty of the Middle Ages was one that people from his age could share — not in exactly the same way, but it didn't need to be. People could be

medieval today just as they could still be Christian today — it involved swimming upstream, but it was worth it.

Aed looked at Taberah gently and said, "Taberah, you said that you were medieval, and asked what time I was from. I am medieval, too."

Questions

It seemed but an eyeblink and another week had passed; Fiona and Taberah were once again in the crowded worship room, and there was an audible excitement. The service was merry and passed quickly, and at the meal afterwards, Ceinwyn came up to Taberah and said, "I know what the wrong questions are to ask you, Taberah, or at least questions it is not good to ask. What are the right questions to ask you? What do you wish others understood about you?"

Taberah closed his eyes and rocked back and forth on his chair. Tears began to appear. When, after a long time, he did not answer, someone told Ceinwyn, "Ask him another question." Taberah, without opening his eyes, said, "That's the best question. That is a very good question to ask of anyone.

"I have had many people try to understand me, but most of them don't. I don't know why not. Maybe I'm just hard to understand. Some of you think of me as medieval, and I am medieval, but I'm as different from other medievals as they are from you. Even how I am talking — it is a means of talking that I learned from your time. I have seen different peoples, and the way in which I am different is not the way one people varies from each other. Maybe there is something wrong with me. I don't fit in anywhere. I can adapt some — I've lived in many places — but I'm never completely — I don't know the word. I'm not making sense. I'm not saying anything. Never mind. I can't think like other people. You asked a good question, but I don't have a good answer for it."

Emerant was pierced by the look on his face. Emerant was intelligent, if not exceptionally so, but she was a psychology major in the middle of a senior thesis studying of the psychology of extraordinary intelligence; she followed all three major schools: traditional Stanford-Binet intelligence, multiple intelligences (there were now twenty-three agreed upon intelligences among most multiple intelligence theorists), and the interactionist school, which studied its intelligence as an emergent property arising from the interaction of the basic aptitudes studied by multiple intelligence theorists. Being familiar with all three schools, Emerant regarded the traditional school as unfairly neglected, and it was that school that she thought of now. The pain Taberah voiced was not at all unique; it was part of why the gifted had joined the ranks of activist minorities filled with anger and seeking redress for grievances that were always perceived to be getting worse. There was more to it than just a taboo (now being effaced) on divulging a high level of intelligence, or a stereotype that for a long time was not realized to exist — a stereotype embedded in words such as 'geek' and 'nerd' that only now were becoming as socially unacceptable as racial slurs. The more gifted a person was, the more differently he thought, and that is why there had been posited a range of optimal intelligence, with IQ between 125 and 145 — beyond the upper limit of that range, a person thought differently, so that his giftedness became a mixed blessing. People with IQs over 170 tended to feel like they didn't fit anywhere. From psychological, emotional and social cues, and the Turing Award, Emerant had no doubt that Taberah's IQ was over 170, probably over 180 — how much further, she did not bother to speculate. Above, at any rate, the point at which IQ tests cease to effectively measure, and well beyond the point that pain would begin to — Emerant wondered what a boy of normal intelligence would think and feel growing up in a society of people who were severely mentally retarded. He would definitely perceive that he was somehow different from the others, and attribute it to either "Something's wrong with them," or "Something's wrong with me." Taberah had evidently taken the latter route, and — where to begin to explain all this to him?

She walked up, placed an arm around Taberah's shoulder, and said, "Taberah, Taberah. I have a number of things to explain to you, but the way you think is not worse than anyone else's — just different and special. You haven't met anybody who thinks like you (nor have I) apart from

you haven't met anybody who thinks like you (not have I, apart from you), because God has only made a few people that way. I understand your feelings, and I would feel the same way if I were like you. I love you and I am glad you're here — so does everyone in this room. May we sing a healing song for you?"

"What's a healing song?" Taberah asked.

"It's a song we sing to God, as a prayer for you that you may have healing."

"Yes, please." Taberah had been touched by Emerant's words, but it was her eyes most of all which caught him. Her eyes bore the embrace of a warm, generous heart, and silently spoke the message, "My heart has room for you." And Taberah realized that he had a foster family who cared about him deeply — he decided to thank them for it. A song began, and he realized that the people had gathered around him, placing their hands on him. The music seemed to Taberah to rise like incense:

*Lord God of Heaven,
Hold this child in your arms.
Fill him with your love.*

*Creator of Heaven and earth,
Fill his heart with your peace.
Let this peace flow through him.*

*Spirit of light and love,
Lift from him all darkness.
Lift him up to Heaven.*

*Let us be his brothers and sisters,
Your love made manifest.
Fill him with your love.*

As the song ended, Taberah looked at the faces around him and wondered, "Is this what Heaven's like?"

Mysticism

"Fiona, I was thinking, and I realized a better answer to Ceinwyn's question. The answer is this: I am a mystic."

"Oh, Taberah," Fiona said, "We already knew that. Dad mentioned that you had done some astrology, and now there's that piece of paper."

Taberah said, "Huh? What does mysticism have to do with that?"

Fiona said, "Huh? Isn't the connection obvious?"

Taberah said, "No. I have stopped astrology because I trust Aed, but astrology was not any strange mysticism; it was to me like what you do in reading a weather forecast. And the paper — I never thought of that as mystical. I just prayed as others were praying, and God gave what we asked for. That is hardly mysticism."

Fiona had difficulty believing that all that was going on was that Taberah had asked God, but she mentally waved this aside. She asked, "Then what is mysticism?"

Taberah said, "Mysticism is living in the fire of God. It is contemplating and gazing on his glory, and for me it is action in that glory. You are concerned with getting things done, with practicality, with results; I happen to get things done, but it is not what I am concerned with. Few things are needed, really only one; I occupy myself with that one thing. That is the heart of mysticism, not astrology or saving a piece of paper."

of paper.

Fiona said, "But what does your mysticism *do*? What mystic powers are you striving to develop?"

Taberah said, "What a funny idea, mystic powers! Which is greater — getting something done, or the reason getting something done is desirable in the first place?"

Fiona said, "I suppose, what made it worth getting it done."

Taberah said, "Correct. Mysticism is not a way to get things done; it is a 'why' that is greater than getting things done. Mysticism is not a way to do something else. Mysticism is worthy in itself."

Fiona asked, "Then how are you a mystic? You say that you are the son of a merchant, that you have travelled to many places and had adventures. How does mysticism fit into that? You haven't retreated into a monastery to spend six hours a day praying; you've already managed to cause a stir. Is that more important than mysticism? Or are you a superman who can do one on top of the other?"

Taberah said, "I find your question confusing. My actions are not more important than mysticism; they are the shape that part of my mysticism takes. I do not see action as something added to mysticism; it is an expression. I am seeking God's glory by talking with you now. I have heard a saying, 'Too Heavenly minded to be of any earthly good,' and I think it embodies a mistake. You cannot be too Heavenly minded to be of any earthly good. You can quite easily be too earthly minded to be of any earthly good. Being heavenly minded is itself of earthly good, whether or not it does things in an obvious manner; that is one of many reasons why, of the nine orders of angels, the highest six gaze only on the glory of God — it is but the lowest three who are ever sent to earth. It is a right ordering. Mysticism is sharing in the truth that the angels share in, and for me that truth takes an active form."

Fiona said, "Does this mysticism relate to your time?"

Taberah said, "My time relates to this mysticism."

"How can I enter it?"

"Seek God, and ask him how you are to enter it. He will show you."

Heaven

Taberah walked out of the computer room, thinking loudly. Aed looked at him, and simply waited for him to start explaining.

"Aed, I was doing some reading today on embryology; what your philosophers have thought of is fascinating. Something in my mind was speaking, and I realized another deep difference in belief. Medieval people believe that they're going to Heaven."

Aed cleared his throat and said, "All Christians believe that, Taberah. It's a basic doctrine."

Taberah said, "Then why does your people not act like they believe they're going to Heaven?"

"How does someone act like he believes he's going to go to Heaven? Does he kill himself to get there faster? You should know better than that."

Taberah paused in thought for a moment and said, "How can you believe you're going to Heaven and not know a change in your actions? That's like believing food nourishes you, but not knowing what eating is like."

Aed had no immediate reply to this. He asked, "How does belief in Heaven change your actions, Taberah?"

Taberah said, "In embryology, one studies how a person is becoming ready to be born and live outside the uterus. That is the whole purpose of being an unborn child — why do the texts leave the word untranslated as *foetus*? Did the English translators of your texts not know how to render that word from Latin?"

"Later, Taberah. You're getting side tracked."

"Some of the unborn child's motions are useful there — such as blood pulsing about the body. There are others that have no use in the uterus, such as sucking and kicking. The question is not how to arrange things to most pleasurably remain an unborn child, but to best prepare for birth and the world beyond that.

"Your people does not understand how this symbol reveals Heaven. They think that the point of living on earth is to make as much change on earth, and make earth as comfortable a place as possible, and — I was a long time in coming to understand political ideology. Authority is necessary, and there are questions about how to best govern, to praise good and punish evil. But political ideology is not just about this — it is about how to use government to turn earth into Heaven."

Aed said, "I do not understand. Do you mean it is wrong to try to make earth better?"

Taberah said, "All of the saints made earth better. Good deeds are an important part of how a soul is made ready for Heaven. But a centeredness, a focus on making earth better is not possible. Or it is possible, but leaves people more poorly prepared for Heaven, and more poorly equipped for earth. It is — I do not know how to say it. My father told me, 'Drink wine to live. Do not live to drink wine.' If I were to live to drink wine, I would be disordered. The wine would ensnare me. Trying to live on technology is trying to make technology something it cannot be. It can pacify a spoiled child; it cannot make him well-raised. Your people is concerned with how to pamper and pacify a spoiled child — and it took me the longest time to understand that not simply did I stumble on a very rich man's house, but that so many people in your society have wealth not only to have as much bread as you need, but as much meat as you want,

and you do not even think of it as costly — while mine is concerned with how to raise him well to grow into a man. In the Great Chain of Being, man lives between the beasts and the angels; it is the beasts who have this life on earth and its pleasures as all they own, and the angels who eternally gaze on the glory of God. Believing in Heaven means becoming more like an angel; here, I have seen heroic efforts to live the life of a beast."

Aed sorted this through. It had been a while since he had thought of the Great Chain of Being, and his thoughts about it moved sluggishly. Apart from that, he began to see — and more than see, he began to believe and know — why Taberah would look around and be convinced that Aed's culture did not believe in Heaven. With a chill, Aed realized that he could not remember the last time he had thought about how his actions were preparing him, or failing to prepare him, for the eternity before him. Slightly later, and with an equal chill, Aed realized that he could not remember the last day he had not thought about how to shape the world around him so as to bring pleasure. He slipped too often in thinking of his teaching as a way to prepare his students for the world it would face — which it no doubt was, but if that was *all* it was, then... Aed asked Taberah, "Taberah, how can I do something that will prepare me for the next life? What is one thing I can do?"

Taberah thought for a second, and said, "Close your eyes and grow still, and wait."

Taberah waited a second and said, "You're wanting to get this over with. Stop that. Want to do this."

Time passed. Aed's breathing had stilled. Taberah said, "Now thank God for seven things he has given you."

Aed took another breath and slowly said,

Thank you, God, for my wife Nathella.
Thank you, God, for my children, Fiona and Clancy.
Thank you, God, for my professorship.
Thank you, God, for my broken garage door. It means I have not only a house and a car, but even a building to protect my car from the

elements.

Thank you, God, for the headaches I have after talking with Taberah. They come from a person for whom I am very grateful, and who challenges me in ways I never thought possible.

Thank you, God, for the hope of Heaven.

Most of all, thank you, God, for yourself.

Taberah smiled, and said, "You have now done one action to prepare yourself for Heaven."

Aed said, "Is it over already?"

"Life"

Taberah looked out; there was depth in his gaze, a gaze that was somehow present and remote at the same time. A short time ago, Fiona would have thought he was staring at her; now, she understood that he was looking past her. It relieved the feeling of being under a microscope.

Fiona sat down and said, "What are you thinking of, Taberah?"

"I don't know how to say it — in any language. It is another part of the answer to Emerant's question."

"Can you try? Can you say something similar?"

"I — live. I don't know how to explain. I experience things intensely. Sometimes, when I drink wine, I am not aware of anything else —"

"You get drunk? That is living?"

"I not know how to explain. I do not get drunk. It is when I am drinking it, the taste — it also happens with thinking, and praying, and music."

When Taberah said 'music', Fiona caught a glimpse into what he was saying. She was transported back to his first chant, when the whole family had been lost in his voice — no, that wasn't quite it. They had been lost in the light that was shining through Taberah.

An idea came into Fiona's head, and she said, "Taberah, why don't

you get your lute out, and I'll go to my keyboard, and we can play together? I think I'd understand you better."

They went to the practice room, and Fiona set up her keyboard. "What songs do you know?"

"I know many songs from the lands I have travelled in. But I do not know songs here; I haven't played with musicians. Ooh! I know your church songs!"

Fiona played songs in several different styles — ancient songs, classic hymns (meaning the contemporary songs of days past, drinking tunes such as "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," and so on), "contemporary" music (meaning roughly three groups: music that had been contemporary in the more recent past, music that represented an unsuccessful attempt to imitate the contemporary secular style, and music that combined both attributes), songs of a new musical renaissance that did not attempt to follow either mold, but borrowed from both and brought a new light... After one of the tunes, Taberah said, "That's the one! I want to play with that song."

Fiona slumped and said, "No, Taberah, not that one! It's awful! It was in bad musical taste when it was written, and it's in bad musical taste now. One of my girlfriends said that it sounds better when it's sung off-key."

Taberah said, "I know. You've already told me that. That's why I want to work with it."

Fiona had enough of her mother's perception to realize that arguing with Taberah now would be a losing proposition. So she resigned herself to playing harmony, leaving the Taberah the melody.

The first time through, Fiona was able to shut out the music; she expected a repose after going through once, but Taberah immediately started playing again. She kept up with the melody, but now Fiona was not able to ignore the music. Then Taberah started to improvise slightly; he made a change here and there, and then he started making only musical questions that required her to think of an answer in the

musical questions that required her to think of an answer in the accompaniment. This required Fiona to plunge even more deeply into the song. After a time, Fiona was too engaged in the music to think about how bad it was.

Time passed, and Fiona slowly became aware of something else. The music was still terrible, but she saw a luminescence shining through it. Then she realized that they were working together, and a strange beauty was emerging from the music. She played, fascinated, and gradually began to see a beauty like that of a rusty truck in a desert — a (she did not know the word) beauty that can't be found in a place that is polished and perfect — there is no room for it. She was fascinated by the music that was flowing around and through her. More time passed, and then a flash of insight struck and her hands froze on the keyboard; it was as if a juggler tossing seven glass balls stopped, and they fell and shattered. Taberah switched off the keyboard, and relaxed his hands. "What happened, Fiona?"

"I realized something, Taberah. I had an epiphany."

"What?"

"I had finally entered your time, Taberah. I entered your time."

Intelligence Emerging

Aed sat and thought about the output of the artificial intelligence program. Trying to decide whether it functioned intelligently was like — no, that wasn't it. Aed couldn't tell what it was like.

Intelligent or not, it was at the same time familiar and alien. He had worked with the algorithm further, so that it stored a history in its state, drawing on the algorithm that had won the Turing Award, and the arguments were coherent — but arguments such as he had never seen before. Any one paragraph of its output could be mistaken for human, but there was something undefinably strange about it; he could tell what the computer was arguing, but not why. Aed slapped his forehead; the arguments were evidently intelligent enough to tempt him to think of the computer as human.

Aed spent a long time trying to think if the computer's rationality was something comparable to human, or even if that were sensible to ask. Dijkstra had said, "Asking whether computers can think is like asking whether submarines can swim." Aed thought for a nuance; he thought it was closer to the question of whether a racecar can swim. Or an oven. Except that the answer was not "No, but it can do something comparable;" an answer of "Yes, but it is not comparable" would have been closer.

Aed thought for a moment, and then went down to the computer computer and navigated. An avatar was shortly before him; it said, "Aed! Still up to the usual trouble?"

"How are things in the philosophy department? I heard you've got a new tenure track position added. I'm actually up to worse trouble, now."

"I'm not surprised. How can I help you?"

"What courses are you teaching this semester?"

"I'm teaching three courses, all of which have a paper due shortly. Get something in the gradebooks for a preliminary report. I'm teaching 101, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 234, *Philosophy and Contemporary Movements*, and 312, *Integrative Metaphysics*. Have you encountered yet another guest lecturer that you want me to cede precious lecture time to?"

"Actually, no. I was wondering if you could give a paper to be graded by your TAs for each of the assignments."

"Uh, OK. May I ask who the paper is by?"

"I'm not telling."

Role Play

Clancy said, "Taberah, have you been to the pool at all?"

Taberah said, "Pool? Why? To drink?"

"No, to swim, silly!"

Taberah stiffened and said, "I swam once, when I fell from a bridge. I don't like swimming."

Clancy said, "Will you come along? You don't have to go in the water. We can hang out on the deck if you want. The pool will close before too long; it's not so warm."

Taberah was careful not to sit too close to the water's edge; falling in once had been plenty for him. He watched the others with trepidation, and tried to grasp that they were in the water for pleasure's sake, and did not need to be rescued. The swimsuits gave him a shock as well. He had finally gotten adjusted to the fact that these people were not used to being naked, and seeing trunks and bikinis was a bizarre sight to him.

Fiona climbed out of the water and sat down on the chair next to Taberah; Clancy was on the other side, whistling a bird song to the robin on the lines overhead. Fiona told Clancy, "You know, it's been a long time since we role played."

Taberah asked, "What is role play?"

Fiona said, "It's — you'll see. But you'll have to make a character. Role playing is *in* this semi."

Taberah asked, "What is a semi?"

Fiona thought for a moment and said, "Semi-decade. People used to not be conscious of what era they were in, and then they were conscious of the century, and then they thought of what decade they were in, and now it's the 5 year semi-decade."

Taberah wondered why people would be time-conscious in that way, and why the era would be that short, but was beginning to understand that certain things were wiser not to ask. He said, "I want to be a minstrel."

Fiona said, "My character is a Jane-of-all-trades named Deborah. Clancy is GMing, uh, game mastering."

Clancy said, "You are both in a forest; your ship has crashed. There is a spring of water nearby. You hear sounds like footprints nearby."

Fiona said, "Do the footprints sound human or animal?"

Clancy said, "You can't tell for sure, but there is an animal quality about them."

Fiona said, "I'm going to get my laser gun out."

Clancy said, "What are you going to do, Taberah?"

Taberah hesitated and said, "Can I hide and nock an arrow?"

Clancy said, "Yes."

"You see a huge bear on a chain. At the other end of the chain is a massive man in a rags."

Fiona said, "I am going to say 'Hello.'"

Clancy said, "He does not seem to recognize the word, and there is

uncertainty on his face."

Taberah said, "I am going to put back my bow and arrow, and take my harp, and begin to sing."

Clancy paused, and said, "The bear sits and listens; the man does, too."

Taberah said, "I am going to take out some of my food and feed it."

Clancy said, "Both bear and man seem pleased at the food. The man looks at you longingly, and starts to walk into the woods."

Taberah said, "I'm going to follow him."

Fiona said, "I'll follow, too."

Clancy said, "He gets to a cave; upon following him in, it takes some time for your eyes to adjust to the twilight. The cave is a crude environment, with assorted items around."

Fiona said, "Such as?"

Clancy said, "Some burnt-out transformers, an oddly shaped granite bowl, a corroded lamp, and some empty containers."

Taberah asked, "Are the containers usable?"

Clancy said, "No; they were disposable containers. They —"

A voice from the pool shouted, "Hey, Kinsella! Want to join us in a game of Marco Polo?"

Clancy shouted, "Not now! I'm entertaining someone."

Fiona said, "What is in his eyes when he looks at us? What is in his eyes when he looks at me?"

Clancy said, "Fear, suspicion, hope, disbelief, a forlorn longing."

Fiona asked, "Does he want to be with our civilization?"

Clancy said, "He wished that at one time. He is now uncertain about what he desires."

Mist came into Taberah's eyes. Fiona turned to him and said, "What is it, Taberah? Is something bothering you?"

Taberah said, "No. There is something about man that —"

Fiona sat silently, waiting.

Taberah said, "Before I left medieval time, that was home. Now, even if I return to it, it is not home. I am part of this time now, and at times I let Heaven be my home, and at times I find Heaven, but other times — I am learning not to be in this state, but it catches me."

Fiona wrapped her arms around Taberah, and said, "Honey, why don't you come home? We can be with you while you heal."

Taberah got up, and joined Clancy in heading for the locker room.

Rated

Aed received the three copies of the computer's ramblings that had been submitted to the philosophy TAs. The first paper had been submitted to the TA for philosophy 234, *Philosophy and Contemporary Movements*:

Paper is nuanced and addresses many fundamental issues of relevance to contemporary movements. Nonetheless, its reflection of nuance is not matched by any kind of logical order; a logician would grade this paper harshly. B

Aed chuckled. This grade was a mark of success; it was the first time he had seen someone complain that a computer understood nuance but was logically deficient. He turned to the next copy, the one submitted for philosophy 312, *Integrative Metaphysics*:

Paper contains brilliant application of argument from multiple domains of philosophy, combined with the indescribable eccentricity that heralds a new development. Ideas are not fully developed, but even in embryonic form, there is a raw energy to them. I have shown your paper to the professor, and she concurs with my judgments. You should do graduate work in philosophy. A+

Aed said, "This is encouraging. What did the TA for philosophy 101 have to say?"

Paper is arrogant and pretentious, trying to be simultaneously

similar to and different from existing philosophies, and combines the worst points of both. Classic example of fake intellectual who strings together a lot of things that sound philosophical and thereby considers himself a philosopher. F

Aed laughed; the 101 TA had picked up on something that the others hadn't. Very well, then; he was pleased with the results, and he was ready to announce what Taberah and he had done.

What Would You Like To Be?

The days passed quickly; the leaves on the trees turned bright colors, and Taberah seemed a shade blueish. There was another shopping trip made, in which Taberah received a warmer set of clothing; this trip passed without any remarkable events, and Clancy said he could take Taberah shopping for clothes alone next time; Nathella accepted. In watching Taberah, Nathella was reminded of her roommate freshman year in college. A young Sudanese woman, she found the cooler seasons to be bitterly cold.

A mug of spiced cider found Fiona and Taberah relaxing over a fire; Taberah was watching a leaf fall from its stalk. Fiona looked at Taberah and asked, "What would you like to be for Halloween?"

She was not surprised by his reply, "What's Halloween?", nor his followup, "I think I'd like to be myself. I don't fancy turning into a rock or a bear." She took it as an opportunity to explain a cherished time of year. "Halloween is when you dress up as something fanciful, and pretend to be something different for a day. You can go around from door to door, and knock, and show people your costume, and they give you candy. I want to be a fairy, wearing a shimmering white robe with draping sleeves and a low neckline and a long, flowing skirt, and with translucent, glittery wings."

Taberah said, "I don't know what I want to be. I was already a jester in my avatar. I know! I can dress as a night-man, with shadow-black clothes that melt in the night, and soft shoes that make no sound, and —"

Fiona said, "No. Too many criminals out at night; you'd be mistaken for one. You need to wear bright clothes and not look threatening."

Taberah said, "Euh... I could be a philosopher!"

Fiona said, "And how does one dress as a philosopher? All the philosophers I've met dress like everyone else. No, wait! You could be an ancient Greek philosopher, with toga, and laurel, and — whatever else you think would make the point."

Taberah said, "Where do we buy these outfits? Are they in a section of the store I haven't seen?"

Fiona said, "Well, there are places that sell Halloween costumes, but they aren't very good — a mask and a hat and some very flimsy cloth. There are places that rent them, and some of those are better — but you only have them for a day. In our family, we have a tradition of making them. We buy cloth and patterns, and cut them out, and stitch them together. It's a great deal of fun — almost as much fun as wearing them. I can show you old costumes I have in my closet; I've been a princess, a space ranger, an alien, an ice cube, a —"

Taberah said, "How did you dress as an ice cube?"

Fiona said, "Dad did that one. We got a big cardboard box, painted it blue and white, and got a white shirt and white tights for me to wear underneath. That costume is — let's see, I think it's being used to store shirts in the attic. Or something; we only go up in our attic when we're putting something up there."

Taberah said, "I was up there. It was fun; it was like climbing cliffs. Only this time there weren't brigands chasing me. I think climbing's more fun when brigands chase after you."

Fiona shuddered, and said, "To each, her own. I'd be scared out of my wits."

Taberah said, "I was scared out of my wits. And I was having fun."

Fiona said, "I guess we all have our own eccentricities. Our attic's not nearly as silly as my Dad is at times; you should see him play charades. The last time we played at a family gathering, he was jumping around with a vacuum cleaner, and humming 'Oh, when the saints go marching in!' I always remember what Dad did, never what he was — when I watch him, I get the feeling that the game isn't about really about trying to help other guess what on earth you are."

Taberah said, "Your Dad understands games."

Fiona said, "How's that? He usually diverts games off their course."

Taberah said, "No. He changes their appearance when he gets them on course. A game on one level is about following rules in some sort of contest — but people would never play games if that was all there was about it. It is a pleasant contest to enjoy other people — and it sounds like your father has found a shortcut to enjoying other people. Most people need the long way about; they can't have fun unless they've carefully earned it. There are a very few people who can take shortcuts, and a very, very few people who can make others feel good about it."

Fiona thought for a moment, and said, "Taberah, I didn't know you were a philosopher."

Taberah said, "I am. You didn't know that? But 'philosophy' means something different here than in my lands. Philosophy in my home means a broad kind of learning, that touches many different places. I gather that your science is derived from natural philosophy, the philosophy that explores the natural order — but there are subtle differences that I don't understand. Maybe that it's separated from the rest of philosophy. I understand that professors at your father's university are called Doctor of Philosophy, and their inquiries are parts of philosophy, but they are not philosophers. 'Philosophy' now means something narrow, dull, not connected with life — some philosophers try to make philosophy relevant, but our philosophers did not need to make philosophy relevant because it already was. Philosophy can be different."

Fiona asked, "Do you think our culture is impoverished?"

Taberah asked, "What is a culture?"

This time Fiona was caught off-guard. Taberah evidently understood what a culture was; he had experienced different cultures and made any number of cultural comparisons. But, when she explained it to him, he was a long time in understanding; Fiona came to appreciate what a non-trivial concept culture was.

As soon as Taberah began to guess what a culture was, a number of possible replies came to his mind about an answer to Fiona's question. To his credit, he spoke only the truth. He said, "Yes. I think your culture is very impoverished."

Fiona asked, "Then what are you going to do about it?"

Taberah leaned back and closed his eyes. He needed and appreciated friends who would ask him questions like that — but didn't want too many. Like the whiskey he had once tried, a little went a long way.

"I don't know," he said. "Let me think about it. Then I'll tell you — or just act."

Women's Liberation I

Taberah was by now taking walks around the town and around the university campus; he had come to tolerate car rides, but never rode in a car by choice, and was shocked when Nathella suggested he learn how to drive a car. He decided to take a long thinking walk, and was weaving in and out among buildings when a voice caught him. "What is your name?" it said.

Taberah looked, and saw a young woman sitting under a tree. She was holding a book, and sipping a strawberry hydrolated beverage.

"My name is Taberah. Why do you ask?"

"You remind me of someone — a friend. Someone I've not seen in a long time."

"What was he like?" Taherah asked.

"What was *she* like, you mean. Don't use exclusive language."

"What is exclusive language?"

"Exclusive language is language that uses the word 'he' to refer to an unknown person. It excludes women."

"Why?" As Taberah asked, he felt a discomfort, a desire to be anywhere else, a feeling of "Not this dance again!" — and at the same time a feeling that there was something significant, a moral pull to be there.

"Using the masculine as the generic reference to a person exists out of sexism because of a man's world, that says by its language that men are all that's important. People tried for a time to make language more inclusive by alternating between 'he' and 'she', but that still had the loaded masculine term. We now use the feminine as a generic term, free from exclusive masculine meanings, as a convenient designation for someone whose gender is unknown."

Taberah sensed something off kilter. It was not just with the argument; though he had never heard use of masculine pronouns interpreted to mean what she thought they meant, and was baffled as to why saying 'he' would be prejudicial while saying 'she' served as a neutral term for a person of unspecified sex, he was aware of something more. What he would come to call traditional language had always been a convention to him, no more significant than the use of a pronoun for a person whose name was not known — the argument he was hearing about exclusive language seemed to him as bizarre as an argument about "nameless language," in that persons of unspecified name were thereby meant to have no name. Taberah at least had always been acutely aware of how his thoughts were more than the words he used. He had struggled to represent his thoughts, and accepted conventions as useful in getting on to more important things. A sharp concern over "inclusive language", more to the point accompanied by a correspondingly sharp belief that the traditional use of masculine pronouns was really "exclusive language"... In itself this struck him as merely silly, and Taberah knew he was plenty silly himself. *Let he who is without silliness cast the first stone*, he had often said to himself, and he did not wish to break a tradition.

This is what Taberah sensed and thought on one level. On another level, he thought less but sensed more, and this was that the woman had a sense of anger about her. It wasn't just that her voice had risen; it was rather that in a vague sense he sensed that what he saw was the tip of an iceberg, that whatever concern and upset were caused by her upset at the word 'he' spoken of an unknown person, was only a surface glimmer, a faint shadow, cast by something he could not guess at. He looked at her, and asked, "Sister, what is your name?"

She looked startled, and said, "My name is Lydia."

He asked, "Lydia, why don't we take a long walk in the woods and talk?"

Lydia blanched, and said, "I'm staying right here."

Taberah concentrated hard and tried hard to see what his *faux pas* was this time. When that failed, he looked at her, and said, "I know I'm breaking all sorts of social rules, and that I don't understand this culture very well, but what did I do wrong? Why were you afraid when I asked you to take a walk in the woods?"

Lydia said, "I think that should be obvious enough!"

Then she saw the puzzlement on his face, and said, "You might rape me."

Taberah turned green, and asked, "Do you really think that?"

Lydia snapped, "Don't you try to put me back in place by challenging me. When a woman says something, she means what she says. From language that speaks of sports playing fields to cars that are designed to look appealing to a man but not to a woman to cutting women down to the subordinate role that would be convenient to men to logic and abstraction regarded as the essence of good thinking, you men will..." She stopped, startled by a realization.

"Taberah, why haven't you told me to go to Hell? Most men usually say that when I stop smiling and... Usually, I can put a smile on and look happy, I usually don't talk about how badly women are treated unless I am with other feminists. You, somehow — I don't act like this. Something slipped. Why haven't you told me to go to Hell?"

Taberah looked at her levelly and said, "I am afraid to tell you."

"You are afraid of me lashing out again?"

"No. Do you want to hear anyway?"

"Yes."

"You are in Hell already."

Lydia glared at Taberah and said, "Of course I'm in Hell! With a man's world that puts women down, how can I not be in Hell?"

Taberah said, "No. Wrongs exist, but you are in Hell because you believe the world is hostile to you. You believe that all sorts of actions are slights, and if there is ambiguity, that ambiguity is to be interpreted in a fashion that means women are being oppressed. I — I have known women who were really happy. Something about them..."

Lydia said, "What? Had they managed to create a place without sexism?"

Taberah said, "No. They lived in a broken world, a much harsher world than we have. They lived, in fact, suffering injustices that feminism has now made a big change in. But they refused to let their identity be one of being persecuted. The world their bodies lived in was far more hostile than the world your body lives in, but the world their minds lived in was not nearly as hostile as the world your mind lives in. You, in your mind, suffer unending hostility; I will venture a guess that, no matter what happens, if you choose to accept feminism's interpretation, you will be in Hell. I have seen other things like feminism; they are like fires: the more they are given, the more unsatisfied they are, the more they want."

Lydia said, "So you would have me just walk with anyone and get raped? One in three women is raped."

Taberah said, "Um..."

Lydia remained silent, and Taberah said, "I know two women who have been raped, and it is a torment I not know how to describe. But I have done some research, and the feminists who did surveys manipulated the numbers to say as many women have been raped as possible, to fuel a political agenda that claims a rape culture. In the first study that had said one in six women had been raped, over half the women who were classified as having been raped explicitly said they hadn't been raped."

And —

"Being raped is terrible. It's one of few things worse than believing that you are in constant danger of being raped, and that you are never safe with men. I would not have you walk with anyone and get raped. I would have you use your judgment and intuition and walk with people when it is prudent to do so. We are never safe — not from disease, not from being killed, nor from being wounded, nor from rape. But we can take reasonable risks."

"Ok," Lydia said. "You want to walk in the forest? I —"

"No," Taberah said. "You're not comfortable. It speaks well of you that you are able to trust where you have not trusted before, but I do not want your discomfort. What I would like is for you to think about what we have said, and then come join me at a place where women are at peace."

Halloween

Halloween came: Fiona a fairy, Taberah a philosopher, Clancy a cybernetic organism, Nathella an elfin lady, and Aed a medieval lord. After talking with Taberah, Aed wished that he could have a table piled high with food, with everyone invited to come and eat and talk — but he could not do so; the gesture would be misunderstood. On Halloween, hosts gave out vouchers for different kinds of candy, which could be redeemed online for a delivery of different candies; it was almost as easy to poison candy as it was to put razor blades in apples. Nathella did have food waiting for the few people who knew their family, but that was all. The rural trick-or-treat Nathella had grown up with was no more.

Aed and Nathella therefore waited, lord and lady at their castle, to meet the year's assortment of ghouls, witches, archers, space cadets, cheerleaders, Romantics, and assorted and sundry other manner of visitors. A file recording of Taberah's music played in the background, and the place had a warm look to it.

Taberah was with Clancy and Fiona; if Fiona most enjoyed making Halloween costumes, Clancy most enjoyed wearing them.

"Trick or treat!" they said at one house. Fiona charmed them most; Taberah looked odd to be trick-or-treating, but the costume fit the gravity that was around him. Clancy reached out with his long, metal arm and used the moving hand at the end to take his candy.

While they were out, they encountered Fiona and Clancy's friends: a

bumblebee, a Hershey's Hug, a snake, and a bear were among those they saw. Fiona did not quite manage to contain her surprise when one matron gave a discerning look and told Taberah, "You do not quite look ancient, young man. I'd picture you as more medieval." It was with an unsteady step that she hurried on to the next house.

In the night's activities, Taberah saw beauty and ugliness mixed together so thoroughly that it was hard to tell them apart. People dressed up as something else — but that something else often meant vampires, devils, and succubi. There was a moment when Taberah almost lost his step, because he had an insight. He understood role play, and saw that it was good. He thought that, in the costumes, he could see a little further into other people than in normal clothing — but was disturbed by some of the choices. Fiona explained the historic origin of Halloween, but that did not seem to allay his concern.

It seemed too soon that moonlight and starlight were shining, and Clancy said, "We need to be heading to home now." They reached home, and Taberah had only one question to ask: "When is next Halloween?"

Women's Liberation II

As Lydia walked into the building, and as worship gave way to discussion around a table, she felt a mass of conflicting emotions within her. There were many branches to feminism, but one thing that held them in common was that, whatever the trepidation with which men and male society were viewed, men were not the real enemy. The enemy was traditional women — people who had settled for being housewives, falling into men's shadows. They were disloyal to the cause of womanhood in a way that a man could never be.

The turmoil Lydia felt came when she saw women at the group who were traditional — but who were not the stereotype she came to expect. They were at ease with themselves, genuinely happy, and she came to see that what the feminist movement had interpreted as living in a man's shadow did not mean what she thought it meant.

It is always a painful experience when reality intrudes on your stereotypes and preconceptions, and Lydia did not enjoy the evening. She saw that other women were enjoying it, but she was processing changes. By the end, she began to see ways in which women's interests were not best served by feminism, and she came back, sharing in the joy upon returning.

Taberah, after talking with her, said, "Lydia, I have met few people, and far between, who could change after being shown they were in error. Most just fight, and fight, and fight, and fight. What let you do that?"

Lydia said, "I suppose the same thing that led me to be a feminist. Women are slighted in most societies; I embraced feminism because I intuited that it had a truth. I let go of it because I learned of something else that could serve women's interests better. Part of it is the new feminism that Catholics called for. The other part is just that — I never knew the tradition. I knew the feminist stereotype, but not the reality. The traditional Christian teaching has a much bigger place for women than I thought."

Lydia leaned to one side and asked, winking, "Does this mean I have to wear makeup?"

Taberah said, "Uh... I hope not."

"You don't like women wearing makeup?" Lydia asked, surprised again.

"No. My culture does not have makeup as you understand it. When I first came here, I did not understand why women were damaging their appearance by smearing strange materials across their skin. I have hawk's eye — my mother used to call me 'hawk' — and a face with make-up looked to me like a counter with rubbish strewn over it. It took me a long time to understand that women wear make-up to convince themselves they're beautiful while wearing it — it took me a long time to understand what 'presentable' means. It means that a woman is not beautiful, but if she covers herself in powder and paint to look like something else, that something else is beautiful, and that the woman is OK only if she makes herself into something else."

"Taberah, are you sure that you're not a feminist?"

Taberah said, "I find that not the most helpful question to ask. Some of the truths I take with me are shared by feminism; feminism knows no doubt things that I do not know, and I know things that feminism does not know. Or at least that is what a mature person from your time would say, and it is true. But I want to see good come to all people, including the freedom of well-meaning women from a system that imposes a cure worse than the disease. I want to see women liberated from women's liberation "

ABSTRACT.

Like an Emerald

A metal keychain knocked on the door. Nathella opened the door, and a young woman asked, "Is Taberah in? I'm Emerant; we've talked a little. I'm a phoenix."

"Come in," Nathella said, "I don't know where Taberah is." She called, "Taberah!" and Taberah came, holding a knife and a half-carved block of wood. The emerging figure was already discernible as a madonna.

Taberah looked sad; his expression brightened when he saw Emerant. Emerant hugged him and said, "Back at that first meeting, there was something I wanted to sit down and talk with you about, but I've been so busy since then! The courses get harder every year, and I've got one that's harder than a darwin. I'm sorry for not calling earlier, but I was wondering if you wouldn't mind going to a coffeeshop. There's this one shop on campus that only sells decaffeinated coffees, but you have to try their carbonated cappucino!"

Taberah set down the knife and statue and said "Sure!" He started to muse about how this people seemed to use big words for little ideas and little words for big ideas — 'darwin' was slang for a course designed to weed out the less suited students from a major, and evoked the substantial philosophical idea captured in a "survival of the fittest" argument — a discredited idea, to be sure, but a magnificent achievement none the less. On the other hand, Taberah did not know what a cappucino was, or why one would carbonate it, but from usage it was clear that the

word meant a drink.

They walked along to the coffeeshop, not speaking, the loudest sound being the crunch of leaves under their feet, but they were not speaking for different reasons. Taberah was not speaking because he lived naturally in silence, did not have anything to say, and did not need to fill the time with sounds; Emerant was not speaking because she had made a conscious and counter-cultural choice to embrace silence and not fill it with noise — the noise that came so easily to a soul raised in a society that was afraid of silence and stillness and slowness. In walking two miles to the coffeeshop, they had their fill of silence, and Taberah took fifteen minutes to decide between a carbonated cappuccino and some hot cocoa. He ended by ordering both, and Emerant, who ordered an herbal mint Italian soda, did not explain to him that this was a *faux pas*.

Emerant sat down with Taberah and said, "How has your day been?"

Taberah said, "A good day. I have not carved for a long time." Then he remembered etiquette and said, "And yours?"

Emerant said, "A day with a lot of thinking. There was something I wanted to explain to you, and I've been trying to think of a good way to explain it, and I haven't found any good ways."

Taberah stiffened, anticipating a rebuke. Better to have it done with than to put it off. He said, "What have I done wrong?"

"It isn't about anything you've done wrong. It's something that I don't think anyone's ever explained to you."

"Is it about being left-handed? Aed has tried to explain about that, and I am at peace with it now. I wasn't earlier; one of my culture's peculiarities."

"It isn't about being left-handed — something I don't know enough about, especially given that I'm ambisinistrous. It's about something else. Taberah, do you know what the word 'genius' means?"

"In Latin it means the angel watching over a person. In English, I

have gathered it means something different, but I don't know what. It is a word applied to some persons, but not others."

"'Genius' means someone possessing extraordinary intelligence and giftedness, someone who has a unique potential to shape society."

Taberah drew back. "Shape society? How would someone do that? Why would someone do that? Why would some people be specially qualified to do so? Your wording means that this is desirable. Why?"

In the ensuing discussion, Emerant was challenged; she had come to explain something to Taberah, and was not expecting herself to learn something new. She had thought of medieval time as hierarchical, holding some people to be born superior — and saw her own time as having practically invented egalitarianism. Emerant saw in her reactions to Taberah that she not only believed some people were more intelligent than others, but that the highest measure of intelligence was taken to bring a prerogative and duty to shape society as one's naked reason led him to believe was best. Taberah found this to be madness; he would as soon consider himself qualified to redesign the human body from scratch, making surgical alterations so that his beneficiaries would have one less leg and one more arm, as to attempt to redesign human society from scratch. Taberah did not mind the concept of a special word for the most intelligent humans, as the implicit belief that this difference translated to a moral entitlement to do something he found abhorrent.

Emerant said, "Taberah, let's start this discussion again. You know that you are different from other people?"

Taberah hung his head. "Wherever I go, I can't be like other people. I make mistakes — terrible mistakes. I can't connect with other people."

"Taberah, there's a very special kind of intelligence, one that brings the ability to do things very few people can do — but it brings pain and failures. It means that you think very seriously. Classical literature has the image of a blind seer. Do you know this image?"

Taberah nodded his head, and his expression brightened.

"The seer has supernatural vision, but the price of it is the loss of his natural vision. It is a great boon at a great price. Taberah, you're not completely blind — you can and will, with time, be better able to connect with people — but your natural eyes are weak because of the brilliance of your supernatural eyes. You are not a second-rate Abanu. You are not a second-rate Tala. You are not a second-rate Emerant. You are a first rate you, and you are close to God's heart. You have already managed one accomplishment most of us can only dream of."

Taberah looked surprised. "What was that?"

"The Turing Award, Taberah! Don't you know what that means?"

Taberah looked confused. "There was a lord of a city who had me over. There is not a custom like that in my land. I understand I was honored, but — if there is one city that practices that custom, surely there are other cities that practice it! What I did wasn't any big deal."

"Taberah, dear, there is only one city that does that, and they search through the whole world before awarding that prize, once per year. There have only been seventeen other people who have received that award. Taberah, there is probably not one person in a million who is as bright as you. I want to talk with you about how you plan to use your intelligence."

Taberah was silent; he was trying to sift Emerant's words, sort them. The image of the blind seer struck a powerful chord with him; for one of the first times he could remember, he was able to think about his failures without feeling inferior. The Turing Award was still difficult to think about; he was beginning to understand that it was something bigger than a prize at a fair, but he had never begun to guess the true magnitude of his achievement. In his mind it was like the time as a boy when he was summoned to a monastery where Thomas Aquinas was passing through, and the theologian told him that he had chosen a good symbol to illuminate the Trinity — only with more hoopla; it was still not a very big deal, and its chief significance to Taberah was the warmth the people of this land had shown him. It seemed to him a very hospitable land. He was warmed, but it did not occur to him to think that he was fundamentally more intelligent than others — the idea of possessing a superior aptitude

ran contrary to medieval culture. Taberah was touched by Emerant's statement that not one person in a million was as bright as him; his culture embraced exaggeration as a means of emphasis, and he was warmed that Emerant would make her point by exaggerating that much.

"Well?" Emerant said. "What do you want to do with your intelligence? Have you given it any thought?"

"I don't know," Taberah said. "I will need to think about what you have said. And your question is not a day's question to answer."

"Well, don't feel hurried. It'll take me some time to process this discussion as well. Taberah, you haven't touched your drinks; they've gotten cold by now. Here, let me microwave them for you. What have you been doing this past week?"

The remainder of the conversation was light and pleasant; it was a kind of conversation which Taberah had only mastered in the past couple of years, had learned did not mean anything in the sense of deep philosophy, but meant a warm personability and sharing — that much translated across cultures. Both of them, for different reasons, learned something of the other's culture — Emerant was enjoying an elective on ethnographic interviewing and even more enjoying an opportunity to apply her learning, and Taberah had crossed cultures from the time he was a little boy, learning something in each case. 'Student' seemed at least as interesting and difficult as any of the other professions he had seen and participated in, and went at a much faster pace with much more difficult material than an apprenticeship. He made a mental note to ask Aed if he could arrange for Taberah to work as a student.

Emerant walked Taberah home, again in silence, and then walked back to the dorm. She climbed into her bunk and punched a name on the phone.

"Tala, this is Emerant. You were right; he made my head spin. But I think that was less due to his being medieval than being astronomically intelligent." It was 3:00 in the morning before she hung up and went to bed.

Confessions

Taberah said to Aed, "I want to be a student! Can you help me be a student? What's necessary to becoming a student?"

Aed thought for a moment and said, "My university will undoubtedly take you, and give you full scholarship; the biggest thing for the moment is picking out which classes to take. That's something Nathella will probably be able to help you out with better than I can; she's very perceptive, and would have a better feel for what classes would help you most." Aed decided not to try to explain the degree programs; he believed in learning for the sake of learning, not learning for the sake of getting a piece of paper — and a degree on top of a Turing Award would be superfluous.

Nathella was out on an errand, and as Taberah waited for her, he began to realize something. The realization was not pleasant. When she walked in, Taberah said, "Nathella, I have a confession to make."

Nathella said, "Ok; I can take you to a father confessor this afternoon."

"Not to a father confessor, Nathella. To you."

"What is it, honey?"

Taberah hesitated, and said, "Nathella, I have been looking past you, but not at you."

Nathella looked at Taberah gently, and then closed her eyes. She was a quiet type, easy to ignore; she was slender, and men seemed not to pay her much notice. Taberah was not the first person to commit this sin, but he was one of the first to admit it. When was the last time someone else had done so? The only prior time had been by Aed. She was sure there were others, but — when she opened her eyes, she saw that Taberah was looking at her.

Taberah said, "Nathella, what are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking about part of my story."

"What is your story?"

"You want the whole thing, or the part I was thinking about?"

"The whole thing."

Nathella thought for a moment and said, "I was born on a farm; as a little girl, I had a wonderful education filled with simple amusement. We had a tight-knit community, and I miss that closeness.

"My father believed in education; he was a welder as well as a farmer, and was committed that his daughter get a college education. I went to school, and it was a wonderful extension and compliment to the rural upbringing I had. I think city kids now miss some of the things going on then; the computerized classroom doesn't teach you how to be perceptive, and I especially miss hunting — my father gave me a hunting rifle and scope on my twelfth birthday, and the day after I killed a bear. No, it wasn't because he wished he had a son; I had two younger brothers, and both of them were given guns on their twelfth birthday as well. I didn't like hunting as much as I liked picking flowers in the field, but there's nothing like giving your Mom a bouquet of wildflowers you picked yourself, and there's nothing like sitting down to eat meat you killed yourself. I don't own a gun, not any more, and I don't want a gun in this house where someone might break in and steal it and kill someone. But I enjoyed those fields, the heat of working in a cornfield in the summer, the fruitful creativity that comes on the other side of boredom — you get bored and then you get bored silly and then you think of things to do

sored, and then you get sored shy, and then you think of things to do that never would have occurred if you always had a television — and our family didn't. We had a computer, but both my Mom and my Dad believed that television was a waste of time and a waste of life. I'm better off for growing up without TV.

"Anyways, at school, it was an exciting new world, and I met Aed. That made a difference. That changed things — and it was the only pleasant thing that happened for a while.

"Back home, my father needed to remove a few stumps, and wanted to put a pond in a field that — I can tell you the story for that another time. Anyways, he needed some explosives, so he mixed an oil people used to use with a common farming material, and so far as I know, had the one forgetful moment of his life. He forgot what he was doing, and lit up a fag.

"That was it. On that one day, I lost my father, my mother, and both my brothers. The barn still looked basically like a barn; the house didn't. There wasn't much of anything of a house left. And I really couldn't go back — the people would have accepted me, but a farming community without my farm and family would have been like a body without a soul: to me, dead.

"I began to notice that I didn't feel so bad after I had some whisky; it took a fair amount — I could drink an elephant under the table. The more I drank, the more empty I felt when I wasn't drunk, and the more empty I felt, the more I drank. This continued for three years; Aed and I both finished our degrees later because of the drain of my drinking.

"There was one day when Aed was in a bad mood, and I got the brunt of everything that had gone wrong that day. I was in a terrible mood — it had just hit me that, even if I went back to visit, there would be this horrible silence about me — I would no longer be Nathella, who knew all the plants and animals and had yellow dandelion rubbed on her cheeks half the summer days from an old joke with two loving and rambunctious brothers; I would be that orphan thing — in a way, not human any more. I didn't at first admit that, and when I did, it hurt, and hurt, and hurt, and hurt. I got myself drunk, so drunk that —

"Taberah, do you know what a BAC is?"

Taberah shook his head.

"BAC is short for blood alcohol concentration. One drink will give you a BAC of .02. When we were at the banquet and you said that you felt funny and that the wine seemed to have more effect than you were used to, you had a BAC of about .05, judging by the amount you drank. At .08, in the eyes of the law, you're too drunk to drive. .20 is very drunk. 1.00 will kill you.

"Taberah, I had a BAC of 1.15, and that was after the hospital pumped my stomach — an experience I never want to live again. Several people at the hospital commented that it was a wonder I was alive at all. It took me over a day to become fully sober, and the first thing I remember when I was sober enough to be coherent, pumped full of chemicals that sober you up but make your mind feel like it's being scraped across asphalt, was Aed sitting down right across from me, looking me straight in the eyes, and saying with a dead serious voice, 'Nathella, I love you, and because I love you, I am not getting up from this chair until you admit you have a problem with alcohol.'

"I was trapped and pressured, and that was the most loving thing Aed ever did to me. Not marrying me; that was a close second, and that's the second best thing that's ever happened to me. No, third; coming to know God was a slow thing, not all at once, and it is the best thing I've ever known. But Aed staring at me as I made jokes, tried to cajole him, threatened to break up with him, and tried every other way I could think of to evade and deny him was the best thing that ever happened to me. He did apologize for his treatment of me the day before, by the way; he felt terrible about it, and has never behaved like that again. After five hours, he was hungry, thirsty, weary, and immovable as a rock, and I said the most painful thing I've ever said. I said, 'I'm an alcoholic.'

"Taberah, being an alcoholic is Hell on earth; I believed it when another alcoholic said that in Heaven, you can have as much wine as you want, and in Hell, you can have as much wine as you want. The first steps of recovery are even worse than being an alcoholic; it's like you had a

of recovery are even worse than being an alcoholic, it's like you had a festering wound, and now there's a surgeon going in with a knife to get the bullet out and stitch things up. It hurts, and it has to be done, and there's no anaesthesia. But it heals. Aed and I both needed support; when you're wounded like I was, you wound those close to you, and he's been healed too, even though he never drank more than four drinks in a day, usually not four drinks in a week. I've been dry for — how long has it been? Over twenty years, and I am healed — really and truly healed. I sometimes long for home, and I sometimes long for drink — believe me, there are some days when I ask Fiona to sit me down and distract me and make sure I don't go to a liquor store. But I am now free of that chain — and happier than I ever believed alcohol would make me.

"My faith... My faith is strong like I wouldn't have imagined. There's not much of me on the surface; most people don't pay me much mind. But underneath, God has given me a strength I would have never dreamed of. Childlike faith meets trial and testing that it may become childlike faith. Some people who hear my story ask me how I can have faith after experiences like that. I ask them, how can I *not* have faith after experiences like that? Even when I was dead drunk — especially when I was dead drunk; even when I admitted I was an alcoholic — especially when I admitted I was an alcoholic — God was *with* me. He has never abandoned me. Never."

Taberah sat in silence for a moment, and said, "I'm sorry I asked you for wine."

Nathella smiled and said, "Taberah, there's nothing to apologize about. You didn't know I was an alcoholic, and asking for wine is a perfectly reasonable thing. Why don't you go out and have a drink with Aed tonight? I can't drink, but I know God blesses other people through the fruit of the vine... Taberah, I know what you're thinking. I see it in your eyes, and I've seen it in other people. I'd like to tell you another story, this one a story that didn't happen to me.

"My best friend in college, Naomi, was the daughter of a competent insurance salesman. Her father was friends with the vice-president of sales, whom he invited over one day for burgers and beer.

"After they arrived from the office, Naomi's father realized that he had beer but not burgers, and drove to the store to buy some food, and the vice president raped her. It was the worst day of her life, and the days after were made worse by the fact that nobody believed her. They merely told her that that was serious business, and she was too old to be telling stories anyway.

"She noticed something peculiar when she began seeing a counselor and sharing this with other people. Many men were afraid to touch her. They knew she had pain, and mistakenly believed that another man touching her body would automatically bring back traumatic memories — at least that's how they thought about it; the way she usually put it was 'They won't even give me a hug!' It's a shame, too; Naomi was one of the touchiest people I've known, not as in easily angered, but as in liked to touch and be touched — she always gave me a kiss when she saw me, and she very much enjoyed a man's touch — rowdy as well as soft — be it in an arm over her shoulder, a crushing bear hug, or in horseplay.

"Some people who've been abused need not to be touched, and it's good to ask what's OK and what's not OK when you find out someone has wounds. But apart from that, people who are hurting need hugs most of all, and not touching a woman because she's been hurt — it's meant well, but sometimes it's just the wrong thing to do. Naomi learned to be very careful, as an adult, who she told about her experience — most people believed her, but some men in particular, with the best of intentions, never treated her the same way again.

"When there's a person in a wheelchair, by nature people will see the wheelchair but not the person. There's nothing to feel guilty about in having to counteract that tendency, but it needs to be counteracted. The standard advice used to be, 'See the person first and the condition second.' Now that has been refined a little bit to 'See an organic whole in which the condition is part of a person.' Naomi sometimes needed to be treated differently because of her trauma; there were days when she just needed to be left alone — and days when she just needed more hugs and more listening. It would never have helped her for me to forget she was human and treat her as something whose nature was 'wounded'. Pierce us; do we not bleed? Poke us; do we not squeak? Taberah, I am a woman

— human — with the full range of human emotions, laughter and silliness and joy as well as pain and worry and trouble. Don't let knowing I'm an alcoholic obscure your knowing that I am a woman. I would much rather you occasionally forget and ask me to buy you a bottle of wine, than think of me as a pit of pain with whom you must always be serious, always careful not to bump me lest I shatter. I'm human, OK?"

Taberah thought for a second and said, "Ok. If you won't buy me a bottle of wine, will you buy me a keg of beer?"

Nathella laughed and tousled Taberah's hair. He had somehow managed to keep a deadpan straight face. "Honey, next time I'm out shopping, I'll buy some root beer, which doesn't have alcohol, and we can each sit down and sip a root beer. Actually, you want to go shopping now? You seemed to enjoy going out for clothing, and maybe you'll see something at the store that you'll like. No, wait; the packaging food comes in is probably not whatever you are used to. Want to come along anyways?"

Which Classes?

Nathella said, "Aed told me that you want to take some classes."

"Yes, Nathella."

"You seem to find things to do easily; I suggest that you take two classes, three at most; other students take more, but you need a lot of sleep. Come on over to the computer with me; we can look at the catalogue with me.

"Let's see... Here's 'Mathematics as a Humanity', team taught by a mathematician and an artist. When I took it, it was team taught by a mathematician and a philosopher. It was the hardest class I took — and the best.

"In this culture, most people are taught something horrid as lower math, and they avoid it as much as they can. They don't guess what mathematicians really do — an art form guided by intuition. Most people think a mathematician must do more of whatever they suffered through in the math classes they couldn't avoid — more statistics and meaningless formulae. It's really sad; higher math is easier than lower math, and that course did not make me a mathematician, but it helped me appreciate what they do.

"'Modern Mythology: An Exploration of Storytelling in Postmodern Society.' This would also be a good course for you to take; it will help you see some of the good points of our culture — and some of the bad points. I

think last year they did an in-depth treatment of a classic interactive — the title escapes me (I'm never in tune with that — I was 20 before I saw *Star Wars*), but — ooh! it was called *net*, and *net* was hard science fiction that somehow managed to be very popular. This class didn't look at technology much, just the timeless elements of the story — and it is timeless. I don't know what they're doing this semester, although I can find out.

"Philosophy of Technology'. This is a good class; it's team taught by a humanities Luddite and a technology-worshipping engineer. Aed likes to occasionally go in and sit and watch the sparks fly.

"Psychology 212: Gift Giving. This class explores how to take basic psychological insights and use them to find a gift that will be meaningful to a friend and loved one.' I wish that one had been available to me when I was in school. Classes have been shifting towards a more practical bent. There's also 'Psychology 312: Synergy. This class explores positive interactions between people, and how to create the circumstances that give it rise.' There are a lot of good classes — hmm.

"Semiotics 101: A Critical Look at Contemporary Society' — this would be an extremely valuable class to you, but not for the reasons that most people take it. It would show you how people are inculturated into contemporary liberalism, and see things into the plurality that was once a holy trinity of race, class, and gender. Taking a critical look at a course like this would help you understand contemporary academia, and perhaps a little bit of contemporary society as well.

"I know you have an artistic bent; I've seen you carving. This might interest you: 'Fine Arts 212: The Art of Tektrix'. It's a class on how to build with robotic blocks, studied as an art form.

"Here's a fun one: 'Gender Studies 315: The Wisdom of Cats. A humorous look at how our lives can be made better by living out the wisdom that cats embody naturally, and a careful study of why cats are better than dogs.' Department notwithstanding, that looks — oh, wait. You're a dog lover. Never mind."

Taberah did not see why loving dogs would disqualify anyone from taking a course on cats, but he was too busy assimilating information too quickly to ask a question. Nathella continued, "'Communication 275: Are Sacred Cows Edible? An interpretive look at the popular comic strip and exploration of its meaning in society.' *That* looks interesting. I'm not going to try to explain it now, but you should take it. Let's see, what else?

"There's a dance art — kind of like a martial art, but taking dance rather than combat as its basic medium. In combat between two good martial artists, there is a harmony that arises, a kind of synchronization and attunement between opponents. Neither party walks in knowing what is going to happen — but a masterpiece emerges. A dance art does this with dance — there are differences; in both, you learn to read your partner, but in a dance art, you also want to be readable, instead of hard to predict — and dance art strikes Aed as very interesting. He tried one for a bit, but then left because he wasn't able to handle the structured, monotonous repetitions that low-level training took from martial arts. Maybe that's its weakness, and come to think of it, you probably shouldn't do that either, even though I have a feeling you can dance very well.

"Here we go! 'History 339: Medieval Culture.' I think this would be valuable to you as well; you would learn something about our culture in learning how it portrays your culture. Maybe that wouldn't be such a good idea; the catalogue refers to your culture as belonging to 'the misogynist tradition', and — come to think of it, I know who's teaching that course, and she'd fail you. That professor can tolerate almost anybody whom liberalism now sees as oppressed, but someone who is from medieval society and believes we have something to learn from it — you'd have a hostile learning environment. Let's see: what else?

"'Integrated Science 152: Heavy Boots.' I think this course would be a good one for you to learn from; it is probably the best to teach the culture of science and scientism — as good for its purpose as the semiotics class would have been for understanding the culture of the humanities as we now have it. Another one that you might like is 'Engineering 297: Cross-Disciplinary Commonalities of Repair and Debugging. This course covers the fundamentals of how to think about technology that does not behave as intended, with application to repair of mechanical and electrical

devices, and debugging of software.' What do you think, honey? Does that interest you?"

"They all interest me, Nathella. I don't know which ones to choose."

"Then we can wind to a close — ooh! You *have* to take this one, Taberah. At least if you can get in. The professor is a cantankerous, eccentric genius. This course has been taught under a dozen department names, and now the university's simply stopped assigning it a department. You'll like it."

At dinner, Nathella said, "Have you given further thought to what courses you want to take?"

Taberah said, "Yes. I want to take the last class we talked about, the class you recommended, and — oh, yes! Heavy Boots!"

Christmas

It seemed not very long at all before Taberah found the ground an unsteady traitor beneath his feet, and more often than not beneath his backside; he could keep perfect balance on a ship, but ice was tricky. The wind seemed to blow bitter cold through him as much as around him, and Taberah sometimes shivered even when he was inside and wearing a sweater. Taberah would have much rather been wearing heavy armor and sparring on a blistering hot day than experience *this*!

Even the cold could not damp his spirits as Christmas approached, though. He had thought about gifts for each of his adoptive family and friends for each day, starting with the first. He gave the madonna to Nathella, a riflery simulator to Clancy, pressed flowers to Fiona, and an abstract pattern to Aed. Each phoenix was given an electronic image of a stained glass window from home.

Aed received gifts in turn; he most prized the Pendragon Cycle which Nathella gave him; he would be fascinated by the historically-oriented retelling of the Arthurian legends. He knew those legends well, as well as he knew the legends of Roland and the twelve paladins, and he would be intrigued by the retelling. Seeing an American portrayal of his home gave him a unique insight into the time and place he was living with, and their conception of what is important about a place — it did not seem as strange to him as it might have appeared earlier. The theme of Ynes Avallach, the isle of the Fisher King, struck a chord with Taberah, and he felt that here, now, he was on that isle.

The days were merry days, with much revelry and joking, and there was a relaxed energy about the house. Aed began to wonder why the custom of twelve days of Christmas was not celebrated more; it was a good custom.

Twelve days seemed perfect to grasp the meaning of the Christ child; the Kinsellas had always understood Christmas gifts to be symbolic of God giving mankind his greatest gift ages ago, but celebrating with Taberah gave a new depth of understanding to the symbol. An hour does not merely allow one to communicate twelve things, each of which can be said in five minutes; it allows communication of things that cannot be said in any number of five minute bursts. The twelve days of Christmas were not twelve consecutive Christmas days; they were part of a whole celebration that embraced gift giving but went much farther, a time of worship and enjoyment of God. Clancy wondered at the beginning how one could possibly spend twelve days celebrating Christmas; come the end, he wondered how one could possibly stop after celebrating one day of Christmas. While they were out caroling, Taberah tasted real wassail, and during the celebration Aed took Taberah to a wine bar and introduced him to champagne.

On the eleventh day of Christmas, Taberah asked Nathella, "Can you smell the incense?"

Nathella was confused. "There is no incense in this house. The only smell of incense has been on our clothing, when we came back from the Christ mass. Are you talking about that?"

Taberah said, "Not that, Nathella! The *real* incense! Can you smell that?"

"I don't understand, honey. Why would you be smelling incense?"

"Nathella, what is incense for?"

"It ascends in the presence of God, and some of it is around us at the holiest times we worship. Catholics only use it on special days; the Orthodox use incense at every worship, and believe in bringing Heaven down to earth — ooh Now I understand Yes honey I do smell the

down to earth — can now understand. Yes, honey, I do smell the incense."

First Day of Classes

The first day of classes was delayed by a heavy snowstorm; it was such as only occurs once every ten years, and people were in mixed moods when they finally came inside a warm classroom. The freshmen and sophomores tended to have a spirit of adventure, while the juniors and seniors more tended towards irritation.

Taberah walked into a large lecture hall, crowded with students. A professor cleared his throat and said, "Good morning. My name is Professor Pontiff, and you are in Communication 275: Are Sacred Cows Edible? In this course, we will be studying the strip of that name. If you'll excuse me for one moment..." He fumbled with an overhead projector and turned it on. A comic strip appeared overhead. It had a young man and a young woman in conversation:

Young man: It's a shame when a comic strip becomes the medium for public discourse.

Young woman: You don't like it when conversation is to the point and funny?

Young man: Not that. I don't like that it has to be funny, and that you get ignored if you have a point that you can't cram into five seconds. Most theories that can be put in a nutshell belong there.

Young woman: What if there was a comic strip that made its point but was not particularly funny?

After giving the class a minute to digest the strip, then said, "The term 'sacred cow' is now a bit dated, but it was popular around the turn of the century. The Hindu religion treats cows as sacred animals, and there are cows in India that people will not kill — they would rather starve than kill a sacred cow. In a typically anti-foreign fashion, people who did not understand or respect this religious tradition took the term 'sacred cow' and made it a metaphor for an absurd belief that benighted people defend and are afraid to abandon, and which one is considered enlightened and courageous to attack.

"Or at least, that's what people who used the term 'sacred cow' understood it to mean. It worked out in practice that 'sacred cow' meant in particular the sacred cows of conservatives, but not the sacred cows of liberals. Even liberals have now come to acknowledge that liberals have just as many sacred cows as conservatives, and even that there are good if inarticulate reasons behind at least some of the norms that are branded as sacred cows. 'Sacred cow' was an anti-conservative weapon, one that could do damage without needing any argument, and it was used in sayings such as 'Sacred cows make the best hamburgers.' It was somewhat of a sacred cow itself.

"There were a number of people who began to question this, but one of the more influential ones was Anonymous. Anonymous preferred not to be known by his name, and kept his anonymity even when running for office as an independent. But that's another story I will not go into here. Anonymous was about equally likely to vote Republican or Democrat, by the way. He was influential because he chose a medium in which one person can reach a number of his people: the comic strip. The very title of the comic strip, 'Are Sacred Cows Edible?' is part of a challenge to what the term 'sacred cow' had been used for.

"On the projector is his first strip. The characters are not named; they are subservient to the idea. Even his basic idea is trying to break out of the frame of the comic strip; it shows no direct humor, but perhaps (if you look higher) some meta-level humor. And, at any rate, it bites the hand that feeds it. Anonymous was very good at that. The question, "What if there was a comic strip that made its point but was not particularly funny?" is in a sense a very pointed joke. Or is it?

"Regular attendance is expected; the class's format will have a strip a day, followed by lecture and discussion. The only textbook is the one comic book you have; I'm sure this didn't influence any of your decisions to join this class. By now, I'm sure that there are a few people in this class so industrious that they've already read the text, or a good chunk of it; I feel safe in asking an opening question that draws on some knowledge of the text: 'How does the comic strip fit among other media? How does this particular comic strip fit among other media? Are the two related or unrelated?'"

Taberah rejoiced in the discussion that followed; it reminded him of medieval reading, an activity so involved that some doctors viewed it as a form of exercise. He himself did not say anything, but paid attention both to what was familiar and what was unfamiliar: the text was viewed in a different manner, he could tell, and not as something authoritative. More of a starting point for tangents. Taberah wished to sit still and watch, come to understand what this culture meant by "having a discussion" — and did so, until the instructor pointed to him and said, "You. What are you thinking about? You're thinking loudly."

Taberah hesitated, and said, "I was just thinking about how this discussion seems to be 'What can we jump off of from the strip?' instead of 'What does the text mean?'"

"You think we can have a discussion about the content of one strip? It's a ten-second strip."

"Maybe. I've known some good, long discussions about a single sentence. One thing which people might say is, 'How do we deal with content that does not fit within a medium's limitations?' How, for instance, do you think about something you can't say in words?"

"If you can't say it in words, you can't think it. The limitations of language are the limitations of thought, right?"

"I think things that I can't express in words. Or, at least, I think things that I can't express, and I've been told I use words well. Saying that the limitations of language are the limitations of thought is like saying

the limitations of language are the limitations of thought is like saying that the limitations of painting are the limitations of imagination — that, just because we can't paint something moving or three dimensional, we can't imagine it. It may well be a limit on what we can communicate, but not on what we can think. We can be tempted to this error by the power of painting — color, shading, and perspective. We can make paintings so lifelike that we are capable of thinking they represent anything we can imagine — but we can still imagine things that just can't be painted. My deepest thoughts almost never come in words, and it takes effort and insight to capture some of them in words."

The teacher was impressed. He said, "If you want, come in during my office hours, and maybe we will talk about how we can have a class period discussion in your style. What do the rest of you have to say?"

Taberah sat back in his chair and continued to think. He was going to like being a student.

The TA stepped forward and said, "Heavy Boots has traditionally been a student-to-student class, taught by people who have freshly learned the material, and this will be the most important class of your discipline. It tells you how to think logically, how to think about science.

"The anecdote from which this class takes its name concerns when a couple of engineering students were in a philosophy class, and the philosophy TA gave as an 'example' the 'fact' that there is no gravity on the moon: if you held a pen out at arm's length and let go, it would just float there. 'No,' one engineer protested. 'It would fall, only more slowly.' The TA calmly explained that it would not fall because there was no gravity. After a couple of things failed, inspiration struck. The engineer said, 'You've seen movies of astronauts walking on the moon, and you saw them fall down. Why is that?' The TA, who had had plenty of courses in logic, said, 'That's because they were wearing heavy boots.'"

A chuckle moved throughout the class. The TA continued, "At this point the other engineer, who was calmer, dragged our friend, who was foaming at the mouth, out of the room. They decided that night to do a telephone survey. They asked people if there was gravity on the moon. Sixty percent said, 'No.' Those sixty percent were asked the follow-up

question about astronauts. Of the people who had said there was no gravity on the moon, twenty percent went back and changed their answers, but over sixty percent said that the people on the moon stayed there because they were wearing heavy boots."

There was more laughter, and the TA said, "Science tells us how the world is, and it can be known through experiment. This class will help you learn not to have heavy boots. Are there any questions?"

A young woman raised her hand. "Do you believe in Darwinism?"

The TA said, "Darwinism is bad, but not nearly as bad as creationism, or the masks it wears — intelligent design. It is true that Darwinism cannot explain the question of origins, but that isn't science's job. It's not subject to debate. However the world came to be, it is here, and that is what we study. As to intelligent design — I have another story. There was an engineering professor who came in to find his class talking about heavy boots. He gave a very involved explanation of, among other things, that gravity works on the moon despite the fact that the moon has no air, explaining the whole scientific method, the idea of trying to be skeptical and open-minded at the same time, and at the end, he asked, 'Any questions?' One young girl raised her hand, and said, 'You seem to be getting very worked up about this. Are you a Scorpio?'"

Another chuckle went through the masses. "There are any number of other stories. Did you hear about the English professor who noticed that his computer was warm, and poured water in it to cool it down? Or the farmer who complained that there were holes in his computer after he played duck hunt? Are there any other questions?"

Taberah thought. Nathella was right; this course *was* going to teach Taberah a lot about the culture of science. He raised his hand and said, "Yes. Why do you regard non-scientists as having intelligence one step above that of a rock?"

The ensuing discussion was both vigorous and heated. Taberah had already begun to piece together that something besides scientific thinking that was being taught — he could not tell exactly what, but by the end of class a good many people came to see that a disrespect for non-scientists

class a good many people came to see that a disrespect for non-scientists was being taught, and some of them even questioned the equation of science with rationality. Taberah was silent for much of the discussion; he was trying to figure out what besides the obvious was being taught in that class.

A professor stepped up to the podium and said, "Good afternoon. Do we have any computer science grad students in class? Good. Any doctoral students? Wonderful. What did the B.S. in software engineering say to the Ph.D. in computer science?

"I'll have the veggie burger and fries, please."

"Or do we have anybody from the practical disciplines? A university without colleges of business, engineering, and applied life studies is like a slice of chocolate cake without ketchup, mustard, and tartar sauce.

"Anybody here from the English department? The English department is a special place. If you want to find a Marxist, don't go to the political science department. Nary a Marxist will you find there. Go to the English department. If you want to find a Freudian, don't go to the psychology department. Nary a Freudian will you find there. Go to the English department. If you want to find a Darwinist, don't go to the biology department. Nary a Darwinist will you find there. Go to the English department. The English department is a living graveyard of all the dead and discredited ideologies that have been cast off by other departments.

"Anyways, I'm Dr. Autre, and I would like to welcome you to the first day of class. You'll be able to remember which room we're meeting in; just remember room 20, same number as your percentage grade. This class will have no discussions, although there will be question and answer. As to discussions — you don't really have to pay anything to hear what your friends think about a matter, but given that you're paying good money to be here — or some of you are; the rest are sponging off your parents — I think you are entitled to hear what a professor thinks. Someone said that diplomacy is the art of letting other people have it your way; I was never good at diplomacy. Too honest for it. Maybe some of you will do a better job at it, when you have a Ph.D. behind your name and

the academic world says, 'Aah, here's a Ph.D. Here's someone we can take seriously!'

"Some of you have questions about the syllabus. The answer to those questions is very simple. There is none. I don't mean that I don't have planned material I can fall back on if I need to; I mean that the important stuff in this course is the stuff I can't foresee. The main reason I plan out course material ahead of time is that it provides me with a point of departure from which to do something interesting. As such, I do not wish to confuse you by giving you distracting information."

A young man raised his hand. "But if you have the information on hand, what harm is there in sharing it? Certainly it helps you."

The teacher said, "There was once a professor who thought his class was writing down too much of what he was saying, and thinking about it too little. At one point, he interrupted his lecture to say, 'Stop. I want you to put down your pens and pencils and listen to me. You don't have to write down every word I say. You are here to think, not to produce copies of my lecture notes. You don't have to write down what I say verbatim. Any questions?'

"One young woman frantically said, 'Yes. How do you spell *verbatim*?'

"I'm not going to spell out an answer to your question beyond that, but I am going to say that I won't always say my full meaning outright. I will leave it implied, for you to wrestle out. That requires the same involvement as discussion, but it leaves you free to hear a professor. You are encouraged to talk with your colleagues after the classroom for as much discussion as you want. Class time is for what you can only get in class time — a professor's lecture.

"I've used a different text each time, and the registrar usually won't print how to get a text in my class. This year, I want you to get a sticky-hand, walk into

Sphttp://www.powells.com/partner/24934/biblio/0684863170 Physical — it's a mile down the street from the college, close your eyes, turn

around, and toss the sticky-hand past your back. The book that the hand lands on is yours. Buy it, and study it; see how it relates to our classroom lectures, and tie it in to your discussions. I guarantee you that, after the first month, you will have learned something that I couldn't have possibly coordinated by picking the text myself. I don't just mean learning to read a text at an angle, although that is tremendously important; I mean that you will have learned something directly from the text that I couldn't have picked out. Tonight's reading assignment is pages three through ten, and the first page of the index, if your book has an index. Any questions?"

Taberah leaned back. This class was going to be a lot of fun.

Baptists

Taberah walked in after the first day of classes, excited, alert. He said to Nathella, "What does the word 'Baptist' mean? I heard someone use it between classes, and I couldn't figure it out from context."

Nathella said, "Um, that's not a five-minute question. First, do you know what 'Protestant' means?"

Taberah said, "No."

"There have been any number of reform movements in the history of the Catholic Church, and there will be any number of such movements in the future. With one of them, a monk named Martin Luther nailed ninety-five theses for reform on the door of a cathedral. The authorities questioned him, and finally asked him, 'Do you believe that the Church has actually been *wrong* in these things for all these years?'

"Luther asked for a couple of days to think about it; that was granted, and at the end of the time the question was put to him again. He said, 'Here I stand. I can do no other.'

"Then all Hell broke loose. Luther was excommunicated, and tried to set up a parallel, reformed church. The church called 'Catholic' was the one that initiated the schism, but they were not the only schismatics. Luther's church splintered and splintered and splintered. There was all manner of invective between the two sides, and they were excluded from each other's communions. It was worse than the split between Latin and

Greek — far worse.

"Over time, people began to realize that the schisms were not a good thing. There were some who said, 'The solution to the problem is simple. Everyone come over to my side, and there won't be any division.' There was the problem of communion: especially on the Catholic side, there was an understanding of communion as implying full membership in the community, which was in turn understood to mean that members not part of a particular schism could not legitimately take part in it — this interpretation was deemed to be more important than the words, 'Take this, *all of you*, and drink from it.' that instituted a feast given to all of Christ's disciples. That's still where things are now; Rome has now interpreted Vatican II to mean that Catholics and Protestants whose consciences command full participation in their brothers' and sisters' worship may be — what's the word, *tolerated*, in taking communion across the schism. It's a step homewards, I suppose, but we are very far off from organizational unity that once was.

"Baptists are, or rather were, one of the Protestant sects, and they added something to American culture. As to what happened —

"In the fifties, the question of abortion, the question of whether a woman has a right to kill the child growing inside her, came up with the Supreme Court. The court protected the child's life. In the seventies, it came up again, and this time the court legalized abortion, and the movement declared the controversy settled. But it wasn't.

"By the nineties... there were laws in place that offered stiff penalties for abortion protests, and RICO, a law meant to deal with organized crime, was used to inflict massive penalties on abortion protesters. There was one minister who led a protest while cautiously distancing any church involvement or statement on the protest. The courts RICOed the congregation, making a multimillion dollar settlement. Also going on were 'physical compliance holds' — meaning pain holds used on demonstrators. Nonviolent protests of abortion received draconian punishment compared to the penalties deemed appropriate for violent protest by environmental or animal rights activists.

"When a pregnant woman walks into an abortion clinic unsure what

When a pregnant woman walks into an abortion clinic, unsure what to do with an unexpected pregnancy, by the letter of the law she is supposed to receive non-directive counseling to help her decide how to handle the situation. What actually happens is very different. Abortion is big business; insurance companies will readily pay thousands of dollars for an abortion rather than deal with all of the expenses of childbirth and a new life out in the world. Even when there is no insurance, a couple hundred dollars is still lucrative for a ten minute procedure. Never mind that the people who perform abortions have the highest suicide rate in the medical profession; it's money, money, money. What actually happens when a girl walks in is that she receives a five-minute sales pitch that slants abortion as the only live option. Most of the abortions that have happened in this country were abortions that the girl was pressured into, that she never was allowed to say 'no' to — same thing as date rape.

"So there was this big push to have real non-directive counseling at abortion clinics, along with a surgeon general's warning about the emotional scars that abortion can cause — post abortion stress syndrome and all. It wasn't just Christians behind it; some feminists, especially those who had spent some time working at abortion clinics or talking with women who had gone through that trauma, had begun to suspect that they and their movement were being manipulated as pawns by forces less innocent than — anyways, the law was passed September 1, 2012, and struck down October 1.

"The Baptists were the fastest to spearhead an initiative to get every church member into a protest — which they didn't do; it was closer to fifty percent, but there was a massive, peaceful protest, and the police came out — pepper spray, tear gas, pain holds, the works. The jails were filled up overnight, and it was ugly. The ugliest thing about it was that it wasn't two parties fighting each other — it was one party attacking satyagrahi who didn't resist. The courts thought this would be a good time for an unambiguous message, and commanded a settlement of over 1.6 trillion dollars. The church could not begin to pay something like that.

"The courts lost something that day. The president of American Baptists called a press conference and said from his jail cell, 'You can force our bodies and our checkbooks, but you can never break our spirits.'

The denomination of Baptists in America is hereby declared to be bankrupt and disbanded. Baptists, melt into other bodies of believers. You are the heart of our ministry, not a formal structure that can be sued. Courts, you have won this battle. But *what is it that you have won?*

"Most other Protestant denominations that participated in the protest did not do much better; Catholics were protected only by the masterful diplomacy of the Papacy. The Pope tried to be an advocate for the Protestants, too, but saving the financial viability of Catholics was making the best of a bad scenario. There were believers who left the Catholic Church — not out of any rejection of Rome, but as a matter of solidarity, saying, 'We would rather be ill-treated alongside these righteous Protestants than be spared because our denomination happens to be powerful.'

"That single court decision galvanized the body of believers as a thousand sermons could never have done. Before then, there had been talk of an emerging post-denominational Christianity; now, people finally realized that they had bigger things to worry about than labels. It was as if two estranged brother generals forgot their dispute in the face of a battle. The Church was driven mostly underground, yes — it had been underground at its beginning, and it will be underground again, no doubt. And people are tortured when they protest abortion, infanticide, or euthanasia — the Constitution prohibits cruel and unusual punishment, but the courts have ruled that 'nondestructive incentives to reform' are not punishment. It is still virtually illegal to witness about your faith — the argument classes it as harassment, and a freedom of religion defense brings a dilemma with it. If you invoke your religion as a defense, the question is which religion, and if you specify whichever area of Christianity you are from, you are slapped with massive penalties for participation in a corporate entity which falls under RICO. All of this is true and more, and the church is healthier than ever before.

"Taberah, in martial arts, I remember hearing something about you and joint locks, but I don't remember what. A joint lock is when someone twists one of your joints so that you will be pain unless you move in a certain way. This enables a martial artist to take your wrist and bring you down to the ground. What the Supreme Court learned in the ensuing

years was that joint locks would no longer work against Christians. You could still figuratively twist a Christian's wrist — break it if you pressed hard enough — but she wouldn't go down to the ground unless you did so much damage to her that she was incapable of standing. And it is bad publicity if nothing else to do that much damage to unresisting people again and again — so things have evolved to an unofficial 'Don't ask, don't tell.'

"Abortion is still of course legal, but now there are a lot of Christian women who can pick up on when another woman is pregnant, sometimes even before she knows it — and tell her, 'You don't have to have an abortion,' and then talk about alternatives. The abortion industry thinks we're worse than termites — individually not a problem, collectively a major problem, and too many to go hunting for — and there's not that much they can do. Yes, they have advertising; yes, they control the literature that goes with pregnancy tests; yes, they do a number of abortions — but we're able to make a sizeable dent. And the legality of killing is something that's hurting the court politically.

"There's a saying, 'Satan meant it for evil, but God turned it to good,' and the final break in dark power is that we are not angry at the court. We pray for them every night, submit to them in what we can, and go about our lives — for God, not against the court. The court, with the worst of intentions, has created the conditions in America for Christians to deal effectively with problems that we would never have begun to treat.

"Have I answered your question, Taberah?"

Taberah thought, and said, "You have answered it and more. I would like to talk with you more some time, to better understand your form of government. You miss the Baptists, don't you?"

Deep Waters

Taberah closed his eyes for a while and said, "Nathella, you said there was a story behind your Dad wanting to make a pond. What was the story?"

Nathella said, "When I was little, I had a fantasy, an image — of being surrounded by a gathering of many warm people, of a place where I belonged. One of my brothers, when he was little, imagined exploring a mansion, and had a very vivid image of a doorway opening, light spilling out from behind. My father had a dream like this, too. He envisioned a deep pool of water, a pool he could swim in and dive deep and meet mermaids. He liked to reminisce, and he talked about that dream from time to time. He had a better memory than most.

"One of the things that happens when you get older is that you get practical, and one of the things I accepted after a blunt remark from a young man is that 'practical' is not about getting things done; it's about letting dreams die. It means settling for less — being happy, to be sure, but... I have come to accept my age, but I know I lost something when I gave up the bright energy of being young.

"One of my father's friends asked him, 'Why not make your dream a reality? You may be too old to swim into a pool and meet mermaids, but there are children around town who are not. They don't have a place to swim. To be sure, you'd have to put a fence around it and require parents to be around, buy one of those floating rings, but why not? Why not make a place where children can dive and meet mermaids?' He told me that a

spark lit in my father's eyes — my father said, 'I've got some stumps to blast, and I've got a field I don't use any more. I can make a pond as well.' That friend felt very guilty when he found out what happened, but when I look back — I think my father died well. It left on me an impression, and I've managed to keep a little more of my young openness to dreams than I might have otherwise.

"And I'm glad to have met you. You help me dream, as well. You're Heavenly minded enough to be of earthly good — you've already changed my life for the better."

Taberah said nothing. He felt at the same time honored and slightly uncomfortable — why was she putting him on a pedestal? Taberah now dreamed mostly of Heaven, and he was sure he would receive it. Why — Taberah thought, and he could not think of any appropriate questions to ask. He let the matter rest.

TMC Metagame Competition

Taberah went down to the computer room, looking for something to do. He found a cool portal, and spent half the day fascinated by looking at different layerings of the human body. He particularly liked looking at a forearm end-on, with only the skeletal and nervous systems visible. It was fun, but something in his mind was still itching.

Then he heard a herald announce:

TMC. TMC is short for TMC Metagame Competition. The objective of this game is to devise the best new computer game; players' work will be judged according to their popularity in testing votes. Points are awarded for originality, quality of game concept, quality of artwork, and another category specified by game designer. Past winners may be seen at...

This had Taberah's undivided attention. He went, sat down, and spent three hours' total playing different winners, and then, after going through the next day's classes (now less interesting to him, although he tried to concentrate), began to think in the morning.

They want something original. This culture values novelty over repetition; what can I give that is truly original?

Taberah remembered his time as a court jester, in which his role was to stand on his head, both literally and figuratively — exalt the abased or pull down the exalted. Pleasure filled his mind, as if he were meeting an

old friend. *All games that I am aware of are competitive; one wins by defeating others or possibly by gaining a high score in surmounting an obstacle. What of a game in which there is no defeating others and in which the player is not constrained by any predefined goal?*

Taberah left the computer room and began pacing in the forest. He could say those words, but what did they mean? Trying to describe a game without a conflict seemed like trying to describe a statue without a shape.

There are a great many ideas that might as well be original because of how hard people have worked to forget them. What is the one idea that is now escaping my attention, the one thing that was the air I breathed in the Middle Ages but which people do not understand now? I can't think of it — what is the one symbol of — symbol! — these people live in a world of symbols, but not as I do. It is a world of meager, half-dead symbols that do not have the courage to be. For them nature, the world is stripped of symbolic lore. A lion is not a reminder of courage — or maybe it is the one surviving exception. They see just a yellow mass, a predator — it is like seeing shape without color.

How can I make symbolic meanings visible to them? How can I make a text speak to people who are illiterate? What if they could look at the green in a pane of a stained glass window and — they can. I can make an annotated virtual world — a cathedral and forest, full of plants and animals — in which, when the objects are touched, a voice tells what they mean.

Aed has shown me enough that I can begin working on this now.

Results

The days passed quickly; Taberah spent every spare moment working on his creation. He enjoyed the classes, but he rushed out quickly to be back in the joy of creation. It had been so long before he created something.

He finished just before deadline, and met with mixed results. His creation fascinated any number of people, was very popular — and was disqualified as not meeting the criteria as a game. The metagame judges wanted something original, but interpreted in such a way as to mean something original in the creation of what you have to defeat. Taberah cried; he was hurt by the judgment, and he felt depressed not to have anything else to be working on. Yes, there were classes, and he particularly enjoyed the cartoon that said, "Tolerate this!" and showed a picture of a cross. The teacher went on to explain that liberality and tolerance did not just mean liberality and tolerance of liberal minorities, but tolerance of Christianity. This produced a heated discussion, and Taberah loved it.

The end of semester rolled around. Taberah had passed the cartoon course, aced the other humanities course, and failed the science course. He was not nearly as saddened by that grade as by the leaving of most of the students, particularly the Phoenix Society. The Kinsella's home was desolately quiet — or at least, it was desolately quiet until Taberah received a call telling him that he was the first person to receive two Turing Awards.

Then the household was busy with preparation.

Gadfly

Taberah walked up slowly, hesitantly, to the microphone. He looked unsure of himself, but there was still a deep confidence in his walk.

He looked at the microphone for a second, and then out at members of the audience, one at a time. It was a minute of silence, and in his eyes a penetrating gaze grew.

"It was a year ago this day," he said, "that I accepted this award, and I accepted it only because it was politic. I did not and do not think that what I did then merited an award of this magnitude. All I did was look at the problem a bit differently, think a little, and see a way to cheat on the Turing test. This is not a very big deal; it was just an accident. Yes, I know that most scientific discoveries are made by accident, but this does not make an accident a scientific discovery. But this time is different. This time, I am happy to accept the Turing Award.

"This time is different. Earlier, I had merely managed to capture the accidental features of intelligence. Now, God has given me the grace to capture some of its substance, and I stand in awe. It is as if, before, I had received an award for making a statue that looked like something alive, and now, I have succeeded in making something that is vaguely alive. The difference is fundamental, and I wish to ask what lessons we have learned in the discovery.

"The first lesson I can see is that abstract thought is easier than concrete thought. Or, to put things differently, that our minds are so

wonderfully made that many of us can handle concrete thought even more easily than abstract thought. (Maybe the first lesson should be that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.)" A chuckle moved through the audience. "There is much more to thought, and rationality, than is easily captured, and I've only scratched the surface of it. It took me a long time to understand that computers are logical and can do math as no human ever will — excuse me, do arithmetic as no human ever will — and yet that they could not think. Notwithstanding Dijkstra's dictum that the question of whether computers can think is like the question of whether submarines can swim, computers could not think. If I have managed to make a computer think, I have managed only the barest prototype of what could be done — like those cave paintings that we can barely recognize as art, I have just stumbled on how the basic principle works.

"Or, at least, part of the basic principle. All I've discovered how to program is how to think abstractly; I still have no idea of how to tell a computer how to deal with sense input. Nobody knows how to make an artificial dog; making the robotics for a body would be easy, and making an internal chemical laboratory capable of taking in food and water and producing slobber, sweat, and the like is arguably possible, but we have no idea of how to do the intelligence. All of the abstraction in the world can't tell our robot dog how to run through a field of children without getting clobbered. We have captured one of the features of human intelligence; there are a number of features of even animal intelligence that we lack. There are other features of unintelligent life that we have yet to touch, as well. Nobody knows how to make machines that heal after they sustain damage."

"The last lesson I wish to mention concerns accident and substance, and..." Taberah closed his eyes, and said, "Mr. Chairman, I stayed up all night thinking of what to say, and manners in the country I come from are a bit less polished. I really can't think of a polite way to say it, but I really think the discipline of artificial intelligence has been running with an albatross around its neck, and my success is in large part because I somehow got on the racetrack without getting an albatross. Do I have your permission to make some polemic remarks that may sting?"

Dr. Bode said, "Mr. Kinsella, you have our full consent to say

whatever you think is best suited to the occasion."

Taberah said, "I know, but I am not much older than a child, and one of the things I've learned the hard way is that people sometimes say that when they don't really mean it. Is it really OK?"

The chairman's face held trepidation for a moment; he paused, and then said, "It's OK."

Taberah said, "Thank you. And I do really mean it.

"I will not begin to attempt a full philosophical analysis of accident and substance, any more than I would attempt a full mathematical analysis of logic within this speech, were I able, but I will say this. Accident is the outer appearance of an object, what the senses can receive. Substance is what it really is, its essence, if you will. Our discipline, in this area, is the self-made victim of an incredible legacy of bad philosophy, and has many fruitless endeavors which make as much sense to a philosopher as trying to bring a statue to life by painting it and making its features ever more lifelike. We have asked the question of, 'How can we create artificial intelligence?', but misinterpreted it to mean, 'How can we imitate the features of artificial intelligence that are most computer-like?' With all due respect to the brilliant man for which this award was named, I was shocked when I read Turing's explanation of what he thinks thought is. His interpretation of human thought is like interpreting a game of chess as moving little pieces around on a board. Some of what I have seen in this community reminds me of trying to kink a cable to stop the flow of data on a network, and then switching to fiber optic to make your thinking work. But what has happened is not that you make your thinking work; you only make it stop working. The main thing I would attribute this success to is that I came from another culture and missed this bad philosophy, and I believe that the artificial intelligence community will really begin to mine out my insight when they can really escape from this bad philosophy."

Taberah closed his eyes a moment, and said, "Mr. Chairman, may I take thirty seconds for a personal announcement, as well?"

The chairman sat for a moment and said "What you have said is a

The chairman sat for a moment and said, "What you have said is a difficult thing to hear, but others have said it before, or things similar. Perhaps we just haven't taken them seriously enough. Yes, you are welcome to say whatever else you want."

Taberah looked, gazed out at over a thousand heads in the audience. All eyes were on him. Slowly, distinctly, loudly, he said, "In this whole room, I doubt if there are more than two or three of you who can hear what else I have to say, but it is something significant. I would like if those two or three would come to my hotel room after the night's festivities so we can talk about it. Thank you, and have a good evening." He closed his eyes and walked hurriedly, almost as if embarrassed, back to his seat.

There was a hushed silence, with murmuring. When he got back to his table, after waiting a minute, one of the people from an adjacent table scooted over to him, and said, "May I join you tonight?" Then another, then another. People began to walk over to him. In minutes, Taberah was at the center of a noisy swarm of people.

Taberah turned to the woman nearest him, looked into her eyes, and asked, "Would you get the chairman for me?"

In a few more minutes, the chairman was next to him.

Taberah hesitated, and then said, "Dr. Bode, there seem to be more people interested in what I have to say than there is space in my room. Would you be so kind as to provide me with a room to speak in, where these people can comfortably be seated?"

The chairman gently laughed, and said, "Mr. Kinsella, why don't you speak here? The whole room is interested in what you have to say."

Taberah picked up his glass, took a long gulp, and said, "Let me take a restroom break first. And would you announce to people that anyone not interested in my tangent shouldn't feel obligated to stay. It'll be a tad long."

When Taberah returned, not a single soul had left. The room was dead silent.

DEAD SILENT.

"The discipline of artificial intelligence is about how to impart rationality to computers. This is a question about computers, but it is at least as much a question about rationality. In our endeavor to make computers rational, we have paid scant attention on how to be rational ourselves. I am not saying that we should be Spocks, embodying logic without emotion. A prejudice against emotion, and a belief that rationality and emotion are antithetical, is (thank God) crumbling, but old fallacies die hard. I embrace emotion as much as I embrace being physical and enjoying music and good wine, but I do not wish to deal further with emotion now. What do I wish to deal with?"

"Dick Feynman, in his memoirs *You Must Be Joking, Mr. Feynman*, included a classic speech on cargo cult science. He spoke of aboriginal people who, in World War II, had Allied food and other supplies accidentally airdropped to them, and produce a mockup of an airstrip, designed more and more to look like a real airstrip — but, however much they worked, planes never landed. Never mind that this is very crude anthropology; there is a fundamental insight there about something that looks very much like an airstrip but just doesn't work. And it provides a key to explain something very disagreeable.

"When I came here, I was shocked at what I saw in intellectual life. It is like the shock that might come to a scientist the first time he goes to a creation science institute and discovers exactly what 'science' means in that context. Pseudo-science can incorporate a lot of material from science, and still not be science. What shocked me when I came here was that I looked for reason and found pseudo-reason."

Taberah said, "A full brain dump of what I have seen would take far too long to deliver in a speech, but I wish to give a sampling in three areas: an instance of bad reasoning I see, an instance of a bad way of thinking I see, and an instance of a possible partial remedy.

"The example of bad reasoning I see is in the area of overpopulation. The general, un-questioned belief is that our world's population is growing exponentially, much faster in the poorer areas of the world, and doomsday will come if we don't curb this population explosion. Speaking

as a philosopher, I ask, 'Why?'

"The answer that is given is that people in the third world have large families to support themselves. And that's enough of an explanation to be accepted by someone gullible, but it does not stand up to examination.

"If the world's population is growing exponentially, then it has either always been growing exponentially, or it started growing exponentially at some point. If it has always been growing exponentially, then, as certainly as the future holds doomsday population levels, the past holds dwindling population figures. As surely as the future explodes, the past implodes. This would mean that prior to, say, 1700, all non-European continents would be virtually uninhabited. If the third world population is doubling every, say, ten years, then the population of the third world in the year 1700 would be less than ten. This is ridiculous. All accounts I know say that the poorer areas of the world have been inhabited with at least moderate density for quite some time — thousands of years easily. This leaves us with the other option, namely that the population of the third world has been basically stable and has recently begun exponential growth. To this possibility I ask the question: why on earth? The cultures of these people haven't changed at any rapid pace (and if they did, I would still be puzzled as to why *all* of them changed, instead of a handful — a rapid change of unrelated cultures is about as unusual as the formation of a herd of cats); it is true that most of them cherish children and value big families, but that's been a part of most cultures since long before whenever this population explosion was supposed to have begun. The introduction of new technology to lengthen life and childbearing years? That would certainly account for a population explosion in the *wealthy* nations, but the average African tribesman has never heard of a Western doctor, let alone received enough medical care to possibly increase the number of children he leaves behind.

"Literature describing a population explosion if the third world birth rate is not curbed has been around for several decades; it used to specify a date for when, for instance, people would all be standing because there would not be enough room for anyone to sit down; those dates are long gone, had passed well before the turn of the millennium, and now there are no more predictions for when doomsday will be — merely that it is

always 'soon'. There are pieces of evidence garnered to support this — for example, the great poverty by our standards of third world nations; never mind that this is how all nations lived before one civilization happened to stumble on Midas's secret — but it doesn't stand up to rational examination. And there are many claims like this that free thinkers never question, because to question them is to question rationality or to question reality.

"That is one example among many of non-think; I do not presently wish to give others, nor even to ask who or why would perpetuate such a massive and propagandistic illusion. I am trying to keep this talk short. So I would like to move on to my next example, of an instance not simply of an irrational belief, but of a macroscopic way of thinking that is bad. In this area also, I have a number of choices; I choose to elaborate on the discipline of economics."

Several faces in the crowd could be seen to wince.

"The discipline of economics has had tremendous success at providing the right answer to the wrong question. The question which it answers is, 'How can a culture be manipulated to maximize the economic wealth that it produces?' The question which it ought to answer is, 'How can an economy be guided so as to best support the life of a culture?'

"I spoke with an economist about this; he said several things. The first thing he said is that economics takes people's wants to be constant, i.e. that it doesn't try to reshape people's economic desires. But this is nonsense; the whole enterprise of advertising and marketing is designed to manipulate people into buying and spending far more than even natural greed would have them do. People work overtime and go into debt to have things they don't need and wouldn't want enough to buy if there weren't ads pressuring them into it. As to the others — there is a naive assumption that the starting point is a consumer who is both selfish and rational. Both have an element of truth, but even the vilest of men is not completely selfish. There is a motivation to do something beyond meeting animal needs that is not gone even in Hitler. Hitler went to incredible lengths to exterminate Jews; such dedication would be called heroic if it were engaged in a noble cause. It was perverse beyond

measure, but it was not selfish. Not by a long shot. And as to rational — anyone who looks at a marketing text, or for that matter pays attention to a few ads — will see that the means of increasing market share has nothing to do with rational appeal. The real questions that economics could address — the meaning of wealth, the right amount of wealth (not the greatest) for people to live with — are brushed aside in the relentless pursuit of more, more, more, more.

"On points like this I could go on — the death of philosophy, the curse of Babel upon academic disciplines so that, for instance, the work of any one mathematician is incomprehensible to the vast majority of his colleagues — but I do not wish to do so here. Instead I wish to turn, on a positive note, to how you can think in a better way.

"Larry Wall's classic *Programming Perl* described the three programmer's virtues: hubris, laziness, and impatience. His points with all three are in one sense tongue in cheek, but in another sense much deeper. The virtue he calls 'laziness' is another facet of the intellectual rigor that takes the one stitch that will in time save nine. It is called 'laziness' because applying that rigor will have the effect of taking less work overall; indeed it is a principle of software engineering that doing something well is easier than doing it sloppily. I wish to focus on that intellectual rigor.

"When you are thinking — be it listening to this speech, or trying to get technology to work, or figuring out why someone is mad at you — *don't slouch*. When you feel a faint intuition in the back of your mind that something is wrong, don't ignore it. Pay attention to it. Try to understand it. Analyze it. Analysis is one tool among a thousand, and you need to be able to let go of it before you can come to the insight Zen offers — that much is clear to me from reading about it, even though I haven't the foggiest idea whether a Zen master would consider me enlightened or not. You need to also be able to relax, to be able to slide into things, to groove (if I may use an archaic term) — but different things at different times. And a certain kind of intellectual rigor applies across disciplines, in sciences, in humanities, in humanities that think they're sciences. It applies outside of academia to life.

"I have thought a lot about the three areas these insights are taken from, and written them down in a sort of book. It will be available on my home room at midnight; those parties who are interested and not offended, whom I guess are few, are welcome to read it there. Beyond that, I thank you all for coming, and if my speech has succeeded, you all need time to think as much as I need time to sleep. Thank you, and have a good night."

Taberah slipped out the back door, scurried off to the hotel room, locked the door, and used both noise cancelling ear phones and ear plugs (noise rating 35); Aed had to get the hotel to open the room to pick up a cellular computer he'd left in there, and bring along security guards to see that he was the only person to go in. The traffic on Taberah's book was enough to take down a zuni server, but the Kinsellas' ISP had mirrors up in an hour. The next day, as the Kinsellas stepped into the plane to fly back, Aed said, "Taberah, I hope you're ready to be a celebrity. I've spoken with the chairman of the Turing society, and he says he can ensure us a week of peace and quiet with his clout. Beyond that, be ready for a lot of visitors."

Taberah smiled and said, "I'm not worried about it."

Sojourn

Ding-dong!

Aed came to the door, and stifled a wince. This wasn't a week's peace! He saw a short teen-ager in an outlandish role-playing costume: a long, loose, dark robe fell about him, hooded shadows covering his face, and fractal-decorated gloves covered the skin on his arms. "Mister, may I use your bathroom?" he said, his voice cracking, and then shrunk back.

Aed breathed a sigh of relief, and said, "Sure. Come this way." He led him to the bathroom, surprised at a smell of — what? something chemical; he couldn't decide. As the door shut, Aed decided to stay; the kid might get lost, and perhaps something else in his house might get lost. It was a few minutes, and then, coming out, the kid reached around the side of his head and pulled off his hood to reveal a shaven head that looked older than he had seemed at first glance. "So," the teenager? said, his voice again cracking, "d'ja recognize me?"

Aed blinked, and did a double take. It was Taberah. No beard, no hair on his head, not even eyebrows. He looked unfamiliar, just a very short teenager whose eyes twinkled.

"I've decided to do some travelling incognito. Listen, I'm really sorry about all the publicity you'll deal with; I hadn't known how your culture works. No, that's not right; I'd guessed about publicity, but I hadn't cared. Anyways, I have learned a lot about travel and adapting back in the middle ages, and disguise came quickly — I learned a lot at Halloween

time. Um..." his voice trailed off, and then added, "You'll eventually have less attention if I disappear."

"Don't feel guilty about the journalists," Aed said. "Their presence is a side effect of making certain kinds of achievements. But Taberah, you will always be welcome here. You don't have to go."

"I know, but I need to go — for me as well as for you. It's been great here, and I hope to come back — but who knows what tomorrow will bring? I am a wayfarer, and I am not ready to settle down in one place for good."

"You're sure? You're taking an awful big step — can I at least provide you with resources? I've got a fair amount invested, and it's an awfully big world out there."

"No. I can't describe it, it's just — I have a feeling I'll be back, but I need to travel. To think. To work."

"What do you call your creation of artificial intelligence?"

"Aed, do we have to argue?" Aed noticed that there were tears forming in the child's eyes.

"You're making it hard enough for him as it is, honey. Let him go," came Nathella's voice.

Nathella walked over to Taberah, held him in her arms, and kissed him on the lips. "I'll miss you — Taberah, what does your name mean?"

"Burning."

"Similar to my husband's name. I'll miss you, flame. I'll pray for you every day." Then she continued to hold him in silence.

"Where will you be?" Aed said. He walked over and picked Taberah up, holding him. Taberah kissed him, too, on the lips. "I think it would better as regards the media for you not to know," Taberah said. He lingered for a moment, and then disappeared out the side door.

A Mugging

Taberah walked out. It was good to be under the sky again, with a bent arm for a pillow. It felt honest. Or did it? In the year's time, Taberah realized he had grown more accustomed to luxury than he thought. There was something nagging at the back of his mind — what? This culture was lacking in rationality, but he had to have more than rationality to give. Academic silliness was a symptom, not the problem. But what was it? He went into a store and purchased a pen and notepad; he needed time to write. He wandered about aimlessly, walking the city streets.

Taberah was snapped out of his thoughts at a sudden, jerky motion. A young man had drawn a knife; he said, "Give me your money. Now. And no quick motions — you draw something, you're dead."

Taberah slowly reached into his pockets. "I don't have much money; only fifty bucks, plus a few coins. I know what I can give you. I have a nice, thick Swiss Army knife that my mentor gave me. It's quite useful. Would you like that?" He had fished out a fifty dollar bill, plus four quarters, one dime, and a nickel.

"Drop it on the ground," the robber said.

"Certainly. Why are you afraid?" Taberah asked, dropping his pocketknife on the ground.

"I'm not afraid," the robber said, and saw that his lie would not be believed. It could not. Taberah was relaxed; he carried a peace about him,

and there was something about him over which the knife held no power.

"Why are you afraid?" Taberah repeated. "I'm not going to hurt you."

"Why aren't you afraid?" the robber said. "I could kill you right where you stand."

"That is the worst you could do. Then I would be with my friends in Heaven. And there are some saints whom I'd be really happy to see."

"You wouldn't even try to defend yourself?" the robber said, puzzled.

"I love to spar. I —"

"Then defend yourself against this!" The robber swung his knife to slash Taberah across the face. Taberah seemed suddenly distant; the knife flew through the air, and then the robber felt a fist between his eyes — he would be reeling. Then he felt a sledgehammer blow to his stomach, far more powerful than he would have imagined such a scrawny body capable of delivering
struggled to regain his balance
fell
realized he was in a full Nelson
felt himself retching
felt himself pulled back, so that the vomit didn't touch him.

Taberah released his arms, and then pulled back, crouched. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. I have learned that violence does not accomplish much, but my hands are not in on the knowing. I should not have pretended that I was sparring with my weapons master. I should—"

The robber cursed him out, and said, "Who are you, and where are you from?"

Taberah was very still for a moment, and said, "My name is Taberah. It means 'burning' in Hebrew."

"Are you a Jew?"

"I am a Catholic. That comes from Judaism."

...and a caution. That comes from a caution.

"So where are you from?"

Taberah paused, and then, against his better judgment, said, "I can give you a short answer that won't tell you anything, or I can give you the real answer, which I won't blame you if you find impossible to believe."

"Give me the real answer."

"I'm from the Middle Ages, Provence in Southern France. I've traveled a bit. An angel took me to this place. I —"

The robber said, "Ok; you don't have to tell me if you don't want to." Taberah did not argue; instead, he asked, "What is your name?"

The robber shook, and then began to cry, trying to conceal it. "You really care about me, don't you?"

Taberah said, "Look at me."

The man brushed his arm across his face and looked at him, startled. Taberah's eyes were glistening, too. He said, "It looks as if you've never had anyone who cared about you. I care about you."

The man wiped his mouth, spat, and then sat up, uncertain whether to glare or to quiver. Finally, he said, "My name is Elika. Don't know what it means. Don't have nobody to care about me. Don't understand you."

Taberah said, "Do you want to understand me?"

Elika said, "Maybe. No. Yes. Why? Are you going to talk about Middle Ages stuff?"

Taberah said, "I don't want to talk about the Middle Ages now. Maybe later, if you're interested. Are you confused about why I care about you? Would you like me to explain that?"

Elika said, "How did you know that?"

Taberah did not answer the question. He said, "Let me ask you

Taberah did not answer the question. He said, "Let me ask you another question. What do you think religion is about?"

Elika said, "Religion? That's not for me. It's about rules and feeling guilty and memorizing the Bible. It's impossible; it doesn't work for someone like me who has a tough life."

Taberah said, "Would you like to know what religion is for me?"

"Something you're good at?"

"Um, I don't know if I'm good at it, but it's something important to me, and something very different than what you have said. It's not about rules, or feeling guilty, or memorizing the Bible."

"Then what is it about?"

"One thing: love. God loves you. He loves me. We should love God and other people. Everything else is just details. It's about love; that's why I care about you."

"Look, I don't know why you are telling this to me; maybe it's something you can do, but I can't. Here's your money and your knife; I need to go."

Taberah said, "I gave you the money and the knife; they aren't mine any more. They're yours. But if you want to give me something — \$50 is enough to buy some bread, some meat, and a bottle of cider. I'm hungry, and you just threw up. Maybe we could meet and talk — or not. You are free to leave, but I'd like to get to know you better."

This time, Elika made no attempt to conceal his tears, and Taberah softly asked, "May I give you a hug?" It had been ages since anybody had touched Elika, and he listened with interest as Taberah shared what was on his heart. "Why do you dare to keep company with me?" Elika asked. "My Master," Taberah answered, "kept company with all kinds of people, from the most respected to the least. His heart has room for me, for you. I want you to share in his joy."

They ate in a park and talked long into the night

they sit in a park, and talked long into the night.

Kindred

Night had slowly fallen; Taberah and Elika walked past a dark valley, from which a voice said, "I see your dress. Are you one of us? Are you one of the Kindred?"

Taberah gazed, letting his eyes grow accustomed to the darkness. "Who are you? Who are the Kindred?"

The voice answered back, "You already know that. Where were you born? And when?"

"I was born in Provence, in the Middle Ages."

"Welcome, Ancient One. Step closer."

Taberah had an intuition that he couldn't place. In his mind, he raised his guard, but this was too interesting to pass by. "Come with us."

Elika said, "Don't worry; they're just role playing."

The voice said, "One is never 'just' role playing. Role play is never 'just.'"

The intuition in Taberah's mind clarified, solidifying. He was beginning to see that role play meant something different than it had with Fiona and Clancy.

They melted into the shadows, and emerged in a candlelit room. In

the center lie a pile of wooden swords, staves, daggers, shields. The voice again said, "It is our custom that Kindred brought into our Clan must fight until all the other members have defeated them. Only then can you Enter. Choose your weapon carefully."

Taberah looked at the pile, picked up a halberd, hefted it. "And if I am not defeated? What happens then?"

"Then you are the new head of the Clan."

Taberah looked, and words began to flow through him, coming partly of his own volition, partly of something else. His senses were more acute; the world seemed to slow down. He said, "Darkness is powerful. Light is more powerful. As a sign to you, I choose to fight you armed only with this."

Taberah stood back, drew himself to a majestic height, and made on his heart the sign of the cross.

Kindred

There was stunned disbelief in the atmosphere. One of the Kindred slowly stepped forward, hefted a quarterstaff, and swung at Taberah.

Taberah dodged; he swung again, and this time Taberah caught the staff and twisted it so that the Kinsman fell on his back.

Taberah used the staff to create around him an area of space; another person raised a two-handed sword, bringing it down. It broke the staff in two — as had been the Kinsman's intent — and Taberah's.

Taberah was now holding twin longswords.

From the outside, it looked as if a thousand things were going on; from the inside, Taberah was only aware of one thing. He kept dancing until he had struck all but one of the Kindred — all but one. They were locked in a dance, the Kinsman skillful and masterful, possessing far greater power than he appeared to have, Taberah moving in a way that was cunning, alien, brilliant. Erika looked on intently; this was the most magnificent fight he had seen.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, the Kinsman threw down his sword, and opened his arms. Taberah followed suit, and the Kinsman reached out to grab Taberah's testicles.

Taberah, with equal swiftness, struck him on the side of the neck, knocking him out.

Taberah turned around slowly, looking, and once again made the sign of the cross.

One of the Kindred looked at him, and said, "Who are you?"

Taberah said, "I am your new leader, and I have many things to tell you. I wish to tell you about a kind of role play beyond your wildest imaginings, a role play that will give you what you search for in vain in calling yourselves the Kindred. Kindred we will be, bound much more tightly than ever a game designer imagined."

"And what is that, that will bind us?"

"It is a dirty word among your circles. Love."

There was murmuring, and a voice said, "Love is very nice for some people, but we need something more real. Something that knows pain. Something that knows angst."

"The love that I know was tortured to death."

"What is this love of which you speak?"

Taberah thought of a short answer, and then said, "That is not a little question, and it deserves more than a little answer. We are tired and bruised; let us, each of us, get a good night's sleep, and then I will give you an answer."

Discovered

The following night, Taberah spoke long, telling a tale that stretched from Eden to the New Jerusalem. The Kindred were spellbound; none of them could begin to imagine that anything so exciting and dynamic could be the ill-spoken Christian faith. He wrapped up by saying, "It means being loved by God, and loving God by four pillars: loving God with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your mind, and all of your might." None of them were, as yet, convinced, but Taberah had their attention.

Taberah stood, teaching in the parks, day and night, and gradually some of the role players came to believe in what he said, and that he had a message worth spreading. Sometimes more than role players stopped by. One of the Kindred raised his hand and said, "Taberah, why don't we make a medieval role play circus to draw people in?"

Taberah thought, and scratched his head, and thought some more. He said, "I would like to draw a distinction between 'medieval from the neck up' and 'medieval from the neck down'. 'Medieval from the neck down' is everything a circus can provide: costumes and castles, swordplay and feasting. Role play notwithstanding, that is gone, and it is not the treasure I wish to restore. I wish to restore what is 'medieval from the neck up' — faith, hope, and love. Maybe there are some people who could be drawn into what is 'medieval from the neck up' after first contacting what is 'medieval from the neck down', but I do not wish to present a false lure."

"You lured us in from role play."

"You're right, except that then I was trying to follow God where I was. I don't feel the same rightness about putting on a show."

The discussion continued until Taberah noticed that a young woman was staring at him; her jaw had dropped. He looked at her and said, "What is it, sister?"

"I know you. I recognized you by the sound of your voice. You're the man who won two Turing Awards."

Adjustments

Taberah's Corner 9/1/2035:
Turning Back the Clock

Upon advocating that we reclaim certain things from the Middle Ages, I am invariably met with the question, "Do you think you can turn back the clock?", and it is a question I should like to address now."

There is a belief behind that question; that belief runs roughly as follows: time runs on an irreversible slope, and with that irreversible slope comes a necessary progression of ages that march forward. This belief appears to be only its obvious first part, that time is irreversible, but it is understood to mean the second part: an equally irreversible march of ages. These are almost so equated that asking, "Can we be medieval now?" is equivalent to asking, "Can we set back the physical clock to 1300?" — but the two are not at all the same.

There is a distinction I have made between being medieval above the neck, and medieval below the neck. Medieval below the neck is all of those popular images that are conjured by the term 'medieval' — knights in shining armor, castles, and the like. Medieval above the neck is not concerned with technology; it is concerned with thinking and living in light of the insights of the Middle Ages. Re-enactors spend short time living lives that are at least medieval below the neck, but I don't think that is a particularly important goal. What I do think is important is what I hinted at with my Turing award speech; it concerns rationality, for one thing. I know I'm fighting an uphill battle against stereotypes here; there has been a massive smear campaign, so that 'medieval' connotes obscurantist silliness and 'postmodern' connotes reasonability, but it isn't so. Medieval above the neck has never been obsolete, and never will be — because

it can't be obsolete, any more than good food can become obsolete.

As to what exactly this will mean — I will write about different things at different times. I have some things to say about judging by appearances versus judging rightly — but that will come in its due time.

Thank you for reading thus far; I hope you will continue reading.

The young woman's recognition of Taberah brought with it powerful changes; Taberah was for the first time of his life busy, and for the first time of his life had to escape from other people for the restoration of his soul. When he appeared, people asked autographs, and he soon learned to enter and leave restaurants through the kitchen. He had a voice to be heard, but he missed being able to walk through the streets and in the woods with Lydia. There were so many things about Taberah that people couldn't understand — such as why he would sometimes rather sleep in a gutter than in a waterbed. Perhaps he could learn to use cosmetics to alter his appearance — but when would he learn how to do that? He saw his fame as a responsibility, but it was more of a burden than a privilege.

He wrote and communicated all of the things that he had discussed with his friends — and re-iterated that he did not want a circus to be put up. He had influence, but it was an impersonal influence with people he mostly didn't know. And so Taberah prayed earnestly that the burden would be lifted.

Reckoning

Taberah's Corner 10/1/2035:
Reckoning

There is a Bible story where God calls Samuel and tells him to find the future king among some brothers. Each time one comes out, Samuel is impressed and says, "Surely this is the one who is to be king!" God tells him, in essence, "I do not judge as you do. I do not judge by outer appearances." It is the last brother who is picked to be king.

I entertain doubts about holding a column at all; I suspect that most readers are reading this column because I have won two Turing Awards. If you are, I would ask you to stop; the Turing Awards merely indicate that I had some success with computers, and do not make me particularly qualified to advise society. If you are reading this column because you think I have good things to say, then go on reading it; if you are only reading it because of the weight of my awards, I would rather you were reading something else, something else that you chose because it is worth reading.

You people are greatly concerned about success. There was someone who said, "I had climbed to the top of the corporate ladder, only to find that the ladder was leaning against the wrong building." I would like to suggest that your understanding of success is like your judgment by appearances. There is something good about being famous as having won two Turing Awards; that something good is that you learn that, whatever success is, that isn't it. Success is being drawn into the heart of God, and it comes more easily when you are about to be deported by the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization Services than when everybody and his brother wants you to be his honored guest. Success might come in many ways. It might be service of children — and how few adults are willing to play

with children? It might be keeping house. It might be running a volunteer shelter. It might be being a judge who has the guts to defend Christianity when it is attacked or challenge Islam when it is hurting our society. It might be any number of things. Perhaps it might even include being a celebrity and using your favor to share truth with others who might not have heard it — but it is not defined by having an award attached to your name.

How can you be successful — not at some date in the future, but right now?

On October 2 2035, 3:05 PM, God heard Taberah's prayer. An Islamist assassin, armed with a high-powered hunting rifle, shot at Taberah and hit him twice — once in the right shoulder, and once in the abdomen. Taberah was in surgery for sixteen hours, and spent the next week drugged out. The doctor gave very firm orders that only close friends approved by both her and Aed were to see Taberah — even then, Taberah always had a visitor when he wanted one.

In Taberah's medically enforced absence, the movement he started became independent of him. They were no longer intellectually dependent on him: Taberah was no longer a head, merely the first person to have known something. There were medieval fairs, showing people what was medieval above and below the neck. When, three months later, Taberah left the hospital, he was simply a member.

On March 6, 2036, Taberah was lying in bed, when the Angel of the Lord came to him in a vision, and said, "You have done well, Taberah; you have done what you were sent for. Which would you like: to return to medieval Provence, or to spend the rest of your life here?"

Taberah cried, and said, "I have waited, and waited, and waited, and waited. Can't I go *home*? To my *real* home?"

His funeral was filled with mirth.

Epilogue

Yes, Eleta, I think you're right, and I think the manuscript will have to stand as it is, but I am still not happy with it. Perhaps no author is ever satisfied with his work, but I am not happy with it. You understand why I presented the events as fiction — the idea is not without merits. Still, a critic could poke any number of holes in it. Someone who regarded it as fiction would no doubt note that good storytelling and good plot are rarely found together, that forty percent of the plot is glossed over in two short chapters, et cetera. I'm not sure that Taberah would share in all those criticisms — he regarded those long days of conversation with the Kinsellas as the best time of his life, and his influential and turbulent time in the limelight as almost an afterthought in which he repeated impersonally what he had shared personally. At any rate, he would have found his message more important than telling a good story — and he took storytelling seriously. Someone who knew this was not fiction and knew the parties involved would have much more serious criticisms to level. I have captured almost nothing of Taberah's sense of humor — cunning, bawdy, subtle, clever, exquisite, and absurd. After hearing about some of the practical jokes he pulled — from now on, Monty Python will taste like flat beer. It pales in comparison. I also did badly in failing to more seriously address the place of Islam. The influence of Islam in shaping the culture, and why it is by nature coercive is something I just barely nicked — probably just enough to make the reader think I suffer from vulgar intolerance. You know better than that, of course; you know that I enjoyed living in a Muslim country, and that I greatly respect their emphasis on honor, friendship, and hospitality. And that it is my

considered judgment — as surely as that Christianity is invariably corrupted when it wields direct political power — that Islam in power is inherently coercive. The role of Islam was one among *many* important elements of the surrounding culture that I failed to capture. And medieval culture, for that matter. And Taberah's "200 ways to use a magnetic paper clip" — I just don't know what to say. It's both silly and serious, and it was one of the things to motivate me to wonder, "What kind of a mind would think of that?" And I have intentionally left out most of the miracles that occurred — not that there were many, but I didn't want to present unnecessary strain on the reader's willing suspension of disbelief. There was plenty of necessary strain already.

The willing suspension of disbelief accompanying fiction is the real reason I chose to write it as fiction. It's not just that saying I know events three decades in the future would label me as a kook — that's understandable enough, and the real explanation was difficult for *me* to believe, even having experienced it. The real reason I recorded this story as fiction is that our time has this terrible stereotype of medievals as backwards, and conception of the past as inferior — and a science fiction/fantasy story is almost the only place where something labelled 'medieval' could be respected. What if I told you that an anti-Semitic campaign had taken the name of Einstein, and smeared Jewry by making his name a symbol of idiocy? The truth is that something equally anti-medieval has taken the name of John Duns Scotus, the medieval genius whom Catholics call the Subtle Doctor, and turned it into the term 'dunce'. That stereotype, and the preconception that we have nothing to learn from the medievals, is a force to be reckoned with, and I don't know how this manuscript will fare in its face.

Once one of Karl Barth's students asked him, "Do you believe there was a serpent in the Garden of Eden?" Barth replied, "The important thing is not 'Was there a serpent?' but 'What did the serpent say?'" In a similar insight, I have presented Taberah's story as fiction and tried to draw attention away from the question of "Was Taberah real?" and instead draw attention to the more fundamental question of "What did Taberah say?" — on which account he has much to tell us. After coming into contact with him, I have come to believe that we can be medievals, too.

What do you think?

-Jonathan

The Consolation of Theology

Song I.

The Author's Complaint.

The Gospel was new,
When one saint stopped his ears,
And said, '*Good God!*
That thou hast allowed me,
To live at such a time.'
Jihadists act not in aught of vacuum:
Atheislam welcometh captors;
Founded by the greatest Christian heresiarch,
Who tore Incarnation and icons away from all things Christian,
The dragon next to whom,
Arius, father of heretics,
Is but a fangless worm.
Their 'surrender' is practically furthest as could be,
From, '*God and the Son of God,*
Became Man and the Son of Man,
That men and the sons of men,
Might become Gods and the Sons of God,'
[By contrast, eviscerating the reality of man.](#)
The wonder of holy marriage,
Tortured and torn from limb to limb,
In progressive installments old and new,

Technology a secular occult is made,
Well I wrote a volume,
[The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#),
And in once-hallowed halls of learning,
Is taught a 'theology,'
Such as one would seek of Monty Python.
And of my own life; what of it?
A monk still I try to be;
Many things have I tried in life,
And betimes met spectacular success,
And betimes found doors slammed in my face.
Even in work in technology,
Though the time be an economic boom for the work,
Still the boom shut me out or knocked me out,
And not only in the Church's teaching,
In tale as ancient as Cain and Abel,
Of [The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab](#).
And why I must now accomplish so little,
To pale next to glorious days,
When a-fighting cancer,
I switched discipline to theology,
And first at Cambridge then at Fordham,
Wished to form priests,
But a wish that never came true?

I.

And ere I moped a man appeared, quite short of stature but looking great enough to touch a star. In ancient gold he was clad, yet the golden vestments of a Patriarch were infinitely eclipsed by his Golden Mouth, by a tongue of liquid, living gold. Emblazoned on his bosom were the Greek letters **Î§**, and **Î‘**. I crossed myself thrice, wary of devils, and he crossed himself thrice, and he looked at me with eyes aflame and said, ‘Child, hast thou not written, and then outside the bounds of Holy Orthodoxy, a koan?’:

A novice said to a master, ‘I am sick and tired of the immorality that is all around us. There is fornication everywhere, drunkenness and drugs in the inner city, relativism in people’s minds, and do you know where the worst of it is?’

The master said, ‘Inside your heart.’

He spoke again. ‘Child, repent of thine own multitude of grievous sins, not the sins of others. Knowest thou not the words, spoken by the great St. Isaac and taken up without the faintest interval by the great St. Seraphim, “Make peace with thyself and ten thousand around thee shall be saved?” Or that if everyone were to repent, Heaven would come to earth?’

‘Thou seemest on paper to live thy conviction that every human life is a life worth living, but lacking the true strength that is behind that position. Hast thou read my [Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself?](#) How the three children, my son, in a pagan court, with every lechery around them, were graced not to defile themselves in what they ate, but won the moral victory of not bowing to an idol beyond monstrous stature? And the angel bedewed them in external victory after they let all else go in *internal* and eternal triumph?’

‘It is possible at all times and every place to find salvation. Now thou

knowest that marriage or monasticism is needful; and out of that knowledge you went out to monasteries, to the grand monastery of Holy Cross Hermitage, to Mount Athos itself, and thou couldst not stay. What of it? Before God thou art *already* a monk. Keep on seeking monasticism, without end, and whether thou crossest the threshold of death a layman or a monk, if thou hast sought monasticism for the rest of thy days, and seekest such repentance as thou canst, who knows if thou mightest appear a monk in lifelong repentance when thou answerest before the Dread Judgement-Throne of Christ?

‘Perhaps it is that God has given thee such good things as were lawful for God to give but unlawful and immature for thou to seek for thyself. Thou hast acquired a scholar’s knowledge of academic theology, and a heresiologist’s formation, but thou writest for the common man. Canst not thou imagine that this may excel such narrow writing, read by so few, in the confines of scholarship? And that as thou hast been graced to walk the long narrow road of affliction, thou art free now to sit in thy parents’ splendid house, given a roof when thou art homeless before the law whilst thou seekest monasticism, and writest for as long as thou art able? That wert wrong and immature to seek, sitting under your parents’ roof and writing as much as it were wrong and immature to seek years’ training in academic theology and heresy and give not a day’s tribute to the professorial asceticism of pride and vainglory (thou hadst enough of thine own). Though this be not an issue of morality apart from asceticism, thou knewest the settled judgement that real publication is traditional publication and vanity press is what self-publication is. Yet without knowing, without choosing, without even guessing, thou wert again & time again in the right place, at the right time, amongst the manifold shifts of technology, and now, though thou profitest not in great measure from thy books, yet have ye written many more creative works than thou couldst bogging with editors. Thou knowest far better to say, “Wisdom is justified by her children,” of thyself in stead of saying such of God, but none the less thou hadst impact. Yet God hath granted thee the three, unsought and unwanted though thou mayest have found them.’

I stood in silence, all abashed.

Song II.

His Despondency.

The Saint spoke thus:
‘What then? How is this man,
A second rich young ruler become?
He who bore not a watch on principle,
Even before he’d scarce more than
Heard of Holy Orthodoxy,
Weareth a watch built to stand out,
Even among later Apple Watches.
He who declined a mobile phone,
Has carried out an iPhone,
And is displeased to accept,
A less fancy phone,
From a state program to provide,
Cell phones to those at poverty.
Up! Out! This will not do,
Not that he hath lost an item of luxury,
But that when it happened, he were sad.
For the rich young ruler lied,
When said he that he had kept,
All commandments from his youth,
For unless he were an idolater,
The loss of possessions itself,
Could not suffice to make him sad.
This man hast lost a cellphone,
And for that alone he grieveth.
Knoweth he not that money maketh not one glad?
Would that he would recall,
The heights from which he hath fallen,
Even from outside the Orthodox Church.’

II.

Then the great Saint said, ‘But the time calls for something deeper than lamentation. Art thou not the man who sayedst that we cannot *achieve* the Holy Grail, nor even *find* it: for the only game in town is to *become* the Holy Grail? Not that the Orthodox Church tradeth in such idle romances as Arthurian legend; as late as the nineteenth century, Saint IGNATIUS (Brianchaninov) gaveth warnings against reading novels, which His Eminence KALLISTOS curiously gave embarrassed explanations. Today the warning should be greatly extended to technological entertainment. But I would call thy words to mind none the less, and bid thee to become the Holy Grail. And indeed, when thou thou receivest the Holy Mysteries, thou receivest Christ as thy Lord and Saviour, thou art transformed by the supreme medicine, as thou tastest of the Fount of Immortality?’

‘Thou wert surprised to learn, and that outside the Orthodox Church, that when the Apostle bade you to put on the whole armour of Christ, the armour of Christ wert not merely armour *owned* by Christ, or armour *given* by Christ: it were such armour as *God himself wears to war*: the prophet Isaiah tells us that the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation are God’s own armour which he weareth to war.

‘Thou art asleep, my son and my child; awaken thou thyself! There is silver under the tarnishment that maketh all seem corrupt: take thou what God hath bestowed, rouse and waken thyself, and find the treasure with which thy God hath surrounded thee.’

Song III.

A Clearer Eye.

‘We suffer more in imagination than reality,’
Said Seneca the Younger,
Quoted in rediscovery of Stoicism,
That full and ancient philosophy,

Can speak, act, and help today,
Among athletes and business men,
And not only scholars reading dusty tomes.
And if thus much is in a school of mere philosophy,
An individualist pursuit deepening division,
What of the greatest philosophy in monasticism,
What of the philosophy,
Whose Teacher and God are One and the Same?
I stood amazed at God,
Trying to count my blessings,
Ere quickly I lost count.

III.

Then said I, 'I see much truth in thy words, but my fortunes have not been those of success. I went to Cambridge, with strategy of passing all my classes, and shining brightly on my thesis as I could; the Faculty of Divinity decided two thirds of the way through the year that my promptly declared dissertation topic was unfit for Philosophy of Religion, and made me choose another dissertation topic completely. I received no credit nor recognition for the half of my hardest work. That pales in comparison with Fordham, where I were pushed into informal office as ersatz counselour for my professors' insecurities, and the man in whom I had set my hopes met one gesture of friendship after another with one retaliation after another. Then I returned to the clumsy fit of programming, taken over by Agile models which require something I cannot do: becoming an interchangeable part of a hive mind. I have essayed work in User eXperience, but no work has yet crystallised, and the economy is adverse. What can I rightly expect from here?'

Ere he answered me, 'Whence askest thou the future? It is wondrous. And why speakest thou of thy fortune? Of a troth, no man hath ever had fortune. It were an impossibility.'

I sat a-right, a-listening.

He continued, 'Whilst at Fordham, in incompetent medical care, thou wert stressed to the point of nausea, for weeks on end. Thy worry

wert not, “Will I be graced by the noble honourific of Doctor?” though that were far too dear to thee, but, “*Will there be a place for me?*” And thus far, this hath been in example “We suffer more in imagination than in reality.” For though what thou fearest hath happened, what be its sting?

‘Thou seekedst a better fit than as a computer programmer, and triedst, and God hath provided other than the success you imagined. What of it? Thou hast remained in the house of thy parents, a shameful thing for a man to seek, but right honourable for God to bestow if thou hast sought sufficiency and independence. Thou knowest that we are reckoned come Judgement on our performance of due diligence and not results achieved: that due diligence often carrieth happy results may be true, but it is nothing to the point. Thou art not only provided for even in this decline; thou hast luxuries that thou needest not.

‘There is no such thing as fortune: only an often-mysterious Providence. God has a care each and all over men, and for that matter over stones, and naught that happeneth in the world escapeth God’s cunning net. As thou hast quoted the [Philokalia](#):

We ought all of us always to thank God for both the universal and the particular gifts of soul and body that He bestows on us. The universal gifts consist of the four elements and all that comes into being through them, as well as all the marvellous works of God mentioned in the divine Scriptures. The particular gifts consist of all that God has given to each individual. These include:

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.
- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgement and establish virtue.
- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
- Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
- Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
- Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire

virtue.

- Weakness and ignorance, so that, turning one's back on worldly things, one may be under obedience in stillness and humility.
- Unsought loss of goods and possessions, so that one may deliberately seek to be saved and may even be helped when incapable of shedding all one's possessions or even of giving alms.
- Ease and prosperity, so that one may voluntarily struggle and suffer to attain the virtues and thus become dispassionate and fit to save other souls.
- Trials and hardship, so that those who cannot eradicate their own will may be saved in spite of themselves, and those capable of joyful endurance may attain perfection.

All these things, even if they are opposed to each other, are nevertheless good when used correctly; but when misused, they are not good, but are harmful for both soul and body.

'And again:

He who wants to be an imitator of Christ, so that he too may be called a son of God, born of the Spirit, must above all bear courageously and patiently the afflictions he encounters, whether these be bodily illnesses, slander and vilification from men, or attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls to be tested by various afflictions of this kind, so that it may be revealed which of them truly loves Him. All the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs from the beginning of time traversed none other than this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by doing this that they fulfilled God's will. 'My son,' says Scripture, 'if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently endure' (Ecclus. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: 'Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.' Thus the soul that wishes to do God's will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to

utter confusion. As St Paul writes: 'God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a way out, so that we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

Hemp, unless it is well beaten, cannot be worked into fine yarn, whilst the more it is beaten and carded the finer and more serviceable it becomes. And a freshly moulded pot that has not been fired is of no use to man. And a child not yet proficient in worldly skills cannot build, plant, sow seed or perform any other worldly task. In a similar manner it often happens through the Lord's goodness that souls, on account of their childlike innocence, participate in divine grace and are filled with the sweetness and repose of the Spirit; but because they have not yet been tested, and have not been tried by the various afflictions of the evil spirits, they are still immature and not yet fit for the kingdom of heaven. As the apostle says: 'If you have not been disciplined you are bastards and not sons' (Heb. 12 : 8). Thus trials and afflictions are laid upon a man in the way that is best for him, so as to make his soul stronger and more mature; and if the soul endures them to the end with hope in the Lord it cannot fail to attain the promised reward of the Spirit and deliverance from the evil passions.

'Thou hast earned scores in math contests, yea even scores of math contests, ranking 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition. Now thou hast suffered various things and hast not the limelight which thou hadst, or believeth thou hadst, which be much the same thing. Again, what of it? God hath provided for thee, and if thou hast been fruitless in a secular arena, thou seekest virtue, and hast borne some

fruit. Moreover thou graspest, in part, virtue that thou knewest not to seek when thou barest the asceticism of a mathematician or a member of the Ultraneet. Thou seekest without end that thou mayest become humble, and knowest not that to earnestly seek humility is nobler than being the chiefest among mathematicians in history?

‘The new Saint Seraphim, of Viritsa, hath written,

Have you ever thought that everything that concerns you, concerns Me, also? You are precious in my eyes and I love you; for his reason, it is a special joy for Me to train you. When temptations and the opponent [the Evil One] come upon you like a river, I want you to know that This was from Me.

I want you to know that your weakness has need of My strength, and your safety lies in allowing Me to protect you. I want you to know that when you are in difficult conditions, among people who do not understand you, and cast you away, This was from Me.

I am your God, the circumstances of your life are in My hands; you did not end up in your position by chance; this is precisely the position I have appointed for you. Werenâ€™t you asking Me to teach you humility? And there â€™ I placed you precisely in the â€™schoolâ€™ where they teach this lesson. Your environment, and those who are around you, are performing My will. Do you have financial difficulties and can just barely survive? Know that This was from Me.

I want you to know that I dispose of your money, so take refuge in Me and depend upon Me. I want you to know that My storehouses are inexhaustible, and I am faithful in My promises. Let it never happen that they tell you in your need, â€™Do not believe in your Lord and God.â€™ Have you ever spent the night in suffering? Are you separated from your relatives, from those you love? I allowed this that you would turn to Me, and in Me find consolation and comfort. Did your friend or someone to whom you opened your heart, deceive you? This was from Me.

I allowed this frustration to touch you so that you would learn that your best friend is the Lord. I want you to bring everything to Me and tell Me everything. Did someone slander you? Leave it to Me; be attached to Me so that you can hide from the "contradiction of the nations." I will make your righteousness shine like light and your life like midday noon. Your plans were destroyed? Your soul yielded and you are exhausted? This was from Me.

You made plans and have your own goals; you brought them to Me to bless them. But I want you to leave it all to Me, to direct and guide the circumstances of your life by My hand, because you are the orphan, not the protagonist. Unexpected failures found you and despair overcame your heart, but know That this was from Me.

With tiredness and anxiety I am testing how strong your faith is in My promises and your boldness in prayer for your relatives. Why is it not you who entrusted their cares to My providential love? You must leave them to the protection of My All Pure Mother. Serious illness found you, which may be healed or may be incurable, and has nailed you to your bed. This was from Me.

Because I want you to know Me more deeply, through physical ailment, do not murmur against this trial I have sent you. And do not try to understand My plans for the salvation of people's souls, but uncomplainingly and humbly bow your head before My goodness. You were dreaming about doing something special for Me and, instead of doing it, you fell into a bed of pain. This was from Me.

Because then you were sunk in your own works and plans and I wouldn't have been able to draw your thoughts to Me. But I want to teach you the most deep thoughts and My lessons, so that you may serve Me. I want to teach you that you are nothing without Me. Some of my best children are those who, cut off from an active life, learn to use the weapon of ceaseless prayer. You were called unexpectedly to undertake a difficult and responsible position, supported by Me. I have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come

across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

Know and remember always, no matter where you are, That whatsoever hurts will be dulled as soon as you learn In all things, to look at Me. Everything has been sent to you by Me, for the perfection of your soul.

All these things were from Me.

‘The doctors have decided that thy consumption of one vital medication is taken to excess, and they are determined to bring it down to an approved level, for thy safety, and for thy safety accept the consequence of thy having a string of hospitalizations and declining health, and have so far taken every pain to protect thee, and will do so even if their care **slay** thee.

‘What of it? Thy purity of conscience is in no manner contingent on what others decide in their dealings with thee. It may be that the change in thy medicaments be less dangerous than it beseemeth thee. It may be unlawful to the utmost degree for thou to seek thine own demise: yet it is full lawful, and possible, for our God and the Author and Finisher of our faith to give thee a life complete and full even if it were cut short to the morrow.

‘Never mind that thou seest not what the Lord may provide; thou hast been often enough surprised by the boons God hath granted thee. Thou hast written [Repentance, Heaven’s Best-Kept Secret](#), and thou knowest that repentance itself eclipseth the pleasure of sin. Know also that grievous men, and the devil himself, are all ever used by God according to his design, by the God who worketh all for all.

[We do not live in the best of all possible worlds. Far from it. But we live under the care of the best of all possible Gods, and it is a more profound truth, a more vibrant truth, a truth that goes much deeper into the heart of root of all things to say that we may not live in the best of all possible worlds, but we live under the care of the best of all possible](#)

Gods.

‘Know and remember also that happiness comes from within. Stop chasing after external circumstances. External circumstances are but a training ground for God to build strength within. Wittest thou not that thou art a man, and as man art constituted by the image of God? If therefore thou art constituted in the divine image, why lookest thou half to things soulless and dead for thy happiness?’

Song IV.

Virtue Unconquerable.

I know that my Redeemer liveth,
And with my eyes yet shall I see God,
But what a painful road it has been,
What a gesture of friendship has met a knife in my back.
Is there grandeur in me for my fortitude?
I only think so in moments of pride,
With my grandeur only in repentance.
And the circumstances around me,
When I work, have met with a knife in the back.

IV.

The Golden-Mouthed said, 'Child, I know thy pains without your telling, aye, and more besides: Church politics ain't no place for a Saint! Thou knowest how I pursued justice, and regarded not the face of man, drove out slothful servants, and spoke in boldness to the Empress. I paid with my life for the enemies I made in my service. You have a full kitchen's worth of knives in your back: I have an armory! I know well thy pains from within.

'But let us take a step back, far back.

'Happiness is of particular concern to you and to many, and if words in the eighteenth century spoke of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," now there are many people who make the pursuit of happiness all but a full-time occupation.

'In ages past a question of such import would be entrusted to enquiry and dialogue philosophic. So one might argue, in brief, that true happiness is a supreme thing, and God is a supreme thing, and since there can not be two separate supreme essences, happiness and God are the same, a point which could be argued at much greater length and eloquence. And likewise how the happy man is happy not because he is propped up from without, by external circumstance, but has chosen virtue and goodness inside. And many other things.

'But, and this says much of today and its berzerkly grown science, in which the crowning jewel of superstring theory hath abdicated from science's bedrock of experiment, happiness is such a thing as one would naturally approach through psychology, because psychology is, to people of a certain bent, the only conceivable tool to best study to understand men.

'One can always critique some detail, such as the import of what psychology calls "flow" as optimal experience. The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, outlined three versions of the good life: the

Pleasant Life, which is the life of pleasure and the shallowest of the three; the *Engaged Life*, or the life of flow, called optimal experience, and the *Meaningful Life*, meaning in some wise the life of virtue.

‘He says of the Pleasant Life that it is like vanilla ice cream: the first bite tastes delicious, but by the time you reach the fifth or sixth bite, you can’t taste it any more. And here is something close to the Orthodox advice that a surplus of pleasures and luxuries, worldly honours and so on, do not make you happy. I tell you that one can be lacking in the most basic necessities and be happy: but let this slide.

‘Of the Meaningful Life, it is the deepest of the three, but it is but a first fumbling in the dark of what the Orthodox Church has curated in the light of day. Things like kindness and mercy have built in to the baseline, curated since Christ or rather the Garden of Eden, so Orthodox need not add some extra practice to their faith to obtain kindness or gratitude. Really, the number of things the Orthodox Church has learned about the Meaningful Life far eclipse the [Philokalia](#): the fount is inexhaustible.

‘But my chief concern is with the Engaged Life, the life of flow. For flow is not “the psychology of optimal experience,” or if it is, the *theology* of optimal experience hath a different base. Flow is legitimate and it is a wonder: but it is not additionally fit to be a normative baseline for mankind as a whole.

‘*Flow*, as it occurs, is something exotic and obscure. It has been studied in virtuosos who are expert performers in many different domains. Once someone of surpassing talent has something like a decade of performance, it is possible when a man of this superb talent and training is so engrossed in a performance of whatever domain, that sits pretty much at the highest level of performance where essentially the virtuoso’s entire attention is absorbed in the performance, and time flies because no attention is left to observe the passage of time or almost any other thing of which most of us are aware when we are awake.

‘It seemeth difficult to me to market flow for mass consumption: doing such is nigh unto calling God an elitist, and making the foundation of a happy life all but impossible for the masses. You can be a subjectivist

if you like and say that genius is five thousand hours' practice, but it is trained virtuoso talent and not seniority that even gets you through flow's door. For that matter, it is also well nigh impossible for the few to experience until they have placed years into virtuoso performance in their craft. Where many more are capable of being monastics. Monastics, those of you who are not monastics may rightly surmise, have experiences which monastics call it a disaster to share with you. That may be legitimate, but novices would do well not to expect a stream of uninterrupted exotic experiences, not when they start and perhaps not when they have long since taken monastic vows. A novice who seeth matters in terms of "drudgework" would do well to expect nothing but what the West calls "drudgework" for a long, long time. (And if all goeth well and thou incorporatest other obediences to the diminution of drudgery, thou wilt at first lament the change!) A monastic, if all goes well, will do simple manual labour, but freed from relating to such labour as drudgery: forasmuch as monastics and monastic clergy recall "novices' obediences", it is with nostalgia, as a yoke that is unusually easy and a burden unusually light.

'And there is a similitude between the ancient monastic obedience that was *par excellence* the bread and butter of monastic manual labour, and the modern obedience. For in ancient times monks wove baskets to earn their keep, and in modern times monks craft incense. And do not say that the modern obedience is nobler, for if anything you sense a temptation, and a humbler obedience is perhaps to be preferred.

'But in basket making or incense making alike, there is a repetitive manual labour. There are, of course, any number of other manual obediences in a monastery today. However, when monasticism has leeway, its choice seems to be in favour of a repetitive manual labour that gives the hands a regular cycle of motion whilst the heart is left free for the Jesus Prayer, and the mind in the heart practices a monk's *watchfulness* or *nipsis*, an observer role that traineth thee to notice and put out temptations when they are a barely noticeable spark, rather than heedlessly letting the first temptation grow towards acts of sin and waiting until thy room be afire before fightest thou the blaze. This watchfulness is the best optimal experience the Orthodox Church gives us in which to abide, and 'tis no accident that the full and unabridged title of

the [Philokalia](#) is [The Philokalia of the Niptic Fathers](#). If either of these simple manual endeavours is unfamiliar or makes the performer back up in thought, this is a growing pain, not the intended long-term effect. And what is proposed is proposed to everybody in monasticism and really God-honoured marriage too, in force now that the [Philokalia](#) hath come in full blossom among Orthodox in the world, that optimum experience is for everyone, including sinners seeking the haven of monasticism, and not something exotic for very few.

‘And remember how thou wast admonished by a monk, perhaps in echo of St. James the Brother of God who said, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.” For thou wert in the trapeza, with the monk and with a janitorial lady, and he told the janitorial lady that she was fortunate, for her manual labour left her free to pray with her mind, and thou, a computer programmer at the time, wert unfortunate because thy work demanded thy full mental attention.

‘Forsooth! If thou canst have optimal experience, the Jesus Prayer in thy heart as the metronome of silence, if thy business were to weave baskets or craft incense, why not indeed can one attend to the Jesus Prayer, rising as incense before God, in mopping a floor or cleaning windows? For however great monasticism may be, it hath not aught of monopoly in meditative work and prayer before God. Marriage is the older instrument of salvation. The door is open, if thou canst do some manual labour, to do so in prayer to God. And monks are not alone permitted prayerful manual labour: monasticism is but the rudiments of the Gospel, and if monasticism seeketh out perhaps a boon in prayerful manual labour, this is hardly a barbed wire fence with a sign saying that prayerful manual labour is reserved only for monastics.

‘Let us say that this is true, and the theology of optimum experience is virtually accepted for the sake of argument, or if thou preferest, thou mayest answer it “Yes” and “Amen.” Still, I say it is a quibble, compared to the darker import. Let us set the point aside, and with good reason.’

Then he paused, and ere a moment resumed explaining. ‘If I may pull a rare note from the wreckage postmodern, there is the concept of a

semiotic frame, perhaps a myth, that determines a society's *possibles et pensables*, that which is understood to be possible in a society, and that which is found to even be thinkable. The knife cuts well against some radicals. And people are in blinders about activism and psychology.

‘Think of thy feminist theology professor, who said both right and full that she believed in Tradition, and in the same breath placed Arius, the father of heretics, alongside St. Athanasius as equally full representatives of that Tradition. When in your theological anthropology class she picked two texts for disability, the obvious agenda, the one and only thing to do for autism (as her agenda fell) was to engage some activist political advocacy for to make conditions in some wise more favourable for that particular victim class. No expression of love was possible save additional political activism. And I would say, and thou wouldst say, that she were too political in her response, and not nearly political enough. (For when all is civil warfare carried on by other means, real concern for the life of the polis but starves.)

‘Yet one of these reading assignments contained what she did not grasp. Of the two, one was what could be straightforwardly be called either or both of political ideology and identity politics, and it was complete with the standard, footnoteless, boilerplate opening assertion that no one else in the whole wide world could possibly have suffering that could be compared to that of one’s own poor, miserable demographic.

‘But the other text was different in many ways. It was entitled “Love Without Boundaries,” and it was a text about love written by the father of a severely autistic son. This latter text did not come close to calling for agitation or plans for a better future: far from it” on these points it is silent. What it did do, however, was take an approach in asceticism, and learn to love without limits. The father did not and could not cure his son, but whether or not the father’s love transformed his son, the love the father expressed transformed the *father*. His love was cut from the same cloth as the peace with oneself which St. Isaac and St. Seraphim with one voice exhort us to acquire, and the love the father expressed rendered him Godlike, in a humble, everyday, ordinary fashion.

‘And in like wise to how thy professor automatically jumped to political activism as how one might exhibit right care for the severely autistic and other disabled, in this day and age the go-to discipline for understanding humans is psychology, and a psychology fashioning itself after hard science, introducing itself by what might be called *the physics envy declaration*: psychologists-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics.

‘It is a side point that psychologists treat subjects as less-than-human: a near-universal feature of psychological experiment is some stripe of guile, because psychological experimental value would be ruined under normal conditions of intelligent and informed cooperation between fellow men. (Though the enterprise may be named “psychology”, the name were oafishly or treacherously applied: for the name be drawn from the Greek for the study that understands the psyche or soul, a *psyche* or soul is precisely what the discipline will not countenance in man.) Forsooth! Men running experiments think and make decisions; subjects in experiments are governed by laws. Moreover, since physics hath worked long and hard to de-anthropomorphise what it studies, physics envy biddeth psychology to seek well a de-anthropomorphised theory of $\hat{I}\pm\hat{I}^{1/2}\hat{I}$, $\hat{I}\hat{I}\hat{I}\hat{I}\hat{I}\hat{I}$, (*anthropos*), man.

‘It hath been noted, as psychology reinvent more of religion, that classical clinical psychology can raise a person suffering from some mental illness to be as normal, but nought more. And so positive psychology chaseth after means of enhancement and excellence, to best make use of giftedness. Meanwhilst, whilst this invention is brand new, it is well over a millennium since monasticism was at one stroke a hospital for repentant sinners and an academy for excellence.

‘The point primarily to be held is that psychology is not the ultimate real way, but one among many ways, of understanding how people work, and one that hath stopped its ear to our being created in the image of God. All great Christian doctrines are rendered untranslatable. [The article form of what is also thine advisor’s thesis](#) hath as its subtitle “From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” and it discusseth the formation of psychology as an emergent secular realm which hath displaced older candidates. But in the West before the reign of psychology

there were pastoral paradigms for understanding the human person, and thou knowest that one of the first technical terms Orthodoxy asketh its converts to learn is “passion:” and if the passions thine advisor hath discussed are not point-for-point identical to the passions repented of in Eastern Orthodoxy, still they be by far closer than any of the several emergent framings and meanings of “emotion” as pushed for in the discipline of psychology.

‘That there be a common term for psychology, and more dubiously one for what it replaced, is of little import for us. The term “pneumatology” may have existed and named practitioners from an older tradition; but such were under religious auspices. The study and field of communication is, among fields of enquiry studied in the academy, of vintage historically recent: yet it would be right stunning to deny that people communicated, and tried better to communicate, before the change when a university department door now heralded and announced, “DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION.”

‘And what has psychology done since being established as a secular arena? Robert Heinlein in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) gets on very quickly to utterly dismissing marriage. But no sooner does Michael stop flailing marriage’s lifeless corpse, but he hath made a gaping hole and buildeth up a bond of water brotherhood that is meant to be every bit as heroic, beautiful, and magnificent, that the only remaining way to make water brotherhood truly more wondrous and amazing were to enlarge it until it grew to become true marriage.

‘Psychology, whilst being secular, in its completion offers ersatz religion that, though meant to be value-free, provides a secular mystical theology. That this secular religion, fit for all religions and patients, uses guided imagery allegedly from some generic copy-paste of Chinese medicine, Tibetan Buddhism, Native American traditions, and goeth back to Graeco-Roman times; mindfulness from Buddhism’s Eightfold Noble Path; and yoga from Hinduism is but an illustration of G.K. Chesterton’s observation: *the man who does not believe in God does not believe in nothing; he believes anything*. But put this aside and take psychology’s claim of secularity at face value. The [Philokalia](#) is scarcely but a library of collected works about how to rightly live the inner life. It is not in the

main concerned with pleasure or joy: but it has an infinite amount to say about repenting from sins that bear Hell each and every one. Psychology does not trade in temptation, sin, or passion: but it too offers a rudder for one's inner life, and if it teacheth not the extirpation of things that sully the soul's purity, it has infinite reach in a battleplan to not be conquered by negative emotion.

‘And if I may speak to thee of TED talks, there is probably a TED talk to be made, “The Trouble with TED,” for they exacerbate this. As thou knowest, one talk gave the staggering announcement that after decades of each generation having higher self-esteem than the last, and the lamented consequence arising that our youth in particular reach record levels of narcissism. Well might she announce that if thou sprayest fuel around and throwest lighted matches on the fuel, sooner or sooner thou wilt have a blaze about thee.

‘She also talked about self-touch, about it being soothing to place thy hand over thy heart. Forsooth! This is placed among the same general heading of making love without a partner. Not a whisper was heard mentioning affection towards another person, or for that matter a pet; the remedy stepped not an inch away from solipsism. Monks as thou knowest are admonished to refrain from embraces: be that as it may, it would be healthier for a monk to embrace another than to embrace himself.’

I said, ‘What is the trouble with TED? For I sense something askance, yet to put a finger on it is hard.’

His All Holiness answered me and said, ‘All world religions have grandeur, and for an analysis secular all world religions represent a way that a society can live together and persevere. Hinduism is not the sort of thing one *uses up*, whether across years, lifetimes, or centuries even; its spiritual paths are millennia old, and to destroy it would likely take nuclear war or an apocalyptic event. By contrast, remember thou how thou hast said, “No form of feminism that has yet emerged is stable:” easily enough one finds the living force of body image feminism today, whilst it would scarce be live in the academy in fifty years. Thy friend answered thy remark of something called “Christian feminism,” which articulates how traditional Christianity cares for, and seeks, the good of

women: for an example, it takes politically incorrect words about husbands and wives and offers the breathtaking change of addressing women as moral agents, and never telling husbands to keep wives in line. That is if anything the exception that proves the rule: for it may bear the external label of “feminism,” but its core be much slower to decay than any feminism at all, for it is *not* feminism at all. In thy feminist theology class one author said that in feminist theology, “all the central terms are up for grabs.” Meanwhilst, remember thy superior when thou wert an assistant at a bookstore. He hath told thee that books of liberal theology have a shelf life; after five years, perhaps, they are hard to sell. Meanwhilst, his shop published and sold Puritan sermons three centuries old. Thou mayest have a care that they are heterodox: but do not have a care that they will go out of fashion, or if they do go out of fashion, it will not be because the sermons lost their appeal to future Protestants seeking Biblical faith, but something else hath changed features of Protestantism that have survived since the Reformation.

‘Thou needest not refute TED talks; a few years and a given talk will likely be out of fashion. There is something in the structure of TED that is liberal, even if many talks say nothing overtly political: forasmuch, there is more to say than that they are self-contained, controlled, plastic things, where world religions are something organic that may or may not have a central prophet, but never have a central planner. TED is a sort of evolving, synthetic religion, and it cannot fill true spiritual hunger.

‘But let us return to psychology, or rather treat psychology and TED talks, for psychology hath of ages hoped for a Newton who would lead them into the Promised Land full status of being scientists. The study of Rocks and Nothing is the exemplar after which to pattern the study of Man. Forsooth! The problems in psychology are not so much where psychology has failed to understand Man on the ensample of empirical science. The real concerns are for where they have *succeeded*.

‘In a forum discussion thou readst, a conversation crystallised on care for diabetes, and cardinally important advice not to seek a book-smart nurse, but a diabetic nurse. For it is the case with empirical science that it entirely lacketh in empirical character. In psychology, as oft in other disciplines, a sufficiently skilled practitioner can pick up a book

about part of the subject he does not yet understand, and understand well enough what there is to understand. Understanding were never nursed on the practice of direct experience, and understanding here is malnourished.

‘However, the Orthodox Church with monasticism as its heart has *genuine empiricism* as its spine; you know with the knowing by which Adam knew Eve. All else is rumour and idle chatter. If there are qualifications to being a spiritual father, one of the chief of these must be that he speaks and acts out of first-hand encounter and first-hand knowledge, not that he learned by rumour and distortion. Dost wish that thou be healed by a spiritual physician? Seek thou then a man which will care for thee as a diabetic nurse.’

Song V.

O Holy Mother!

O Holy Mother! Art Thou the Myst’ry?
Art Thou the Myst’ry untold?
For I have written much,
And spent much care,
In [The Luddite’s Guide to Technology](#),
And looked all the whilst,
Down the wrong end,
Of the best telescope far and away that I could find.
I have written of man and creation defiled,
Yet for all my concerns,
Of so-called ‘space-conquering technologies,’
Which it beseemeth me ‘body-conquering technologies,’
Sidestepping the God-given and holy bounds,
Of our embodied state,
Where better to seek healing,
For an occult-free simulation,
Of the unnatural vice of magick arts,
Than in the perfect creaturely response,
‘Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.

Be it unto me according to thy word.’
Then, the gates, nay, the foundations,
The foundations of Hell began a-crumbling,
The New Eve, the Heavenly Mother,
Whom Christ told the Disciple,
‘Behold thy Mother!’
In Her is the microcosm of Creation aright,
And She is the Friend and Comfort,
Of the outcast, and the poor:
My money, my property, I stand to lose:
But no man can take from me,
A Treasure vaster than the Heavens;
Perhaps I would do well,
To say little else of technologies progressively degrading humanity,
And pray an Akathist to the Theotokos,
And put a trust in Her that is proto-Antiochian,
Rather than proto-Alexandrian,
And give Her a trust in the great Story,
Diminished not one whit,
If She happeneth not to be a teacher,
Offering such ideas as philosophers like:
Her place in the Great Story is far greater than that:
And such it is also,
With illuminã”d teachers,
Who offer worship to God as their teaching,
And are in travail,
Until Christ be formed in their disciples.

V.

He said, ‘But let us return to the pursuit of happiness, which hath scathingly been called “the silliest idea in the history of mankind.” And that for a junior grade of pursuing happiness, not the clone of a systematic science which worketh out a combination of activities and practices, an America’s Test Kitchen for enjoying life, studying ways of manipulating oneself to produce pleasure and happiness.

‘It were several years ago that thou tookest [a Fluxx deck](#) to play with friends, and the group included five adults and one very little boy. So the adults took turns, not just in their moves, but (for a player who had just played a move) in paying attention to the little one, so that he were not looking on a social meeting that excluded him.

‘When it were thy turn to look after the boy, thou liftedst him to thy shoulders and walkedst slowly, gingerly, towards the kitchen, because thou wishedst to enter the kitchen, but thou wert not sure thou couldst walk under the kitchen’s lower ceiling without striking his head.

‘Shortly after, thou realizedst three things: firstly, that the boy in fact had *not* struck his head on the kitchen ceiling, even though you had advanced well into the kitchen area; secondly, that the boy was dragging his fingers on the ceiling; and thirdly and finally, that he was laughing and laughing, full of joy.

‘That wert a source of pleasure that completely eclipsed [the game of Fluxx](#), though it were then a favourite game. And when thou askedst if it were time for thy next move, it were told thee that the game was won.

‘In the conversation afterwards, thou wert told a couple of things worthy of mention.

‘First, and perhaps of no great import, thou gavest the boy a pleasure that neither of his parents could offer. The boy’s father wert a few inches taller than thee, and were he to attempt what thou attemptedst, he in fact *would* have struck his son’s head against the ceiling. The boy’s mother could not either have offered the favour to her son; whether because her thin arms were weaker, or something else: God wot.

‘Second of all, as mentioned by an undergraduate psychologist, it gives people joy to give real pleasure to another person, and the case of children is special. She did not comment or offer comparison between knowing thou hast given pleasure to any age in childhood and knowing thou hast given pleasure to an adult, but she did comment, and her comment were this: the boy were guileless: too young to just be polite, too young for convincing guile, perhaps too young for any guile worthy of the name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that

name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that his ongoing and delighted laughter were only, and could only be, from unvarnished candour. Wherewith thou hadst no question of “Does he enjoy what I am doing with him, or is he just being polite?” Just being polite were off the table.

‘And this is not even only true for [the royal race of men](#). Thou hast not right circumstance to lawfully and responsibly own a pet, but without faintest compromise of principle, [thou visitest a pet shelter nearby to thine own home](#), and at the shelter also, guile is off the agenda, at least for the pets. A cat can purr, or if it hath had enough human attention for the nonce and thou hast perhaps not attended to its swishing tail, a light nip and swipe of claw is alike of unvarnished candour. Whereby thou knowest of a truth what a cat desireth and conveyeth if it purreth and perchance licketh thine hand.

‘Which were subsumed under a general troth, that it is better to serve than to be served, and it is better to give than receive. What is more, the most concentrated teaching about who be truly happy is enshrined in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), and enshrined again as the shorthand version of that great Sermon chanted in the Divine Liturgy:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,
and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven:
for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

“The word translated, “blessed,” $\hat{I}^{1/4}\hat{I}\pm\hat{I}^0\hat{I}\pm\hat{I}\hat{I}^1\hat{I}\hat{I}$, (*makarios*, hath what we would count as at least two meanings in English: “blessed,” and “happy.” Among English Bible translations there are some, but a few, translations which render the word as “happy,” including [Young’s Literal Translation](#):

Happy the poor in spirit — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy the mourning — because they shall be comforted.

Happy the meek — because they shall inherit the land.

Happy those hungering and thirsting for righteousness — because they shall be filled.

Happy the kind — because they shall find kindness.

Happy the clean in heart — because they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers — because they shall be called Sons of God.

Happy those persecuted for righteousness’ sake — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy are ye whenever they may reproach you, and may persecute, and may say any evil thing against you falsely for my sake — Rejoice ye and be glad, because your reward [is] great in the heavens, for thus did they persecute the prophets who were before you.

‘In English this is usually, but not always, found in more free translations; the [Amplified Bible](#) naturally shines in cases like these as an deliberately unusual translation style intended to render two or more faces of an ambiguity or a phrase bearing multiple meanings. Other languages can be different; in French, for instance, there are separate words *béni* and *heureux* which respectively mean “blessed” and “happy,” but *heureux* appears to be the term of choice in French translation of the Beatitudes.

‘Here, though, the Gospel hath aught in common with Plato. Plato investigated happiness, and the Greek term used was $\epsilon\upsilon\delta\alpha\iota\mu\omicron\upsilon\acute{\nu}\iota\alpha$, *eudaimonia*, almost exactly a literal equivalent to “in good spirits,” but the literal sense was taken much more seriously and much farther. It was a primary term for happiness, but what was seen as true happiness was having one’s spirit in good health. This happiness would not be easily confused by counterfeit pleasures such as one can immediately procure with narcotics; and the point is not that real-world narcotics create addiction and horrible misery. The happiness would be just as counterfeit in the pleasure of a person unhealthy in spirit to take some imaginary narcotic that created intense and endless pleasure, without either addiction or the misery that loom in the grievous backswing of narcotic pleasure.

‘Thou rememberest thy surprise, when reading thine undergraduate psychology text, when thou readedst what wert said of the pleasure principle. For the pleasure principle art an artifact of bad philosophy, which noting perchance that most of our actions bring some pleasure or pleasing result, assumes and defines that every action anyone ever takes is that which is calculated to bring thee the most pleasure. In settings less far back, thou hast listened to people saying that the only motivation anyone takes for any action is that it is calculated to bring them the greatest economic profit, and thou hast borrowed an answer, to say that several people have essayed to convince thee of this as truth, and so far as thou knewest, not one of them stood to gain financial profit from convincing thyself of this purported truth.

‘Thy textbook, like those who try to convince with a charming smile where a reasoned argument is ordinarily polite to offer, said that it were

more a virtue than a vice to show kindnesses to others because one enjoyed the feelings it gave, and thou hadst two answers in thy heart: first of all, past the sugar-coating of “more a virtue than a vice” lies an assertion that virtue is impossible in principle, and secondly, that the only theoretical possibility thou couldst care for the poor in order to help thy fellow men is if one received absolutely no pleasure or consolation in any stripe or dimension to care for the poor out of a genuine motive of benefitting others and not whatever probable pleasures their generosity and service might come back their way. That appalling price tag reaches beyond exorbitant. And thou desirest to speak of a “masochism principle” or “pain principle” whereby all decisions and all actions at all times by all men are whatever is calculated to bring them the greatest sufferings, alike useless to assert for any philosopher worthy of the name. It is hardly to be denied that most decisions bring some pain or have some downside on the part of the persons who make them, so a pain principle mirroring a pleasure principle is alike unprovable, and alike unfalsifiable, an untestable guess that hath not any place in science and scarcely more any place in disciplines seeking to be established as science. It was not until later that thou readst a competent philosopher who said that the existence of pleasure and a reward does not in and of itself make any action which brings pleasure to be motivated solely as a means to obtain pleasure. The thought-experiment were posed, that a man who gives to the poor and enjoys doing so were offered a pill which would give him the full pleasure and benefits of his generosity, but do nothing at all for the practical needs of the poor, would be in but rare cases utterly spurned as a right empty and worthless counterfeit.

Song VI.

Crossing the Great Threshold.

The tale were told,
Of a child starkly scant of mind,
Who received a glittering package, a gift,
And kept the glittering package,
Indeed taking it with him well nigh everywhere,
And after long time,

When the disposable wrapping paper,
Were well battered and now dingy,
An adult asked,
'Aren't you going to open the package?'
The child exclaimed with joy,
Once the toy emerged from the tatters,
And squealed with joy, saying,
"Oh, there's *another* present!"
My Lord and my God!
Perhaps I will never open,
[The Sermon on the Mount](#).

VI.

I said myself then, 'O John! O glorious Saint John! Canst thou lead me on a path into the [The Sermon on the Mount](#)? For I have trod the path of self-direction, and it well nigh destroyed me.'

Then the Saint said to me, 'Thanks to thee, son, for thy request. I awaited that thou mightest ask, for that thou mightest have the Heavenly reward for asking.'

'That which you ask were a work of years or lifetimes; let me chase a humbler quarry: unfolding the first verse only of that great Sermon, which declareth the poor in spirit to be blessed and happy. I will speak to you of the riches of poverty but not the heights of humility, though they be one and the same. Though I may call on other verses to tell what riches are in poverty, I will make no attempt to unfold these other Beatitudes, though to them that which declared the blessedness of poverty that wert one and the same. And I tell thee, through thine interests, that to be poor in spirit is to be no self-sufficient solipsist; rather, it is utterly dependent on the infinite riches of God, and that it is royal: for kings are forbidden to touch money, and in another sense all Christians and especially all monastics are forbidden to touch aught possession, not solely money, in stead of grasping as did the rich young ruler. But poverty be the unstopping of yon Sermon, an unstopping of virtue in which flowing fount eclipseth flowing fount.

That true poverty extendeth beyond a lack of possessions is taught by calling those blessed who are “poor in spirit,” beyond mere poverty of the body, and it is taught that the monastic vow of poverty includeth the other two: for a monk is bereft of the normal blessing of holy matrimony, and even of his own self-will. *That* thou knowest as treasure, for thou wishest to trade thine own idiorrhythmic self-direction for a coenobetic monastery, and to speak even more plainly, the direction of an abbot.

‘In the [Sermon on the Mount](#), poverty beseemeth to be special, for there are two passages: that which commendeth the storing treasures up in Heaven and rejecting the storing up of treasures on earth, then discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body, then exhortation to take no thought for the morrow, for God knoweth and willeth to care for our needs. And when thou hast wealth, be merciful to others, and thou wilt be repaid at great usury by thy true Debtor, God.

‘In fact there is one passage and topic, the longest though length in verses is a trivial measure. The tri-unity is harder to see in modern translations that translate something out to be accessible; one reads of one’s eye being “healthy” or “sound”. The King James version rightly renders “single”, for an undivided wholeness. Fr. Thomas Hopko hath said, before the surge of enthusiasm for mindfulness, “*Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.*” This attentiveness and full presence is the operation of an activity that is *single*, that neither layeth up possessions, nor defendeth them in worry, nor doubteth that the God who provideth will overlook thee in His care. In all these is dispersal and dissipation. Poverty of spirit maketh for singleness of eye, and a singleness destroyed by so many of the technologies you trade in.

‘It has from ancient times been reckoned that if thou givest to the poor, God is thy Debtor, and under what you would call third world living conditions, I told married Christians to leave to their children brothers rather than things. This too is poverty of spirit, even if it belong only in marriage, in a condition monks renounce. Thou hast read of those who suggest that thou asketh not, “Can I afford what I need?” but “Do I need what I can afford?”

‘It is monastic poverty that monastics do not defend themselves, not

only by force, but even with words, showing the power that terrified Pontius Pilate. It is monastic poverty not to struggle again over any temporal matter. It is poverty of spirit not to have plans, nor, in the modern sense, an identity. For in ancient times, Christians who were martyred, answered when asked their names, none other than “Christian.” And beyond this further layers yet beckon. Poverty is not an absence of treasures; it is a positive, active, thing that slices sharper than any two-edged sword. And monks who renounce property sometimes have something to say beyond “Good riddance!” The force of the rejection, and the freedom that is gained in letting riches go, is more like the obscene and *thundering* announcement: “I lost 235 pounds in one weekend!”

‘Thou readedst a church sign saying, “Who is rich? The person who is content.” And I tell thee that thou canst purchase by poverty of spirit many times and layers more than contentment with what thou possessest now. I have not even scratched the surface of experiences of monastics who were poor in spirit to a profound degree, but thou knowest that there are limits to what is lawful for me to utter to thee, and thou knowest that thou art not bidden to chase after experiences, but seek to repent of thy sins for the rest of thy life, which thou knowest to reckon as monastic privilege.’

Song VII.

I Sing a Song to my Apple.

Betimes my salad days were right begun,
I programmed an Apple][,
In gradeschool adventure games and [a 4D maze](#),
Simple arithmetic- and trigonometric-powered animations.
My father a computer scientist,
Who shared with me his joy,
And in high school a Unix system administrator became.
My family got, and still hath the carcass,
Of one original ‘fat Mac’,
So named because it had an available maximum 512k of RAM.

My calculator in high school,
On which I programmed computer-generated art,
[And a simple video game](#), had as much.
Ere my salad days were dwindled,
I remained a Unix programmer,
And judged Mac OSX my preferred flavor of Unix.
Later I had iPhones,
And for the first time in my life,
Owned a computer where I lacked root privilege.
Along the way I got an Apple Watch,
My desire increased as I read about it,
And vanished when I learned it were,
Bereft of such things as even a web browser.
I gave it to my brother,
Who later gave it back before it broke.
I sing a song to my Apple,
A peerless 17" MacBook Pro,
Which through minor design flaw,
Burned through video cards oft enough,
And when the Apple Store stopped receiving those cards,
So with it went any hope of keeping my Mac without frequent \$500
repairs.
And along the way,
With the sweetness of a Linux virtual machine,
[Realized that OSX had grown monstrous as a version of Unix.](#)
When I asked about one cardinally important open source project,
I were told that Apple had removed parts of the operating system,
That the project needed to run,
But information technology work in my Linux virtual machine,
Was the command line equivalent of point and click.
It were a discovery as if I had returned to Paradise.
I sing a song to Apple's technical support,
For when I asked a question,
About command-line-driven Apache configuration,
It took escalations up to level 3 technical support,
Before a Genius knew that Macs *have* a command line.
I purchased a computer meant to last many years.

I sing a song to my late iPhone,
[Bewailed by men who made the Mac great,](#)
Which slipped a pocket near a food bank,
Booted my laptop into Windows and found,
That Find My iPhone was now rendered useless.
I went to see an Apple Store,
And received a followup call,
Giving a good ten days before I could access my iPhone,
And found out also that Macs were as useless,
As my computer booted into Windows,
To Find My iPhone.
Once I had one from each four,
Offerings for Apple computers:
A laptop one, an iPad one,
An iPhone one, an Apple Watch one;
And ere I were negotiating,
For to buy a replacement iPhone on eBay,
I said that there were many Android devices within my budget,
And whilst in bed realized,
I wanted full well that the negotiation fail.
Apple's indirect gift to desktops may be Windows,
And Apple's indirect gift to smartphones may be Android;
For surely no iPhone killer before Android even came close.
Certainly Windows Mobile answered the wrong question.
But even if one may argue, legitimately,
That a Mac and a PC have grown remarkably similar,
And iOS and Android are also more alike than different,
I was not poisoned by technical merits.
I was poisoned by the corporate mindset,
That all but killed my prospects,
Of finding my iPhone before the battery were drained completely,
And when I called my iPhone to perchance find it in my car,
I went to voicemail immediately:
My iPhone's battery wert already dead.
I had known, but not paid attention earlier,
To Steve Jobs as beyond toxic, as a boss;
Screaming and abusive,

To employees he had every reason to cherish,
And after a technical fumble,
Publicly fired an Apple technician,
At an employee motivational event.
And I believed it.
More disturbed I was,
When I read of Jobs's spiritual practices,
Such as an Orthodox might interpret,
As opening the mind to listen,
And draw the milk of dragons.
Technology does things for us,
Though I have found that when I shared my iOS devices with children,
Squabble and squabble ensued.
Technology does things for us,
But this Trojan horse does things for devils also,
Who cannot give exquisitely beneficial gifts,
Even wert they to try.
The power of devils is real but limited:
Such teaches the [Philokalia](#),
Which though it be filled with love of the beautiful,
Says more about the operations and activities of devils,
Than aught else that I have read.
And one thing it sayeth,
Through Orthodox Christian Tradition,
Says that devils can tell a man's spiritual state,
And try to inject venomous thoughts in temptation,
Where men have free will, still,
The devils cannot read minds,
Even if they by ruse give one man certain thoughts,
Sting another that the thoughts are in the first man,
And behold, they speak and art deceived,
That devils can read people's minds.
Devilish predictions are called guesses,
Which are sometimes wrong,
The devils see a man walking to journey,
And guess that he travels to visit another specific man,
But 'tis guesswork; devils can well enough be wrong.

[St. Nilus's alleged prophecies are dubious at present,](#)

But we may not yet be in the clear.

And if the U.S. has been called "One nation under surveillance,"

Where No Such Agency has received every email,

It is now clear and open knowledge,

To those that will reflect,

That among most most Americans,

'Every breath and step Americans take,'

Is monitored by Big Brother,

But perhaps it is not just human agencies,

That reap the information collected.

[++ungood](#)

(Did anyone besides my most reverend Archbishop mention that it used to be that you had to seek out pornography, and leave your car in front of a store with papered-over windows, and wear your trenchcoat disguise for the mission, whereas now *pornography* seeks *you*?

It is something like a water cooler that hath three faucets,

Serving cold water, hot water, and antifreeze,

And the handles perplexing in their similitude.)

VII.

The Saint turned to me and said, 'I would remind thee of Fr. Thomas's famous 55 maxims:

55 Maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.
2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must.
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by discipline.
4. Say the Lord's Prayer several times each day.
5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.
15. Read the scriptures regularly.
16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.
18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.
28. Face reality.

29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
32. Never bring attention to yourself.
33. Listen when people talk to you.
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.
45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.
47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty.
48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves.
49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
50. Be merciful with yourself and others.
51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.
53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.
54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over.
55. Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

The Saint continued: 'Wouldst thou agree that we are in a high noon of secret societies?'

I answered, 'Of a troth.'

He asked, 'Wouldst thou agree that those societies are corrosive?'

I answered, 'As a rule, yes, and I wit that Orthodox are forbidden on pain of excommunication to join the Freemasons.'

He spoke again and asked me, 'And hast thou an opinion about the assassination of JFK, whether it wert a conspiracy?'

I said, 'A friend whose judgement I respect in matters political hath told me an opinion that there in fact was a conspiracy, and it were driven by LBJ.'

He said, 'And hast thou spent five full minutes in worrying about either in the past year?'

I said, 'Nay.'

He said, 'Thou hast secular intelligence if thou canst ask if "surveillance from Hell" in an obviously figurative sense might also be "surveillance from Hell" far more literally speaking, but such intelligence as this does not help one enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The devils each and every one are on a leash, and as thy priest hath said many times, *every thing that happeneth to us is either a blessing from God, or a temptation that God hath allowed for our strengthening*. Wherefore whether the devils have more information than in ages past, thou wert still best to live:

Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.

Song VIII.

A Hymn to Arrogance.

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,
'There be no war in Heaven,
Not now, at very least,

And not ere were created,
The royal race of mankind.
Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,
And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.
There were war in Heaven but ever brief,
The Archangel Saint Michael,
Commander of the bodiless hosts,
Said but his name, "Michael,"
Which is, being interpreted,
"Who is like God?"
With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,
Sore losers one and all.
They remain to sharpen the faithful,
God useth them to train and make strength.
[Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?](#)
[Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?](#)
[As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up,](#)
[Or as if the staff should lift up itself,](#)
[As if it were no wood.](#)
Therefore be not dismayed,
If one book of Holy Scripture state,
That the Devil incited King David to a census,
And another sayeth that God did so,
For God permitted it to happen by the Devil,
As he that heweth lifteth an axe,
And God gave to David a second opportunity,
In the holy words of Joab.
Think thou not that God and the Devil are equal,
Learnest thou enough of doctrine,
To know that God is greater than can be thought,
And hath neither equal nor opposite,
The Devil is if anything the opposite,
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,
Though truth be told,
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,
The Devil fared him not well.
The dragon wert as a little boy,

Standing outside an Emperor's palace,
Shooting spitwads with a peashooter,
Because that wert the greatest harm,
That he saweth how to do.
The Orthodox Church knoweth well enough,
'The feeble audacity of the demons.'
Read thou well how the Devil crowned St. Job,
The Devil and the devils aren't much,
Without the divine permission,
And truth be told,
Ain't much with it either:
God alloweth temptations to strengthen;
St. Job the Much-Suffering emerged in triumph.
A novice told of an odd clatter in a courtyard,
Asked the Abbot what he should do:
"It is just the demons.
Pay it no mind," came the answer.
Every devil is on a leash,
And the devout are immune to magic.
Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder:
The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.
The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
Wherefore be thou not arrogant towards men,
But be ever more arrogant towards devils and the Devil himself:
"Blow, and spit on him."

VIII.

I told St. John, ‘I have just read the panikhida service, and it appeareth cut from the same cloth as the divine services in general.’

He said, ‘Doth that surprise thee?’

I said, ‘Perhaps it should not. But the [Philokalia](#) describes a contrast between life and death: for instance, in the image of an inn, where lodgers come for a night, bearing whatever they possess; some sleep on beds, some sleep on the floor, but come daybreak, all of them pick up their belongings and walk on hence.’

He said, ‘How readest thou that parable?’

I said, ‘In this life, some live in riches, and some in poverty, but all alike leave this life carrying only their deeds with them. The last English homily I heard, the priest quoted someone who said, “I have never seen a trailer attached to a hearse.” Which were, “You can’t take it with you,” save that terrifying tale of a monk who died with over a hundred gold pieces. (’Twas said he was not avaricious, but merely stingy.) When he died, the community discussed what to do with his nigh incalculable sum of wealth: some suggested a building or other capital project, others some kindness to the poor. And when all was discussed, *they buried all the gold with him*, a costly, potent reminder to monastics that they should not want to be buried with even one gold piece. But the monk could not take the gold with him ere it were buried with him.’

The Saint told me, ‘Thou hast read part of [Prayers by the Lake](#), in which St. Nikolai says that birth and death are an inch apart, but the ticker tape goes on forever.

‘Rememberest thou also that in the [Philokalia](#) we read that those who wish one suffering to die were like one holding a deeply confused hope hope that a doctor would break up the bed of a sick man? For our passions we take with us beyond death, which passions the body mediateth to some degree.’

I said, ‘May I comment something? Which soundeth as a boast?’

He said, ‘Speak on.’

I said, ‘I am mindful that I am mortal, and that I am the chief of sinners. But the day of my death be more real to me than my salvation, and that I be the chief of sinners eclipseth that God be merciful. I have needed the reminder of the core promise in [For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.](#) Thus there be twain of deep pairs, and I have of the twain grasped each one the lesser alone.’

He said, ‘Hast thou not been astonished at God’s perfect Providence of years betimes?’

I said, ‘Yes.’

He said, ‘What thou sayest resoundeth not as boasting in my ears, but many people have wished for the remembrance of death and not reached it, no, not in monasticism even.’

I asked, ‘Will I reach monasticism?’

He smiled at me, and said, ‘Whither askest thou the future? It is wondrous.’

He said, ‘Remembrance of death doeth not to drain life. It is a reminder that life is not a dress rehearsal: or rather that it is a dress rehearsal, and *our performance in this rehearsal determineth what we will meet the Resurrection having rehearsed.*

‘With death cometh a realization of, “I shall not pass this wise again.”

‘Such death as we have giveth life a significance eternal in its import. For thou knowest that all ye in the Church Militant stand as it were in an arena before God and His Christ, before all the saints and angels and even devils, as God’s champions summoned to vindicate God as St. Job

the Much-Suffering and others vindicate God. And whereinever thou triumphest, Christ triumpheth in thee.

‘Knowest thou not that the saints who have run the race and be adorned with an imperishable and incorruptible crown stand about all ye, the Church Triumphant cheering on the Church Militant until every last one hath crossed the finish line in triumph?’

‘Knowest thou not that every saint and angel, the Mother of God and Christ enthroned on high, all cheer ye who still run the course, each and every one?’

‘The times preceding the Second Coming of Christ are not only apocalyptic; they are the very thing which giveth the term “apocalyptic” its meaning in thy day. And they be trials and tribulations which perhaps will happen in ages later on, and perhaps may already be begun. But in the end Christ will triumph, and all alike who are faithful. And if thou art alive for the Second Coming of Christ, or if not, God hath provided and will provide a way for thee. Be thou faithful, and remember, “The righteous shall live by his faith.”’

I said, ‘I should like to know where God will lead me. I can guess promises of good, but I am happier at least leaving a vessel open for God to fill.’

The Saint’s face began to glow, and he said, ‘In my day, I said something you may have met in the Reformers: that the age of miracles was no more, or in crasser tongue, “God wrote the book and retired.” So I called “opening the eyes of the blind” to be cleansing eyes from lust, which wert a fair claim in any case, and in particular if there miracles are no more. Thou, it seemeth, art in another age of miracles, or perhaps the age of miracles has never stopped from before the Nativity of Christ, but hath merely hid from time to time. Thou knowest thyself not to be the Orthodox Church’s fourth Theologian, but thou hast known some beginnings of theology already, and hath seen more miracles in thine earthly pilgrimage than have I. I perchance engaged in rhetorical discourse about God, and never on earth saw the Uncreated Light. Thou hast seen icons like and thou hast also seen a photograph of inside an altar, where notes and candles glewed purest white, and unlike mine own

and, where pain and chance glowed purest white, and unlike mine own self, thou hast been anointed with more than one miraculous oil, dear Christos...'

Then he bowed deeply, and prostrated himself before me, and his face glowed brightly, brightly, ten thousand times brighter than the sun and yet hurt not my mortal eyes, and he asked of me, 'Friend, wherewith askest thou the future? It is wondrous.'

Then there was a scintillating flash of light, beyond intense, and the Saint was gone.

I broke down and wept until I realized I was the happiest I had ever been in my life.