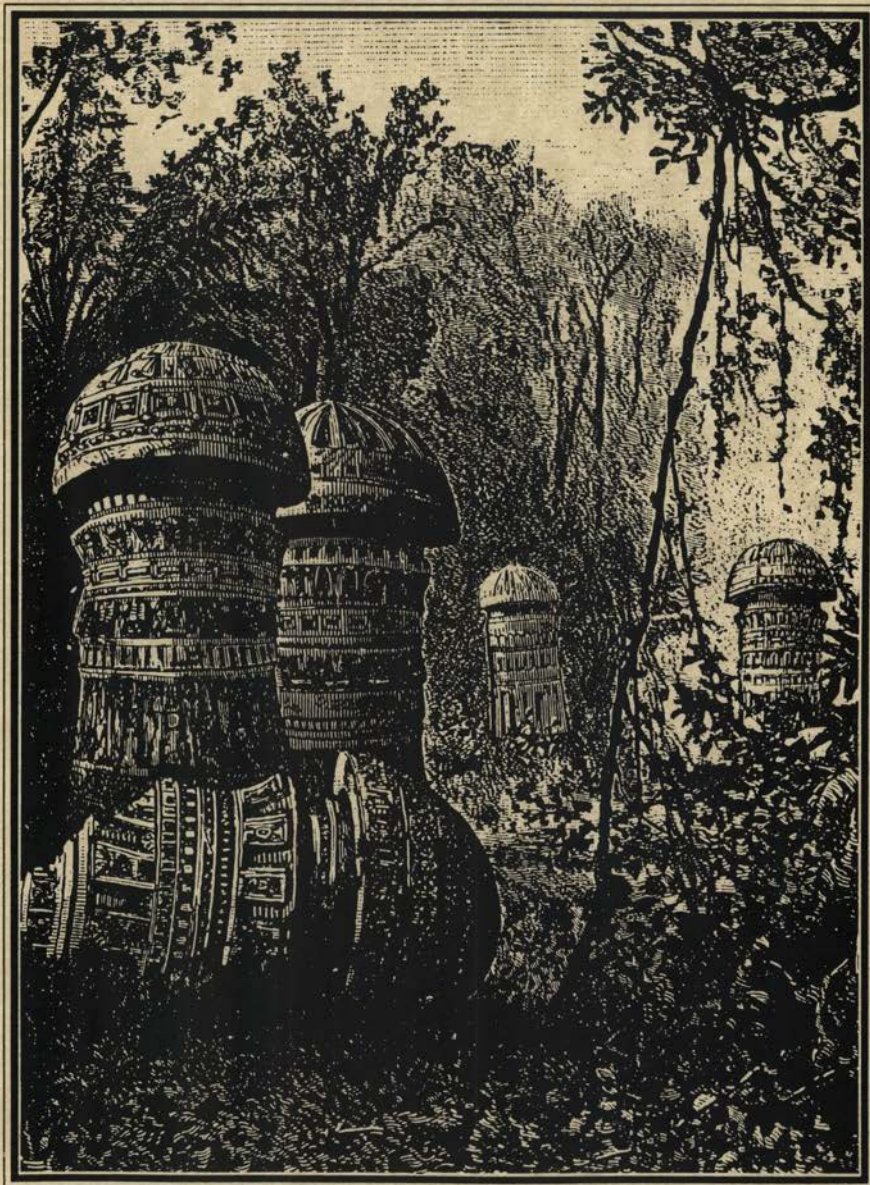


# FUGUE

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First off, some niggling details.

We've switched the magazine to a market standard 9-point Bookman font. Hopefully, this will provide a more comfortable read for all of you as this typeset is wider in character and more easily caught with the eye.

This will be the last "Summer" issue, at least until we feel we can tackle such again. I'm afraid response in submissions was far too low to do another Summer issue. We will go to printing two issues a year, at the end of Spring and Fall semester, and will fatten those issues up. If you presently have a subscription to the magazine, do not be concerned; your subscription for three issues will be fulfilled.

The new subscription rate will be the base of \$3.00 per issue, for as many issues as you wish to receive, and that includes all shipping costs.

And now I'd like to pull your attention to something in our current world affairs and—as all editors eventually do with one or more editorials—express an opinion as if I really knew what I was talking about. Those of you who don't have a need to snicker at my rants and raves can skip this part.

Has anyone noticed the new wave of victory optimism in the country today? Has anyone else puked all over their carpet just one too many times? I'm as relieved as the next person that the latest in a never-ending chain of Mid-East crises, one in which we literally buried ourselves as a country, is finally over and our people have come home. Most of them. They deserve peace, a return to life, and our welcoming arms. But there is something wrong with the current outlook.

I don't pretend to know all the facts. No one does, no one ever will, and anyone who says they do is a guaranteed bullshit artist. What I do know is that I've seen too much: minted coins, stamps, medals, video-tapes (you too can now have "The War" in your very

own home), t-shirts, bumper stickers, etc.

Sounds like multi-media coverage of an international prize fight, not a war where we obliterated thousands of lives (a kill ratio of 1000/1 or more), laid waste to a country whose major civilian populace didn't really want a war (don't believe the hype piped into your vid) and then abandoned the indigenous forces our own government encouraged to take revolutionary action (until the news coverage forced Mr. Bush to send help.)

We're supposed to be celebrating the return of family and friends from the enactment of mankind's greatest horror—war. Personally, I have heard few soldiers who, having been involved in the conflict, glory in the victory. They are just happy to have survived and come home. So what has happened to the civilian mentality represented by the media and the commercial sector of society?

*Weapons are instruments of fear.  
They are not the tools of the wise.  
They are used only when there is no  
other choice.  
Peace and quiet are dear to the wise  
heart,  
And victory no cause for rejoicing.  
Rejoice in victory, and you delight in  
killing...  
...In happy times, preference is given  
to the left,  
In sad times to the right.  
In the army, the second in command  
stands on the left,  
The first in command on the right;  
And so, War is conducted like a  
funeral.  
The slaughter of multitudes should  
be mourned with great sorrow,  
A victory celebrated with a  
Funeral Rite.  
—Laotse, The Tao Te Ching, 31*

—J.C. Hendee



# CLASSICAL CONDITIONING

Serena Poovey Mackey

**P**atrice took the stairs by twos, her cotton blouse half unbuttoned by the time she pushed the bedroom door open quietly, knowing it squeaked at three baseboards away from the wall. Her shirt was off before Chris stirred from his heavy sleep. She wound the blouse around her hands, forcing it into a tight ball in an attempt to disguise the smell, and further cloaked her secret by shoving it in the direct middle of the hamper between last week's laundry and the most recent shirts and underwear. He didn't wake, at least not enough to remember kissing her clumsily, pressing his bottom lip against her nose.

The morning espresso, however, woke him sharply when he heard the high whine of the milk steamer thrust up the stairs and under the door. It must be Saturday, he confirmed as he sat up in the king-sized, pillow infested bed. Always cappucino on the weekends. The stairs came into focus slowly as he tied his robe in a loose knot on his way into the kitchen, straight dark hair leaning all directions from the soft force of the pillows. Patrice provided a shocking contrast with her short

blonde hair carefully brushed and teased, somehow remaining in place without the aid of hairspray. Her freshly mascaraed eyes boasted an early shower and a rehearsal the night before that must have gone well. She always woke early when practice was successful and slept late when there had been arguments or musicians hadn't been prepared.

"Morning Pat," Chris managed with a squint against the morning sun.

"Good Morning, honey," she replied with the habit of six years' marriage. The words and inflections were always the same. Mondays, Tuesdays, even Saturdays, morning was a time for ritual.

"Surprised to see you up early." His eyes finally focused on her slim white leggings and pink oversized t-shirt.

"Why, honey?" She spoke clearly, although she never looked him in the eyes.

"Well, I thought rehearsal went bad. You must have come in late. I fell asleep."

"We finally had things going well last night and decided to practice while everyone was in synch. The concert's in a week." Her

hands flew with deftness from the demitasse cup to the mug, pouring milk and shaking cinnamon.

She handed him the cup with red and gold music notes, the insignia of the Austin Symphony.

"This'll help you wake up. I want to hear about the research. Seems I've been at rehearsal so much lately I hardly know how it's going. Did Dr. Stites give you full permission?" The subject change came easily this morning.

"Stites. Yeah, over a week ago. Said everything would be fine. He even gave the research a title. Calls it Sensori-Memory-Retainment-something or other. Sounds okay, I guess. He must need something technical for the paper work. I don't care what he calls it, as long as the grant lasts until I finish."

She unlatched the closures on her cello case and pulled the oil cloth out of her bag. Saturdays were also cleaning days. Chris cleaned the bathroom and Patrice cleaned her instrument. Maybe things will be done by noon, Chris thought, and we can go for a ride later.

"Oh, you'll do fine dear." Patrice's cooing brought him back to the startling white linoleum of the kitchen. She continued, "Do you have enough participants?"

"We put a sign up in the department. I think we can get enough people that way. Psych majors get extra credit for volunteering." The cappucino was too hot for his waking senses and he placed it on the counter to cool. Mozart whistled softly in the background, reminding him of the research, the grant the entire project.

The idea was bizarre, he agreed, but once enough professors saw some logic and genius behind the senility they finally

supported him. Psychologists should be studying these forgotten fields, he had told them, we are too concerned with things that only affect a minute few in the population. Chris wanted to explore something that applied to everyone. He always knew music was an important element in everyone's life. Whatever people loved and grew up with would influence the rest of their lives. So they had given him the grant, allowing him to study how music and particular songs affected individuals in later life. Like hearing songs from the "Grease" soundtrack and remembering, ironically, a drunken sexual encounter.

One girl left the testing room crying after he had played "Sunrise, Sunset" from *Fiddler on the Roof*. She came to his office later that week seeking counsel rather than extra credit. "I've repressed it all these years," she explained as she held out a faded clipping from the Austin paper describing a four-car pile-up on black ice. Her parents were the only fatalities.

Everyone remembers things with music they forget otherwise. The subjects he studied to establish a base line for the research had proved this already. He wondered if more people cooked dinner to Beethoven or The Carpenters as Patrice pushed the mug towards him.

"Drink up," she smiled, eager and bouncing, wanting to get through the morning. Chris looked at the cello, seeing its beauty with a strange sense of resentment.

"That thing is a pain. Can't you pay someone to do all that?" He loved her music, but sometimes the whole thing was a bit obsessive, and it didn't bring in enough

money to deserve obsession.

"Oh, I have to hurry this morning, hon. I have professional rehearsal at noon. Stage and lights." If her chin had eyes the couple would be looking at each other, but even though her head was inclined towards him her eyes were on the oil jar resting on a bar stool where her cello leaned.

"Rehearsal? On Saturday? God, Pat, Friday nights are bad enough." He was finally awake enough to feel annoyed.

"A week, Chris, I said the concert is in a week. It's going to be recorded. We all have to be there." She rubbed her frustration into the wood methodically, like an expectant mother soothing a kicking fetus.

"Well, maybe tomorrow we can ride." Now the cappuccino was too cold, and microwaved it would be worse.

"Yes. Okay? Tomorrow is supposed to be warmer anyway. We'll go tomorrow. The horses won't mind."

But Chris minded. More than he would ever tell her, or perhaps admit to himself. He minded. But the disappointment hid behind a weak smile as she continued rubbing. Maybe today I will go listen, he thought. The atmosphere of a professional practice left him feeling powerful, energetic. We'll go for dinner afterwards. He smiled now, excited for a new, unexpected afternoon.

**H**e could not focus when he entered the auditorium. The sun was brighter than he expected, forcing his pupils to expand fully to find the edge of the chairs. He slid into the back row before his eyes adjusted to the dim light. Bright lights reflected off the

backs of empty metal chairs on the stage yards below. They must be in the back on a break, he thought. But then he noticed out of the entire symphony setting only a cello and a violin rested on the darkly wooded stage. White pages of music showed through the cracks of two music stands and as the inch of skin between his eyebrows wrinkled, relaxed, then wrinkled again, two shallow voices echoed from behind the heavy blue curtain.

Patrice's white tights were clear in the piercing lights as she walked onto the stage, followed by a laughing man in khaki slacks and an emerald green turtleneck. It's too warm for a turtleneck, Chris thought.

He recognized the face from Patrice's concert program printed the week before. Deckland was the featured soloist, moving up from years as a member of the Austin Symphony to become spotlighted in public and featured on the first album. Her laughter soothed Chris, but Deckland's deep chuckle cooled him suddenly, uncomfortably, like streams of cold water jetting into a warm swimming pool. They sat in front of their respective instruments adjusting papers as Chris finally noticed they were only two.

His questioning continued when they started to play. The crescendos allowed Chris' anger and confusion at her lies to surface, but when the music softened he was sure Patrice could explain later, and that she must be helping Deckland rehearse for the concert. Or maybe, he thought, this piece is a surprise for me. She didn't tell me about it because the fact that she is being honored is a secret until the concert. He felt



strangely guilty as the last chord resolved, inwardly glad the bright lights on the stage prevented her from seeing him. He didn't want to ruin her surprise.

The musicians put down their instruments and turned toward each other, bonded in the accomplishment of a solid performance.

"You crafted that piece wonderfully," she told Deckland. "Compose more."

"You inspired me," he responded, allowing her carefully cocked head to charm him. With one hand on his violin, Deckland smiled at Patrice. With one hand on her thigh, Deckland smashed his lips tightly into hers. Chris saw through transparent cheeks, watching their tongues twist wetly around each other. He sat quietly, hearing Elvis' "Love Me Tender," and seeing Janice, his high school sweetheart, kissing Billy Thomas behind the gym.

**T**he concert sold out. Patrice did not surprise Chris, although she and Deckland played the duet after intermission. KXGN, the classical radio station, promised to air the concert continually, until another station picked it up and gave it air time. But Chris gave it more time than any station could, especially the duet. He played the whole concert at strange intervals during the following weeks, but Patrice's piece was especially saved

Friday nights, when she came home from rehearsal, he had the cassette perfectly wound so only brief seconds passed between the time he pushed play and the first single note of the violin. Lit candles surrounded the bedroom, even scenting the corner where the laundry hamper stood. Every Fri-

day Patrice pushed the door open three boards from the wall, blouse nearly to the hamper as Chris started the tape. He slid naked to the edge of the bed, placing his research notebook carefully on the darkened lamp shade. Her blouse always fell short of the intended corner once Chris stood and pulled her to him. The sex repeated, gentle and smooth, ending the way he planned, fiercely close to the end of Deckland's piece. She questioned him only once.

"This is kind of strange, Chris," she said the first week, wanting to shove the blouse deep into the dirty clothes.

"Kind of sexy too, though, don't you think?" he asked with a knowing smile.

Eventually, he played the music without candles, then with a robe on, and finally he feigned sleep with the violin and cello chasing frantically in fugal intercourse.

Patrice began throwing her blouse several inches shy of the laundry hamper, eager to wake Chris, disrobe him, and light the candles. Slowly, Patrice came home earlier on Fridays and after some weeks never went to rehearsal at all, although she and Deckland were approaching their first duo concert. She said she must be entering the stage where women get their sex drive like men do in their late teens. But Chris knew the real reason. Her hormones were not the cause at all during those rehearsals where he knew they must practice the piece Deckland composed. Without fail, sex was great on Fridays. ○

# A GUIDED TOUR

Ron McFarland

**B**y the time we got to the Recoleta district of Buenos Aires that afternoon, the tour had entered its third hour, and most of us were tired of it and eager to get on with our individual modes of decadence. "It's going to rain," I drawled, yawning with what I supposed was a Parisian ennui. Art said he wanted "mas cerveza," and Bob was gabbling on about how we should save our energy for La Club. We called him "Disco Bob" after that, but we never did get to La Club. The cover charge and drinks were too high there anyway. I repeated about the rain, but without the yawn this time.

When we got off the bus, we noticed a couple outdoor cafes and one in particular called La Biela, where we had drunk espresso the night before in the vain hope that a trio of beautiful portenas would for some bizarre reason be attracted to three middle-aged American tourists. The portenas flashed by us glamorously on that velvet evening and on deep into the satin night in their short, scoop-necked, tight black dresses, paying about as much attention to us as to the blue-and-white striped umbrellas

over our table. Espresso cost 12,000 Australes apiece, about a buck twenty U.S. Bob observed the Argentine currency was about as much inflated as our egos were deflated.

Then we saw a couple dancing the tango beneath a huge ombu tree, he in black and she in a tight red satin sheath. For some reason I thought of Jorge Luis Borges, but I kept it to myself because my friends were not literary. Art is a contractor and Bob's a lawyer in a small city in Montana. A three-piece band, which included an accordion, turned out respectable music, for all we knew. Our combined knowledge of tango was zip. After one of the numbers, the woman tried to lure Art onto the floor, but Maria, our tour guide, had warned us they would expect to be paid for such attention: 20,000 Australes would be "appropriate." Perhaps "warned" is not quite fair: she informed us. We should enjoy Buenos Aires, she said. "Es muy lindo, the Paris of South America." She was immensely proud of her country and her city, which should probably be the main requisite of all tour guides.

She was also very fond of the word "appropriate." For a cup of espresso or a towel at a restaurant, a tip of 1,000 Australes would usually be appropriate. It would be appropriate to have supper after eight, but it would not be appropriate to go to one of the many nightclubs until after midnight. "Portenos rarely show up before one or two, and then they enjoy themselves until five or six."

Maria rescued Art from the dancer and led us through the elaborate gates to the cemetery, which she obviously regarded as the high point of the City Tour. The tombs or family crypts were those Carrara marble edifices one finds in Roman Catholic cemeteries the world over and in New Orleans, where ostentation belies the simple, honest biology of decay. Such vaults are not really graves but homes for the dead, so it is easy to see why some would regard such a site as a city-within-a-city. The dead, some believe, must be housed sumptuously, at least the worthy dead; for others, a hole in the ground or a quick touch of flame will suffice.

A young woman on the tour burst into tears when she read the maudlin poem on one of the more elaborate tombs, which featured the life-sized statue of a twenty year-old girl of remarkably cliched beauty and her faithful dog, to which the sculptor had imparted greater individuality, an Irish setter, I believe. The girl died wile on her honeymoon in Paris, and her dog, back home in Buenos Aires, predictably enough, howled at the precise instant she was struck by a taxi near the Eiffel Tower.

The young woman on our tour read Spanish well enough to decode the poem; thus, her tears,

which prompted Maria to tell of seeing the girl's father there in the cemetery at various seasons placing flowers on his only (of course) child's tomb. He had himself wept with gratitude to learn that Maria was perpetuating his daughter's memory (I forget her name) in her tours. This brought additional tears from the young woman and from two or three others of our formerly merry crew. How happy we had all been only an hour before at the Boca, a sunny alley where artists rivaling those at Jackson Square in New Orleans exhibit their wares.

No doubt Bob, Art and I would have joined in the lament had our Spanish been up to deciphering the poem. As it was, my two years of high school Spanish, about thirty years in arrears, along with some cognates, came up with the following:

*Beloved . . . and most beautiful  
daughter,  
Star in our heaven . . .  
splendorous (?)  
. . . blue eyes . . .  
Her beloved Bruno (husband or  
dog?) . . .*

*Gods knows why . . . heaven  
Why . . . mercy . . . maiden (?)  
Why our plenteous tears . . .  
Why our dearest one . . . dead.*

*Gone from this world . . .  
Gone from her friends . . .  
Gone from . . .  
But alive in our weeping (?) hearts  
forever!*

Of course that tomb was not the focal point of our visit to the cemetery at Recoleta, the city of the dead, nor was it the majestic military statue of some general form

the mid-nineteenth century whose name I forgot even as I tried to remember it. The object of our visit was the relatively plain, almost austere black marble tomb of Eva Peron. "Around this corner," Maria began, her voice dropping to a reverential hush. "I have something especial and most appropriate to you to see . . ."

But when we got to the site, Maria was alarmed to discover a devotee already in residence, a shrivel of a woman as poor as she was old, clearly neither a tourist nor a resident of the ritzy Recoleta district. It would have been all right if the old "descamisada" ("the shirtless one," as the Perons lovingly and ingratiatingly dubbed the masses) had darted obsequiously away into the shadows, intimidated by this host of gringos, but Maria was not so fortunate. The obstinate old lady held her ground. Indeed, she did not look up from the ground, but stared silently and reverently into it as if she might penetrate into the cellars of the deceased.

She was here first, and her right was greater than ours, and she knew it. In her thin gray fist she held a red rose, the sort that people sell at the sidewalk cafes to young lovers. Twisted into the black iron grillwork on the gate to Evita's tomb were several flowers of varied colors and in various states of decay. Inside, presumably, lay Eva Peron—peasant, actress, dictator's wife, symbol, and as much of a saint as most Argentine peasants will ever know. And despite all the magic of the embalmer's art she has drifted into decay as the archbishop in the Municipal Cathedral near the old Cabildo for some reason has not, even though he shuffled off his

mortal coil sometime in the 1890s.

Or so I presume. The archbishop's body lies in a glass-windowed estate open to the public view in the niche next to that reserved for the elevated coffin of Jose de San Martin, the Liberator himself. There was no way to find out for sure about Evita, though I knew she had been suspended in the public eye for some years after her death, supposedly as beautiful as ever, in a glass room of her own. Perhaps they hoped that her lingering beauty might not simply sustain her memory, but somehow effect her resurrection. To my Protestant eyes the archbishop's ghastly gray-white feet and ankles wrapped in sandals, presumably those in vogue during Christ's day, looked merely ghoulish. Better the distant, cold serenity of San Martin or the mystery of Eva Peron.

It was an odd standoff, and Maria was not one to back down. She proceeded with an oration on the life and works of Eva Peron, on her untimely death, on the bizarre exchange of bodies that brought her back from Spain. I forget the details—body snatching on a scale unmatched since Frankenstein, I gather. "The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." I kept thinking, for which, presumably, it is well to keep the body intact.

All this time the old descamisada glared, quietly prayed and glared. She would not leave, though the rose quivered in her bony fist.

"See," Maria exclaimed, pointing angrily to a piece of the grill where a petal had been snapped from one of the black iron flowers, "see where the grave robbers have taken their souvenirs! In a few years more there will be no gate to

protect her poor body." She stared accusingly at the old woman, as if she knew for a fact that she herself had molested the shrine. But the old woman held her rose stiffly in front of her face as if it were a crucifix suitable for warding off vampires, even the gringo variety. "This sort of behavior," Maria scolded, "is *not* appropriate!"

The old descamisada said nothing, but she lifted her sharp withered chin defiantly. Then she kissed two fingers of her right

hand and touched them firmly to the tomb beside the bronze plaque bearing Eva Peron's profile. Then, slowly and regally, as if consecrating the sacred host, she made the sign of the cross and moved though us. We tourists, silent for the first time that afternoon, parted like the Red Sea. She stuck her rose gently into the grill, just where Maria had complained about the broken ironwork. Appropriately, it began to rain. ○

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### ON THE 8TH DAY

A look through bifocal glass.  
Sunshine through the window  
Across the desks,  
Upon your face which is apple red.  
Constricted by the room,  
We call life.  
The musk of old books arouses.  
Black with gold lettering,  
Hiding secrets so simple  
For a time.  
Until they are opened,  
The labyrinth crossed  
Lush vegetation as a barrier  
Or a garden?  
The book is of paper.  
The paper is of wood.  
The wood is of the tree.  
The tree is of knowledge.

—Seth Platts

**THERE ARE NO FOES**

Leaves stir you  
twisting, playing as a young  
virgin with the staff  
against an unseen foe.

Grow will he into man  
killing without emotion  
but not without feeling.  
The door of feeling emotion  
is lost.

Stumbled upon,  
the door is considered a weakness,  
hidden, guarded.  
Protected from friend and friend alike.

Leaves stir you  
twisting, emotion steps  
twirl, jab, parry, dodge,  
but attacks are a way of avoiding,  
better than the most skillful dodge.

She is the better warrior.  
He has the better bluff.  
The loudest will win in his eyes.  
The quietest in hers.

Here there are no foes.  
Here no one wins.  
All are imaginary, closet characters.

—Tasche Streib

**ALICE**

Girl  
white dress, black polka dots  
Sunday shiny shoes  
lace white socks,  
yellow ribbon in hand.  
She dances around the tree  
wrapping the ribbon around  
never catching, just touching

I seem to be a grasshopper  
watching her  
her looming feet pound and shake the ground  
Don't step on me  
This is my view of happiness

I am a girl in multicolored tatters  
Holes in my boots,  
mud for stockings.  
The ribbon wraps around  
Can't get it loose  
Tied to my pain  
disjointed dance  
I scorn the life of the happy girl and cry.

—Christi Rucker

**DANCING WITH CHRYSANTHEMUMS**

Some revel in difference  
Some sit in sameness  
The different enjoy  
Startling the sitting  
Into standing  
I hardly think I'm different  
solely because I'm dancing in  
chrysanthemums  
Running naked through the daisies  
(sitting in daisies might be as nice)  
Isn't for everyone  
For some sitting  
in a blank white room  
precipitates  
ecstasy

—Christi Rucker



**MOTHER**

Overwhelmed by emotion	I shift
to a utilitarian mode. The pain	I cannot
deal with becomes a nagging mother	I ignore
doing what I know,	I leave

Behind the pain lie fears	I have
of infidelity, incompetence,	I am
capable of all faults.	I try
to believe that they're not real but	I lie

If I do not face these fears	if I
let them run	if I
do not listen, understand my feelings	if I
do not, how can I understand	yours.

—Tasche Streb

# CYBERFUSED

Susan Baumgartner

**B**lackwell watched from the window as the students gathered outside the lab. They were all around five years old now counting from first consciousness. Class of 2141. The curiosity of origin was usually strongest about this time, and each student had won the necessary psychological clearance. Blackwell had double checked the log just this morning.

Cupping her hands around her eyes to block the glare, Blackwell tried to see better. Foolish to think she could pick out thirty-two among the twenty or so identical children, the group of little its—all grey, all bald, all naked, all five-foot-ten—and yet each with its own individual traits. She rubbed at the slightly raised place on her chest and thought of the LED display embedded there, just below the skin. 60. She had been “60” during her own period of it-hood, that time of the artificial pronouns—ti, tir, tis—neutered and identity-less, a grey child blending in with hundreds of grey others. She remembered how most of the adults had always had to check for the identifying LED numbers, but that she and the other children

could recognize each other on sight, often clear across the courtyard/playground. They projected their own personalities. Age was apparent in bodily control, posture, sureness of movement. Temperament came out in body language—assertive, shy, introspective, boisterous. When the time came, the choosing of name and gender and skin color and nationality and work preference had been almost anticlimactic. Not once had she been tempted to join the greys, those knowledge-obsessed individuals who never got around to changing from the regimented equality of childhood. No. She had been born Blackwell, not some LED number, quickly finding her identity in those stuffy British scholars who were her early heroes, settling now into a comfortable academic dowdiness that suited her personality and her work.

Work. She knew she was getting older by this tendency to daydream and to think about the past. Work. The morning’s tour. She focused again on the group of children, watching for those identifying traits she remembered from her own childhood. There, on the

fringes of the group, the one with just the slightest hesitation in its step, the one holding back, was that 32? Blackwell watched closely, but couldn't be sure. Instinctively, she felt sorry for the little one regardless of who it was, alone and obviously anxious about this new experience. But then another of the children came streaking from the direction of the home rooms and headed straight for the isolated child.

Ti drew back for a moment alarmed, but then apparently recognized the hurtling figure as a friend, and tis whole face lifted into a wide smile. Blackwell hugged herself. It was 32. No one smiled quite as completely as that child.

"Spying, Blackwell?"

Startled, Blackwell turned quickly to look into the dark eyes of Sula and blushed a little.

"Which one?" he asked.

"32."

"Oh. 32 is on the tour today?"

Sula paused, and Blackwell saw that he remembered. "I didn't know that. I'm glad you told me. I think."

Blackwell nodded. "I've been watching for the last few months, watching for tis number to come up. It seems too soon though, doesn't it?"

"Yes. The time goes so quickly here." Sula paused again. "Well, everyone's in place. Shall we go and let the little monsters in?"

While Jaideep and Erika processed the "little monsters," passing the wand over each LED to check for psych clearances, Blackwell took her place at the dipping station. She shivered a little. Helping out on these periodic tours for the children was one of the most important aspects of her work. Done right, with delicacy

and sensitivity, it was a moving experience for everyone. But there was always the chance that one of the students wasn't yet ready for such powerful information, and then the whole thing could go very badly. She was almost relieved that it was Sula leading the group today, and that she only had to do the demonstrations and answer any questions Sula directed her way.

Sula clapped his hands. "All right, children. I am Sula. I will be your guide this morning. There are just a few procedures you need to know. First of all, this is a serious place. We're dealing with human life here."

The children all nodded, their faces sliding quickly into the absorbed, serious expressions they reserved for their most challenging studies.

"Much of the equipment is extremely delicate," Sula went on, "so do... not... touch... anything. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Sula," they chorused.

"All right. So who has guessed what we do here?"

Blackwell only half listened to the children's various hypotheses about how they had been created. Mostly she watched 32, who had overcome tis shyness enough to move to the front of the group. 32 gripped the hand of the child who had run to tir, 67. Blackwell was overcome again by the wonder of it, the volatile mixture of adult brilliance and emotional immaturity and rabid hunger for knowledge. Close to a hundred years now of full integration, and still the process seemed like such a miracle, each generation promising more than the previous one.

"Good guesses," Sula complimented them. "Some of you are

very close. So let's not keep it a mystery any longer. Let's begin!"

The children shivered and smiled and nudged each other, twenty sets of slate grey eyes opened wide.

"Now you've already met Erika and Jaideep. The woman up there on that platform is Blackwell. She's been doing this work for almost as long as I have. Would you begin for us, doctor?"

Blackwell smiled at the children and at Sula. An honest slip. They seldom used the honorifics anymore, redundant really since almost everyone now easily reached the Ph.D. level, but it was a nice compliment to Blackwell's skill. "Why don't you step around this big vat below me," she invited the children. "We used to call this the Encephalic Containment and Preservation Chamber, the Easy-Peasy, but now we just call it... the vat."

The children laughed politely.

"It can be a little cloudy from the condensation, but I think you can see through the glass. It's okay to move closer. Anyway, the vat is filled with genetic material from literally thousands of your ancestors. Tissue has been taken from the ancient sperm banks and frozen embryos of the late 1900's and, since about 2050, we've taken contributions from every human alive. After a certain age, you, too, will be asked to contribute cells to this depository. Does anyone know why we have so much *stuff* in here?"

"Too hard to decide what to throw away," 67 volunteered with a wink at 32.

"Anthropological research," someone else offered.

"Diversity."

Blackwell smiled. "In a way

you're all correct. It is dangerous to throw things away, to decide unilaterally that something has no value or is no longer needed. This is a very rich mixture, and we have strived to maintain and increase that richness, since human evolution has always moved most quickly through diversity. Have you learned something about this in your history studies?"

"Royal lineage."

"Marrying within the family."

"Incest."

"The Aryan Nation."

"Weakened bloodlines."

Blackwell held up her hands at the onslaught of answers. She wondered if the time would ever come when the adult teachers wouldn't be able to stay ahead of the learning of their pupils. "Good. Very good. So we try to avoid those problems of inbreeding by allowing infinite possibilities and by including a certain randomness in the process."

Most of the children nodded. A few of them were busy making notes to themselves—kings and queens, incest, Aryan—all the things they'd look up as soon as the tour was over.

"Now, the vat preserves this genetic material in a special solution at a prescribed temperature. When we've finished the overview, those of you who are interested in chemistry or machine design or control systems are welcome to come back here and talk with our scientists. If you look closely, you can see articulated arms moving past the glass. These arms keep the material moving constantly so that we get a good mix.

Blackwell paused as the children bent close to the glass, and waited for the chorus of "I see it" and "There it is" and "Here it

comes" to subside. "When we are informed of the need for a new human...."

"When someone dies?" asked a child directly below her.

"Yes, often when another human dies or gives up consciousness, we begin the process of creating a new life. This place where I am standing is called the dipping platform. This is the first step. We use this method of selection to ensure that we never create a specific human with specific traits, but leave the ultimate combination of genetic tendencies to chance."

"So you're going to make an actual, real person today?" 53 asked, incredulous.

"We're going to begin the process, yes."

"Wow!"

Carefully, Blackwell activated the controls that lowered the mechanical dipping arm down the sterile tube. The translucent, pliable, oddly-shaped container was already attached to the arm. As she lowered the globular container into the vat, the children crowded close and watched it move through the mixture, filling slowly. At a precise weight, the opening sealed itself and the arm lifted the globe out of the vat. The outside surface was rinsed thoroughly with saline solution and the dipping hatch over the vat was resealed.

The children "ooohed" and "aahed" appreciatively as the precious container was moved through the tube to the next step in the process. Erika took over here, but Blackwell followed along. She somehow never got tired of watching these hours of discovery. Erika showed the children how the mixture was slowly brought up to room temperature and how it was nourished. She showed them a

container that held material already out of the dormant state and actively growing. One by one she let them look into the analyzer and explained a little bit about how she and the other geneticists could tell at least something about every bit of genetic material contained in the globe. Only in the rarest cases did they remove anything or attempt to alter it. "I know it seems contradictory to say this, sitting in a laboratory filled with equipment," Erika concluded, "but our whole purpose here really is to create a human as naturally as possible."

From Erika's station they moved on to Jaideep's. Here the material in the globes had reached its potential mass, and at this point, the DNA was injected which ordered the material to specialize into brain cells. The precise process of nurturing continued until the globe contained what many of the children recognized as a human from the brain dissections they had watched or performed in their anatomy classes.

"Blazin'."

"Wow."

"Cool."

Sula led the children on into the viewing chamber for the integration room and, once again, invited Blackwell to take over. With a quick nod, Blackwell entered the integration room and moved to one side of the surgical table. The children gathered close to the glass on the other side, staring at the figure on the table, just like them, grey-skinned, bald, thin, five-foot ten inches tall.

"Is ti sleeping?" one of them whispered, tis voice picked up and channeled through the speakers on Blackwell's side of the glass.

"No," she answered gently.

"This is a body waiting to receive the human consciousness. It was manufactured about one-hundred miles from here at one of the five plants world-wide that create our bodies."

"We are all the same under the skin," the children chanted automatically.

"That's right," Blackwell answered, almost as automatically. "Our ancestors planned wisely when they agreed to standardize our bodies, eliminating inequalities and obsoleting nationalism. Not to mention simplifying maintenance," she added with a smile, then turned back to the table. "Now, this body is almost identical to yours, though it has a few, tiny improvements. Jaideep has already done a complete diagnostic, but I'll show you a few of the things we check before we proceed with the integration."

Blackwell switched on the computer at the base of the enlarged skull and ran through some of the basic tests, watching as the body, robot-like, moved its arms and legs. She activated the LED and projected the complete number on the wall behind her—19274311.

"Did you know your numbers were this long?"

Several of the children shook their heads.

"This would be a mouthful for a name, wouldn't it? That's why we shorten it." She locked in the number 11 for the LED.

"But there already is an 11," someone objected.

"Yes. But it is almost ready to leave, and will soon have a word name. Do you think the two of them will get mixed up?"

"I guess not."

"Sometimes we almost run out of numbers, but we try not to go to three digits. Those are too hard to

say." Blackwell bent back over the body. Moving very slowly, watching the faces of her audience carefully, she opened up the head and showed them the various leads that fed up into the brain cavity, showed them the precise, miniaturized system that saw to the circulation and oxygenation of the brain, showed them the numerous backup systems and vigilant diagnostics that ensured perfect operation of both the biological and synthetic systems of the body.

She closed the head back up, making sure the face was sealed exactly in place, and then paused for several minutes, again focusing on the children. Many of them looked shaken. It was one thing to do a dissection on an adult body, obviously old, and another to see the fragile insides of a body just like their own. Although they'd been aware for years of the way their bodies worked, had been carefully instructed in all the essential maintenance procedures, it was demeaning in a way and frightening to see one of their own kind in such a helpless state.

After the children had recovered, and Erika had joined her in the integration room, Blackwell went on. "Now it is time to join the two systems. Erika will perform the surgery today and I will assist." She paused while they both put on rubber gloves and switched on the special lights that kept the entire area sterile. "Although we won't actually be touching off any of the biological components," she explained, "we do take every precaution just in case. Erika?"

"Yes, I'm ready."

"All right."

"Jaideep pushed in the cart and turned it slightly so that the children could see the globe-in-closed brain in the center. The brain was well-developed, but did not fill the globe completely, because it was a child's brain and would grow as the child grew and learned.

Blackwell cleared his throat. "The tricky part of the integration is to get the brain, which is maintained by the equipment in this cart, into the brain cavity of the body as equally as possible. Erika will have to move very quickly as she makes the interconnects and gets the maintenance systems up and running."

The children nodded, gravely. Some of them were already making the old, biological movements of holding their breaths. Blackwell sensed that she didn't even need to caution them not to ask questions during this most critical phase of the process.

With smooth, skilled strokes, the transfer was made. Erika's thin fingers really did seem to fly, and in less than five minutes, the brain settled into its new home. After much fussing and regulating of the controls, the head was again closed up. The body lay on the table, looking little different than it had been before, but the children remained awe-struck and silent. It was clear that they sensed the importance of what had just happened.

Blackwell smiled at them through the glass, smiled at their sensitivity and their courage. Then she signaled that they should walk on to the next room. After getting rid of her gloves, she joined them, stepping through to their side of the glass.

"...important that Erika stays

and watches over the infant for quite some time before it is settled here in the incubation room," Sula continued. He spread his arms, and again the children crowded toward the glass to see.

Blackwell peered in with them. The incubation room was huge. Currently, it contained thirty-seven new humans. They lay on deep soft pads spread out on the floor, eighteen on one side, nineteen on the other.

"Are these more... bodies?" 71 asked.

"No. Look carefully," Sula urged. "You'll see that they are not."

Again the children and Blackwell pressed close. After a few minutes, as her eyes adjusted to the dim interior, she could see that the infants were moving. Most of them were curled together, spines arched, fists clenched. They yawned, shifted positions, rubbed at their faces, pushed out in random explorations with their feet.

"Why are they on the floor?"

"We want to give them complete freedom of movement," Sula explained. "And this way we don't have to worry about them falling."

The children nodded. They were used to their own recharging times, plugged in and stretched out on the floor of their home rooms.

"So are they sleeping then?" 71 ventured a second guess, still concerned about their physical state.

"In a way. They're waiting to be born."

"To be born?"

"Yes. It's a long slow process and it varies for each individual. After the brain is installed, there is a period where the two systems take time to get to know each other. The computerized body

practices its movements. The brain senses these movements and sends out what we call *feelers*. Over time the *interconnects* form and the two systems integrate. We don't exactly understand how it works. It just happens. The body and the brain are in this sort of dreaming state. They dream each other and grow to understand each other."

"And then what?" 67 demanded.

Sula inclined his head to Blackwell. Blackwell swallowed and nodded. The children gathered around her, eyes wide.

"And then there is a mysterious moment when the two systems become one. It really does just.. happen. The computer nurtures and supports the brain. The brain recognizes and accepts the computer. And then the child simply... wakes up. One minute it is a non-person just lying there and the next minute it comes alive." Blackwell felt the magic of that moment flowing into her words. "That is the way we all begin. That is the first conscious step of this adventure we're having, discovering all the facets of ourselves, all the things that interest us and lead us to our place in the world. It is one of the most wonderful moments we ever...."

Blackwell stopped short, turning instinctively to face 32. The child stared at her with unseeing eyes. Slowly tis hands moved up to tis face. Ti started trembling all over. The other children stepped back, frightened. Blackwell tried to push past them to get to 32, but by the time she could get close, 32's eyes had rolled back in tis head and ti was falling backwards. The impact, even on the cushioned floor, was dreadful. 32's limbs

twitched. Ti was going into full seizure.

Blackwell sank down beside 32 and tried to pull tir close. "It's all right, 32. It's going to be all right." Blackwell was hardly aware of the other staff members clustering around her. She focused completely on 32.

"Has ti gone into fugue state?"

"Should we initiate computer override?"

"Call in the emergency technicians?"

Blackwell looked up for just a moment. "The child is afraid," she interrupted loudly, her own guilt coming out as anger. "Ti's afraid."

They all stared at her. Only Sula, who remembered, nodded his head.

"32 is afraid and alone," Blackwell repeated, more quietly this time. "Ti needs to be held and comforted."

Again, Blackwell bent close around 32. She sensed Sula beside her, helping to draw 32's knees up into tis chest and then gently holding them there. The child, 67, inched closer and crouched down. Ti put out tis hand to stroke 32's shoulder. Then the other children, one by one, gathered around 32 and touched tir, murmuring their concern.

It took ten full, long minutes for the spasms to subside. Blackwell continued to pour out her feelings of love for the child, and felt that same love and concern flowing out from all the others until it enveloped 32 like a blanket. She felt the tremors in the child's limbs slowly ease, watched as 32 pulled tis hands away from tis head, as though it no longer hurt so badly. The pinched features of the face relaxed, the jaw unclenched. At



last, 32 allowed himself to pass into the fugue state, the mind disconnected all of the children had learned before they were a year old, the drifting state they'd been taught to go into if they were damaged in any way or when they felt something unusual happening with the computer. It was the ultimate back-up system. If anything bad happened, the body would fight to the death to save the brain, shutting down all systems except the brain maintenance to conserve power. Meanwhile, the mind floated free to cut energy requirements and to avoid the negative sensations that, remembered later, could badly traumatize it. Under most situations, brain integrity could be maintained for a full twenty-four hours.

Sula helped to catch the full weight of the child, and then assisted Blackwell as she curled 32's inert body into a fetal position on the floor. Jaideep knelt to run a quick diagnostic and a brain scan.

"Some minor damage. Peripheral wiring. Brain waves are still agitated, but they're within normal range."

"Thank you," Blackwell breathed, thanking some person or some power other than Jaideep.

"Shall we get him into the infirmary."

Blackwell shook her head. "No. Not yet. Let me just stay with him a while longer."

She knelt back down beside the child, concentrating on him, only half aware of Sula as he drew the children to the other end of the viewing corridor and urged them to sit cross-legged on the floor.

"32 will be fine," Sula announced, his voice calm and reassuring. "This happens sometimes,

a bad reaction. You have all learned so much this morning, and sometimes that knowledge can be a little overwhelming. Also, 32 had a few problems on his first awakening, and that has made this more difficult for him.

"But you're sure 32 will be all right?" 67 demanded.

"Yes. We'll leave him here with Dr. Blackwell until he feels better. We'll talk a little more about it this afternoon, so you'll know how 32 will want to be treated when you see him again. Okay?"

"Okay," the children muttered.

"Why don't we go on now to the infant rooms, the home rooms with the closed doors, so you can see how the little ones learn. I bet not one of you can remember back that far or believe that you used to be like that."

Sula motioned the children on ahead of him, and then paused in the doorway. He raised one eyebrow and Blackwell lifted her shoulders. He made a movement to signal for one of the other staff members, but Blackwell shook her head. "It's better, I think, not to move him right away. I think the child will come out of it himself if we just wait quietly here."

"All right. Call Jaideep or me if you need any help."

"I will."

Blackwell looked down at the small, expressionless face. Gently, she stroked the child's cheek with her hand.

"Oh, little 32," she murmured, "I'm so sorry. This should never have happened. I should have been watching. I shouldn't have let you fall. Somehow I'm just never able to get to you in time, am I?" Then she settled herself on the floor to wait, remembering how it had all begun.

**A**larms going off everywhere. In her seven years at the lab, Blackwell had never heard so many alarms at once. Instinctively, she ran toward the incubation room, met Jacinth running the other way.

"What is it? What's wrong?"

"One of the infants, I think." Jacinth said, grasping Blackwell's hand. "I think it woke up and no one was there and now something's really wrong. I didn't know what to do."

Blackwell pushed past her, running as fast as she could, the dull thudding of other feet right behind her. "Which one, which one?" she shouted as she stood in the center of the dimly-lit room, faced with nearly twenty identical infants.

"32," Jacinth shouted, hurrying to catch up to her, pointing out a sprawling infant near the center on the right side.

Blackwell reached the infant and knelt down on the floor beside it. Something was indeed wrong. The child was trembling all over. Its limbs were extended and almost spastic with tension.

"What is it?"

"What happened?"

"What should we do?"

Blackwell gripped the child's shoulder, feeling helpless. There was a careful, transitional procedure they always followed for this first awakening. It wasn't supposed to happen this way.

Someone switched on the light.

Instantly, the child's eyes flew open, a grey-black look of anguish and terror. It seemed to be drowning in its own fear and pain.

"Turn that off," Blackwell continued. "We've got to shut that down."

32 shrieked, rubbing at its

ears.

"The internal alarm," Blackwell continued. "We've got to shut that down."

"Waaaah, waaaah, waaaah..." 32 protested, as though trying to push the hurting sound back out.

Making things up as she went along, Blackwell tried to bring 32's environment back to the way it had been, back to the nearly sensationless floating of its pre-conscious period. Lights off. Internal alarm silenced. The soft covering of a blanket to lend a sense of containment and security. Blackwell stretched out close to the child and put her hand on its chest over the green glowing LED and rubbed in small, even circles. She started humming, and matched the slow stroking to the rhythm of the song. The other staff members, following her lead, offered the child what solace they could. Gradually, 32 quieted. Its limbs stopped trembling. Its face relaxed. For just a moment it opened its eyes and there was a look of relief or gratitude. Then it slid completely into the floating state.

Slowly Blackwell and the rest of the staff pulled their hands away from the blanket-wrapped form. They hovered, waiting to see if the attack would begin again. Then, one by one, they got up from the floor.

"Poor wee tyke," Blackwell said, sliding past an old accent on her way to her present one. "32," she murmured. "I didn't expect this one for another week at least. I hope we haven't traumatized it." She sighed and crouched down again on the floor, her hand on the child's shoulder. "Well, let's see how much we've lost. Sula? Chan?"

The distinguished black

scholar was already stretched out beside 32, checking the leads into the computer at the base of the skull. As Sula moved to his terminal, Chan did the external analysis, looking for obvious signs of damage, working carefully so as not to wake the sleeping newborn.

"Whew!" Chan held up one small clenched hand. "Fried right through the skin."

"Chan!" Blackwell exploded, with Yakovlev, the psychiatrist, right behind her. "We've had consciousness here. Never speak like that even when they're sleeping. They can hear you."

"I'm sorry," Chan whispered. "Sorry. I wasn't thinking."

Blackwell touched his hand. "That's all right. There are a million things we can do wrong here. A million." She sighed and shook her head. "Who knows if we even have any right to be doing this."

An hour later they gathered around the conference table to look over the printouts and diagnostics and x-rays. "Well, it's not as bad as I feared," Blackwell murmured. "A shame though. We should have been watching more carefully."

Yakovlev nodded. "It's so hard to guess when the interconnects will take hold. Especially when it happens so quickly."

"Was it abnormally fast?" Chan asked.

"A little," Blackwell said. "I think it was the sudden consciousness coupled with the initial lack of support that caused the damage. The brain is primitive at this point and knows little outside of fear and discomfort. The biology is always the weakest part of the system..."

"But the most important," Yakovlev added quickly.

"Yes," Blackwell conceded, "the most important. So let's put 32 under and get everything functioning again. I want two people with tir and two people on call at all times. The next time 32 wakes up, ti won't be alone."

And 32 was never alone again, at least not as far as Blackwell could tell. She was especially attentive to the child, though she was not supposed to show any favoritism, watching for manifestations of the early trauma. Unlike most people, she was on six and off two, on six and off two, and then after a month of briefing the team, off for a whole year because her work was so demanding. It was wrenching though, to guide the four or five infants under her supervision through the first few months of growth and then to miss two months and come back and hardly recognize them because they had advanced so much. But that was the way they had designed the program. Important that the caretakers not become not become all-consumed with the infants. Important that the children interact with a variety of adults.

Attachments formed, though. Blackwell knew that. They were still human, after all, and every one of the staff members here had special children they kept track of. And the children found mentors and guides of all ages as they began the lifelong process of building their own families. She, herself, had favorites, but felt the strongest attraction to 32 because she still felt so responsible for what had happened.

She had been present for almost all of 32's first six months. The month following initial consciousness had been the most intense, hovering over 32, a still

helpless creature lying on the soft mat on the floor.

Whenever 32 was awake, ti watched Blackwell with slate gray eyes that loomed huge in the child's face. Those eyes seemed to devour everything they saw, watching and watching as though the entire world could be sucked in through vision alone and the child could know everything at once. Day after day, Blackwell crouched beside 32 and bore the scrutiny of those eyes and did what she could to help the youngster, though careful never, never to push. She touched the child often, reassuring tir with her presence. Often she bundled the entire five-foot ten-inch length of 32 into her arms and rocked the inert and awkward body back and forth, back and forth, to that older rhythm of the heartbeat. She caressed it through the ritual of the pacifier, marveling that it was this ancient, and instinctive hunger that would slowly lead 32 into discovering the whole world. She leaned so close that 32, in spite of tis blurred eyesight, could begin to recognize the pattern of faces. She spoke constantly, letting the sound of words soak into 32's mind, so that eventually ti would have the power of language.

Fortunately, 32 slept often, exhausted by all ti was learning. It was during the sleeping that so much of the magic occurred, the subconscious communication between the two hemispheres of the cerebrum as well as with the computer lodged just below. A hundred years before, no one could ever have imagined how intricate the link-up would become, electrical impulse to electrical impulse, from biological sphere to synthetic and back again. A few

times, Blackwell and the other researchers had used a microcam to film the process. When they slowed the images down, they could still see some separation; the computer, obeying the brain, ran the body, but the interactions were so swift, it might as well have been a single unit. The computer was vigilant, checking the condition of the body, seeing to the careful nourishment of the brain. Meanwhile, the brain worked unencumbered, but still aware of its body and the organs of sense it depended on for information. Waiting and coaching, catching naps when she could, hollow-eyed, Blackwell, along with the rest of the team, watched the miraculous transformations and would not have missed the experience for the world.

After the first month, 32 was moved from the incubator room to tis home room, the living space that would be home for the child until ti completed basic education, chose an identity, and moved on to the first phase of tis productive life. Housing requirements were simple in this century, no kitchen or bathroom or laundry room needed.

Here, in this sunny, open space, movement happened. Rolling over and sitting up and creeping and kneeling and crawling. Crawling lasted a very long time. It was challenging enough for a two foot high infant to pull itself up and stand alone, something quite different for a gangling child almost three times as tall to achieve that precarious balance. But the urge to stand was strong, 32 kept trying in spite of tis apprehension. Pulling up on objects around the edge of the room. Gripping. Swaying. Dizzied by the height. The tricky

balance, much harder than sitting. Many falls. Much wailing. The falls forward, smashing the face. The falls backward, jolting the computer. But finally, standing happened, and the standing was good. But crawling was better. Safer.

Many more days of crawling and watching and listening. 32's face grew animated, trying out all the different combinations of movement. The first smile. The gurgling sounds. The first laugh. Finally there was too much to do and crawling was too slow and walking was essential. More falling, more wailing, but at last it was accomplished, a shambling, hunched over walk, precarious at every turn, but worth it. And after walking, somewhere between five and seven months, it was time for socialization.

Once Blackwell and the others decided 32 was ready, they opened the door hidden in the outer wall of the home room. With a little creak and then a hiss, the wall retracted, revealing the vast, open courtyard, a communal space surrounded by all the other home rooms and shared by all the children. The courtyard was a world unto itself, packed full of wading pools and jungle gyms and sandboxes and open fields and trees.

32's entry into this world followed typical patterns. Hesitant at first, even regressing a little, eventually ti joined the other creatures out there, the strangers who moved freely in the open space, touched each other, hurtled across the ground at impossible speeds and sat together in circles. Within fifteen minutes of 32's apprehensive journey to the sandbox nearest tis home room, the others,

in the universal way of children, had shyly welcomed tir and included tir in their world. Although 32 still made the occasional trips back to tis room to be fussed over and applauded, and to reassure tirsself that entering the wider world didn't mean losing the old comfortable one, that wider world soon claimed most of tis time.

Blackwell was off soon after this momentous day, and when she came back, had a whole new set of infants to nurse through their first months. But she managed to check up on 32. It was a time of firsts for the child. First time to see a rainbow. First time to go wading in a gently undulating pool, to feel the sand sucked away beneath tis feet. First time to run, to think of moving quickly and then find tirsself doing just that, naturally, instinctively. First words, mimicking the older children. Shouting. Laughing. Pushing. Tickling. First emotions—selfishness, stubbornness, joy, anticipation—and the gallons and gallons of tears pumped through for every bump and personal slight and unexpected pain.

And when even all that stimulation was not enough for tis voracious mind, the period of more formal learning began. 32 spent time every day with Max, tis external, companion computer that could answer nearly every one of tis questions—"What's that? What are they doing? How come? How come? Why?"—all those questions that 32's caretakers got tired of answering. Max could log into the nearly infinite library of instructional videos and games and educational programs. It patiently introduced 32 to the mystery of reading, and within days the child was devouring words so compulsively,

ti had to be dragged away for essential maintenance or recharge. Each morning Max informed tir of all the possible activities, group story time, a tour of an old factory, swimming instruction, a project race to weigh twenty different objects in tis own home room, draw up a comparison graph of the results, and be the first one to reach the tag tree in the courtyard.

Avidly, Blackwell followed 32's educational progress, watching tir rush through the required knowledge blocks that must be mastered before ti could go on to the next level and the next. 32 seemed fine—happy, motivated, eager to learn. The majority of the team agreed that it was best not to bring up the incident of 32's first awakening until 32, tirsself, brought it up.

But there were incidents. Though the practice was somewhat frowned upon, Blackwell often read through the child's file. One guide recorded a "morbid curiosity about biological functions," describing an incident in one of his classes. "What is shit?" 32 had asked, innocently enough, but then would not give up tis detailed inquisition even after nearly the entire class was nauseated and begging tir to stop.

Whenever 32 hurt tirsself, the minor bumps and cuts and burns that were a part of growing up, ti was always temporarily paralyzed, apparently by the wail of tis internal warning system. Even after the third or fourth time, the alarm still seemed to surprise 32, and to confuse tis judgment. There was the incident when 32's hand was burned rather badly in the time it took tir to react and drop the heated beaker that was part of a chemistry experiment.

32 had a special aptitude for animals. Whenever ti forgot to log in with Max, and no one was able to find tir, they could almost always trace tir through the pet library. They would usually find tir in one of the adjacent parks, quietly stroking some animal—baby goat, miniature horse, snake, never cats, and most often, a dog, usually the older, quieter ones that most of the children weren't attracted to. This practice was considered a healthy interest, except for the irresponsibility ti showed in slipping away. 32 lived tis life at a frenetic pace, and the time ti spent with the animals seemed a good and soothing thing.

There was the time of tis new friend, 67's, bad fall. 67 was a little younger than 32, and 32 had helped tir enter into courtyard socialization. Since then, they had been inseparable. Playing one day, 67 tried to clear a hurdle the children had built by dismantling one of the swing sets, and tore a huge gash in tis right leg. Caretakers were there instantly, coaching 67 through the required response, calling the other children to witness this most valuable learning experience.

"Don't fugue out yet, 67," Vincent, the child's current caretaker warned.

"But it hurts! It really hurts!"

"I know. How bad does it hurt? Can you feel it but still think?"

"I guess so."

"Then what should you be doing?"

"Visual check?"

Vincent nodded.

"Okay." 67 propped tirsself up against the hurdle and stretched tis leg out. The children murmured with voyeuristic horror. Gingerly, 67 laid over the flap of

skin, exposing the array of wires, some blackened.

"Good," the caretaker whispered. "Now check the core. Is it broken?"

67 peered down into tis leg. "I don't know. I can't see it."

"Do you think you can move your leg?"

"It hurts."

"I know. But does it hurt so much that you can't try to move it?"

"Maybe not."

"You have to think about your situation. Here, there are all kinds of people to help you. But what if you were alone. What would you do then?"

67's eyes brightened, more intrigued now with solving the problem than worrying about tis leg. "Run a diagnostic," ti said. "See how bad it is."

"All right."

So 67 ran a check on tis leg and read out the results, a direct read, tis voice the monotone of the computer. "Electrical and circuitry damage. Possible crack in the core. Thirty-percent impairment. Walking not recommended, but possible if required."

"So?" The other children were all straining to answer, but Vincent held up his hand to silence them.

67 bit tis lip. "I could fugue out and hope that someone comes along. Or I could deactivate the pain circuits and walk to get help... if it wasn't too far."

"Good, very good," Vincent whispered.

At the caretaker's softened tone, 67 relaxed tis own control a little, and several tears leaked past tis eyelids.

"Since we're all here with you, I would suggest you slide into fugue

for a few minutes to rest, and then we'll take you over to the infirmary."

67 nodded. With the confidence of someone who completely trusted the system, 67 closed tis eyes, concentrated, and let tis conscious mind float away to a place where ti couldn't feel anything.

Finger over his lips, Vincent led the children several yards away from 67's still form and had them circle around. "Now, who can tell me why the very last alternative 67 should consider is shutting down his pain circuits?"

"Peter Principle! Peter Principle!" they all cried together, most of them too animated to keep their voices down.

"You're too bright for me today." Vincent winked at the children, sharing in their delight at knowing the answer. "So who wants to tell it?"

A thicket of hands shot up.

"84? How about you?"

84, full of self-importance, growing very close to the time when ti would choose tis identity, took Vincent's place in the center of the circle. Ti cleared tis throat. "As you all know, we are an obsessive people. When we get interested in something, we are very interested. Now once upon a time, when we were first being formed, the designers decided it would be a good idea if people no longer felt pain. So when they built the neuro-nets, they wired the damage monitoring circuits to an audio alarm and figured that would be a good system to keep people safe."

The children stirred in the circle, anticipating the next part of the story.

"Well, one day a young human named Peter was working on a science experiment. His internal

alarm went off. He was *very* interested in his project, but finally the noise of the alarm made him stop and do a quick visual check. Peter didn't see anything wrong, so he did a reset and went back to his work. A minute later, the alarm went off again. Peter ignored the buzzing in his head as long as he could and then, impatiently, he did a second visual check. Nothing. This time he turned the alarm off. Probably a malfunction, he decided. Besides, things were getting interesting with the experiment, lots of smoke and interesting smells. After five minutes, the backup alarm sounded, but by this time things were happening so quickly under the scope, Peter couldn't even be bothered to turn that off. He might still be in the lab working on that experiment if his guide hadn't come in suddenly. She called to Peter, and when he turned to answer her he fell flat on his face."

The children scrunched their faces, waiting for the punchline.

"You see, Peter was so busy with his experiment he didn't notice that he'd left the nitric feed open. All that time, the acid was soaking slowly through his skin and eating away everything inside his leg clear into the core. His body tried to warn him, but he wouldn't listen. And that's why, today, we all have out internal alarms and pain receptors, so we don't force our bodies to go on when they're broken."

The children nodded solemnly at this traditional wisdom, as Vincent praised 84 and moved back to the center of the circle. "So what would have happened to 67 if injuring tis leg didn't actually hurt tir?"

"Ti would have wanted to keep

playing the game."

"Ti would have put off repairs."

"Ti would have made the damage even worse by trying to walk to the infirmary."

Vincent nodded and smiled. "Such wise children. Now let us rouse 67 and carry tir to the infirmary, and if ti doesn't mind, you can stay and see how they repair tis leg."

The whole affair had been a typical one, the kind of accident the caretakers always exploited because it gave them such a good opportunity to show the children the fragility of their own bodies and the need for being careful. Back in the 1900's, paraplegics and quadriplegics had learned the same hard lessons, scrupulously caring for parts of their bodies that they couldn't even feel. And yet the incident had been noted because of 32's reaction. Ti had seemed especially horrified by the injury and empathically involved in 67's pain. Although ti had dutifully accompanied 67 to the infirmary and watched the repairs, ti held back when 67 called to tir for comfort during the sometimes painful process of reassembling the leg. For days after that, 32 was over gentle with 67, even though ti recovered very quickly, mostly disappointed that the proud new patch on tis leg hardly showed at all. And 32 was also over careful of tis own person, refraining from physical activity for almost a week. Tis guides at the time had attributed 32's behavior to an exceptional affection for 67, but when Blackwell read through the report, she saw other factors.

**B**

lackwell shifted her weight. Her own internal alarm was going to go off in a minute if



she stayed in this constricted position much longer. She put her face close to 32's and whispered, "You can come back now, 32. It's safe here. Nothing will hurt you."

Slowly 32 opened his eyes. Ti looked into Blackwell's face, anxious and confused.

"Do you remember what happened?"

32 shook his head.

"I think you do. Why don't you sit up here and think about it for a minute."

Slowly, 32 sat up across from Blackwell. Ti looked around as if trying to orient himself. His hands flew up to cover his face. "I freaked. Oh no. How could I do that? I got so scared I fried through my skin right in front of all my friends." 32 turned away, tears leaking past the charred tips of his fingers.

"32!" Blackwell's voice was stern. "This is no time for emotion."

"But my friends. They were all so disgusted they wouldn't even stay with me."

"They were not disgusted. They wanted to stay. But your recovery took quite some time, so we sent them on." Blackwell reached out and gripped 32's wrist. She hated it, how brutal they had to be sometimes, to teach the children the harsh facts of their existence. "I know you feel badly about what happened, but you must put that aside now and be logical. What are you forgetting?"

32 sniffed and sat up straight again. "The alarm," ti said vaguely. "It's been going for a long time now."

Blackwell nodded. "You are feeling ashamed. Are you going to make it worse by being ignorant and not taking care of yourself?"

32 sighed. "No," ti answered,

shoulders tensed to support the weight of difficult responsibilities.

Blackwell watched as 32 talked himself through the drill.

"Pain levels? Minimal. Diagnostic check? Disruption, overcharge in central interconnect. Damage to peripherals. Skin integrity breached. Ambulatory with care. Immediate repair necessary."

"Good."

32 swallowed. "Will you help me to the infirmary?"

"Yes, of course. Do you want any of your friends?"

"No." They took a few steps together, Blackwell supporting 32. The child stopped suddenly and turned to her. "Why? Why did I freak like that?"

Blackwell could feel the trembling beginning again under 32's skin. "We can talk about that later," she said firmly. "Now you must concentrate on your physical self."

"Yes I understand."

32 was stoic through the examination and the repair work. Ti kept himself conscious though most of it, helping the technicians verify the accuracy of their work. When the procedure was over and there was nothing to show from the ordeal except for a kind of trembling due to the overextensions, and a shininess to the skin in the places it had been replaced, 32 asked to be excused.

"Do you want to rejoin your friends?"

"No."

"Do you want to talk a bit?"

"No."

Blackwell excused 32 then and watched him walk away, body held rigid, fighting against the tremors that threatened to return, building up just below the surface.

She gave the child three hours of privacy, and then checked the log. No sign in with Max. Up to tis old tricks again. So Blackwell finished her shift and made her way to the pet library.

"32? Yes, ti was here. A little unusual for a child that old. No, ti hasn't checked back in yet."

Blackwell strolled through the neighboring parks until she saw a still, grey shape under one of the trees. 32 was there, leaning against the trunk, a shaggy black and white dog sprawled in tis lap, having its stomach rubbed.

"Are you feeling better?"

The child looked up, startled. "Did you follow me?"

"No. Not exactly. I've been wanting to have a talk with you."

32 inclined tis head just slightly, permission to join tir. Ti continued stroking the dog, tis new-skinned fingers sensitive to every touch. "Do I know you?" ti finally asked. "You seem familiar."

"I was one of your caretakers when you were an infant."

"Oh." Ti shrugged. "I can remember that."

"I know."

"Have you always worked at the lab?" 32 asked politely.

"No. I've only been there about thirteen years. I started out in literature and then spent some time on the world charter project. Then I went back to school. This seemed like the most fascinating work there could be."

32 nodded, though ti clearly wasn't interested. Ti focused for a while on stroking the dog. "Shep, he is completely biological, isn't he? He's all one thing and every part of him is alive. Why wasn't he changed, too?"

"They did try, the early scientists, when they were just begin-

ning this whole transition. The animals couldn't handle it. Their brains couldn't adapt."

"But ours can?"

"Yes."

"All of them?"

"Yes. With help. With time."

32 pitched the dog out of tis lap. It whined for a moment, and then moved away. Stretching itself from one end to the other, it grinned with canine contentment and flopped down for a nap. "Shep can eat, too, can't he?"

"We can eat."

32 snorted. Ti went through the motions of inserting the sensory program into tis computer, then dipped an imaginary fork into the hologram meal floating in mid-air. Ti studied the new patches of skin, the textured pattern of tiny woven filaments still clearly visible. Ti looked again at the dog.

Blackwell waited tir out.

"I feel like a freak," 32 said suddenly, pushing tis fists against tis forehead. "I feel like a monster. I'm this machine," ti went on, pounding one thigh with tis fist. "This dead machine that is like a prison. And then this small organic part, this... meat that ages and decays and dies, trapped inside. I can never really feel. I can never really live. Why did they do this to us?"

"You know why."

"Oh yes. They try to make it sound so good. *We are all the same under the skin.*"

Blackwell nodded.

"But why? Why five-foot-ten? Why not six-feet even? Why not five?"

Blackwell shrugged. "Tall enough to be convenient. Not so tall as to be awkward."

"Logical, of course. Everything is so damned logical." 32 dug tis fingers into tis skull as though

wishing to tear it open. "Well, this... meat inside doesn't want logic. It feels. It hungers."

"As it should. You are approaching the time when you will choose your identity."

32 snorted again. "Those pathetic attempts we make to look like human beings. Change the color of the coolant circulating under our skins. Get synthetic hair implants. Choose to be either male or female when all of us are really only neuter. Why should I make myself into a mannequin? At least the greys are honest. At least they choose to look like what they really are."

Blackwell hunched her shoulders under the barrage of 32's words. The child had been brooding about this for a very long time. "We celebrate the diversity of our past," she began lamely. "We nourish our imaginations by giving them free reign."

32 turned away.

Blackwell tried again. "Surely you understand why we have evolved in this way?"

"Of course. They teach those lessons well. Mid 1900's and beyond. Transplants and artificial limbs and artificial organs and people's brains kept alive after their bodies were dead and diminishing food supplies and the fear of pain and the fear of aging and technology will always have the answers."

"Finished?"

"I guess so. That's what the textbooks and the teachers drill into us. Why do you think they did it?"

Blackwell shrugged. "Because they could. I'm afraid we have a long history of doing things simply because we can do them, long before we understand how a process

actually works or what the consequences will be. As you said, they managed to keep a human brain alive outside its body. Things evolved from there. We still don't quite know how it works. We've never been able to separate the pure energy of consciousness from the biological processes that create it, and so we must continue on as a sort of hybrid of living and synthesized matter. And I'm afraid that even if we decided now that this is not a healthy way for humans to live, it is too late to go back."

"Well, it seems like it's healthy for everyone else. No one else freaked today. No one else ever seems to think about it the way I do."

"There could be a reason for that."

"What? What reason?" 32 lunged away from the tree, hands extended, desperate for some answer.

And so Blackwell told 32 the story of tis first awakening, explained how ti had awakened and no one had been there to help tir through those first disoriented moments of consciousness. "I think being in the incubation room again this morning awakened your subconscious memory of what happened there, and the memory was so strong, you relive it."

"And that's the reason I freaked?"

"Probably."

"That's what makes me so weird?"

"That's what may make you perceive things differently," Blackwell corrected gently. "For most of us, there is a very supported, comfortable fusion between our synthetic and biological

selves. I think that most of your friends don't feel the separation as strongly as you do."

"Well, how can I stop feeling it?"

"I'm not sure you want to stop feeling it. Two hundred years is a very short time in terms of evolution. Your special awareness, your sensitivity, could be valuable in many ways. I admit that you carry a burden, but it doesn't have to be a futile one."

"I don't think I can bear it, knowing what it means to be human and knowing that I never will be." 32's whole body shuddered with self-revulsion. "Synthesized speech. Tactile circuitry. Imaging systems. My brain wants real input, human senses."

"But you are human. Human is not arms and legs and blood and stomach acids and excrement. It is what we are up here, our consciousness, that makes us human."

32 started to shake tis head, but Blackwell gripped tis shoulders.

"How do you think you came out of that seizure in the incubator room? Your mind was trying to slide into the fugue state because you were so upset, but you wouldn't let it because you were, you are, too afraid to trust your body. What do you think happened?"

32 shrugged. "I don't know. I fainted, or something."

"No. I held you and all of your friends came close and touched you. Now you can say that it was just machine fingers touching a machine body and that it meant nothing, but they were touching you with their love and you felt that love with your mind and you relaxed into it and let yourself go before your fear could grow strong

enough to tear both sides of your being apart."

32 shook tis head.

You must believe me," Blackwell protested. "Let me show you." She moved over and sat down beside 32 with her back against the tree. She spread her arms. "Now climb into my lap."

"I can't do that. I'm way too big. I'm just as tall as you are."

"You're not too big. You're never too big to be loved." Blackwell half pulled, half dragged 32 onto her lap and wrapped her arms around the child. 32 fought at first and kept tirsself stiff, but Blackwell held on to tir hard for both their lives, until gradually 32 relaxed and snuggled close and curled tirsself as small as possible to fit. Blackwell felt the child's shoulders heave. Tears slid down 32's face and onto Blackwell's hands. "Just water pumped through tiny hydraulics?" she asked. "No. Tears. Human tears. The emotion is yours. The emotion is human. Maybe we can't *feel* the way we used to feel, but that doesn't mean we can't hurt and empathize and experience joy and laugh and love, does it? We are the way we are. We create ourselves every day, the same way humans have always done. We clothe our bodies in humanness with the power of our minds. I love you, little one. I love all of you, every cell and every microcircuit, and you should, too."

And then Blackwell stopped talking because she knew words were not enough and that another language was needed. She stayed under the tree rocking slowly back and forth, held the burden of the great, tall child, felt her strength become the child's strength and knew that 32 would be all right. ○

# THE BUM IN THE CHRISTIAN DIOR SOCKS

Barb Hendee

I loved the way the street in front of Murphey's Pub turned black on rainy nights. I took my time wiping down the front tables just so I could watch that hard spray pounding down past neon lights to explode on the pavement. It rains all the time in Seattle.

The place was nearly dead for a Thursday. I wasn't even sure if my boss Jack planned to come in. A couple of Irish college students from the UW were arguing unintelligibly about the revolution. Oh please. Sometimes I wished Jake would stop serving Guinness Stout so those shitheads would look for a new hang-out. Lately we'd been serving a pretty yuppie crowd. Gag me.

I stepped back behind the bar and was putting some glasses away when the door creaked open.

"Tanqueray Sterling, please."

The voice was warm and familiar. I popped back up.

"Hey, Willie. Where've you been?"

"Get me a drink, dear, and I'll tell you."

He was the weirdest bum I'd ever seen—with taste for imported vodka. I don't know what his real

name was. A few of the guys dubbed him "Moonshine Willie" three years back because of all the French and British booze he ordered. All the other U-district derelicts hung out at Goldy's or dives that served cheap beer and nachos, but not Willie. He always wore the same dirty, torn Pierre Cardin dinner jacket and a John Phillips shirt that had once—long ago—been white.

I don't know how he afforded Jack Murphey's pub. I thought he must scrimp and save and steal and beg for weeks, then stop in for an evening of Tangueray Sterling or Grand Marnier Liqueur, like it was nothing, like it was just something to do.

I pretended right along with him. We'd talk about fashion, films, or art like he was some corporate lawyer slumming. I didn't give him any shit about extended credit because he always paid up sooner or later. Jack growled at me every once in a while when it came time to do the books, but he never told me to stop serving Willie or do anything cold like throw the poor old guy out. Although Jack's reasons weren't exactly charitable.

Willie had become sort of an in-

stitution—a side-show attraction. People liked to see him. The guys would lean back in their chairs and call out, "Hey, Willie. Nice Jacket." Or some pair of big-haired girls in Gucci pumps and tight, Carlos Marquez dresses would sit down and smile, "Buy us a drink, baby?" They especially made me sick because he'd do it. His perfect gentleman illusion couldn't get splattered all over the wall for refusing to buy the ladies a drink. I kept my mouth shut.

Tonight was different, though. Murphey's was quiet, and nobody even noticed the old man in faded Christian Dior socks at the bar.

"Not much going down," I said. "You might want to wait until tomorrow."

The silver beard along his jawline twisted up when he smiled slightly. He kept his facial hair quite neat by fishing disposable razors out of the trash. "No, I think I'll stay." He sipped his drink. "Besides, you just asked me where I've been."

"Yeah, just a second. Let me check on everybody and get myself a beer."

A few minutes later I was sitting on the bar stool next to him hearing about his latest trip to Europe.

"I sat in the courtyard outside the Louve sketching portraits for pennies. They loved me. I couldn't seem to work fast enough for the people standing in line." He paused and his eyebrows knitted. "Then a young girl with red hair walked past, and I thought of you."

Maybe that's why I listened to him. I knew he'd never been to Paris, but he had this weird way of making me feel special. "You did?"

"Yes, and I sent everyone away. I began to work on this."

He reached inside his jacket

and pulled out a tube of paper. I unrolled it curiously. It was a sketch of me, and it was good.

"You drew this?"

"Isn't that what I just told you?"

"Yeah, but..."

Had he been an artist? The sketch was really good—better than any of the street artists I knew. It wasn't finished, but I could see a nearly perfect image of myself depicted in soft lines on the paper.

"Will you finish it?"

"It is finished, my dear. It is far as it will go."

Something in his face made me drop that track, something sad and distant. "Well, here, let me pay you. I love it anyway."

"It's a gift."

I went around the bar to my purse and pulled out two tens. "Don't be stupid. Take this. You earned it."

He pulled the money gently out of my hand. "I haven't been paid for my work in a long time."

Sometimes he slipped in and out of reality. I thought that maybe for the first time he was being totally honest with me.

"Why is that?"

"I can't finish... the colors in my head don't work on the canvas." He chewed slightly at his lower lip. "They'd pay me when I started—the people. But I couldn't bring myself to ruin them with the wrong colors." The room seemed to darken a bit. His eyes dimmed. "I was telling you about Paris."

I let him talk, but I wasn't listening. He had been an artist. I should have figured that much out on my own. Nobody dresses as well as a broke artist, nobody. They all just seemed to have this innate sense about layering their clothes. Dancers run a close second, but

artists will starve themselves for a week just to afford a wool Canali sweater they saw in *GQ*. Willie fit the bill too perfectly. I'd been blind.

He left that night before I closed the place up. I hung the sketch on my apartment wall with lime-green pushpins. The weeks passed and business at Murphey's seem to pick up. I didn't really think about how long it'd been I'd last seen Willie until Jack started doing the books one afternoon.

"That old bum owes the house fifty-four dollars. You've been letting him charge too much."

"If it bugs you that much I'll pay it myself," I snapped. "If those uptown girls would leave him alone he wouldn't have to spend so much."

"That's not my problem. You just tell him to pay up."

I asked a few of the more worldly customers if they'd seen him lately.

"Yeah, he got busted," one of the Irish college students told me.

"He got arrested?"

"Picked some lawyer's pocket and got caught. Judge went pretty easy on him. He wasn't in for very long, but I heard he got cut in the chest. I don't know if it's true."

I walked away. I thought how his John Phillips shirt would have new color besides brown and gray.

Then I tried not to think at all.

Three weeks later Willie walked —stumbled—through the pub's front door. He was coughing and never took one hand off his chest. His hair was matted, and I could tell he hadn't been fishing any razors out of the trash lately. Before I could say anything, Jake looked up and spit, "Hey, your tab's up fifty-four dollars. I hope you came in to pay it."

"Not tonight," Willie whispered. "But I'd like to purchase a drink to help my cough." He pulled seven one dollar bills out of his filthy jacket pocket.

"You been pan-handling again?" Jack growled.

"Leave him alone."

I couldn't stand Jack when he was like this. Then I noticed how bad Willie smelled, like sweating fish. Before long the clientele began to complain. Nobody wanted to make fun of him anymore. He was no longer an attraction.

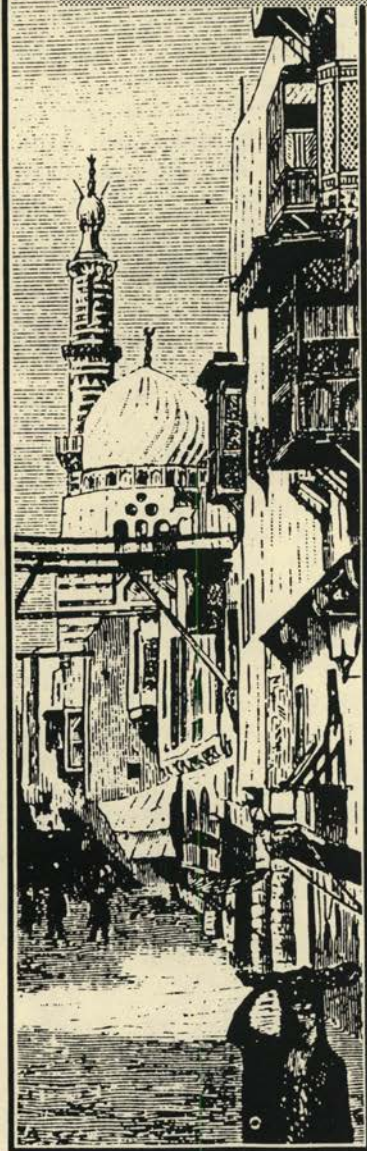
Thirty minutes later, Jack threw him out. "Don't come back until you can pay up."

But I know that was just an excuse. He didn't want Willie in the pub anymore. I know it was an excuse because I looked at the books two days later and noticed that Willie's account had been wiped clean. Jack wrote it off. It no longer existed for us... just like Willie. ○



# WHY I CRY EVERY DAY

John Edward Ames



The last time a toothache kept me awake I made up a bad joke.

A famous critic meets Stephen King at a party. "Mr. King," he declares with heartfelt conviction, "you are an artist of the first rank! Simply superb! Whatever they're paying you, it's not enough!"

Big Steve finishes his Coors, belches up some foam, then winks as he replies, "Yeah, it is."

.....

Who steals *my* purse steals trash. But I can't in good conscience knock The King and other Brand Name writers. Hell, most of them worked hard before they made it to the mountaintop, and besides, they didn't invent Corporate America.

Still, I don't know too many writers who appreciate my little joke. Every year about 40,000 books are published in America. Only about 15% or 6000 of them are fiction. The rest are cookbooks, textbooks, occult, how-to's, etc. This means that millions of fiction writers like me throughout the English-speaking world are annually competing for about 6000 contracts. Who can blame the shell-shocked editors when they hunker down and quote an embattled Abe Lincoln: "There's too many pigs for the tits!"

As if beating those incredible odds isn't tough enough, new writers who do somehow break into print must still survive against the bestseller system with its highly centralized distribution and marketing. This system ensures that most of the publishers' marketing



efforts go toward promoting a few Brand Names. They spend millions annually on hype designed to convince us that the bestsellers are indeed the very best fiction coming down the pike. They are forced to this "high-concept" hype because too often publishers have paid millions in advance for a book that's not even thought up yet, much less written. Naturally some of them turn out disappointing or even downright crappy. I hear other readers and writers echo my feelings over and over: the hype all too often disguises mediocrity and The Same Old Thing.

This obsession with hyping a few megasellers is logical to the MBAs who now dominate publishing. However, it leaves talented but unknown writers in a rum place: The publishers are telling us, "Sure, you're talented. But economically you're an insignificant drop of piss in the cesspool. We will publish your book to fill out our monthly lists, but our promotional machine is geared up to move million-copy bestsellers now jamming our warehouses. It takes too much time and effort to help all you 'sensitive artists' build up the steady but smaller readership you merit. So you'd better quit praying for rain and go seed the clouds." And because a living dog is better than a dead lion, we powerless, wimpy writers say *Ja, mein Herr* as we bend over to assume the position.

I'm not whining, just reporting facts. The decision as to whether or not my next book gets published depends directly on how the previous one sells. The publishers now have direct access to each other's sales departments, and one of the first things they check when considering a manuscript is not its

quality, but the writer's previous sales figures.

This results in some ironic situations. One writer's mediocre book can actually "earn out" because of aggressive marketing savvy, yet you'll search high and low for two readers who really got excited by it. Other writers get their butts nailed to the barn door, financially, yet make avid fans of the few who happen to buy their books.

Desperate situations call for desperate remedies. Starving hacks needn't fold up the tent and go home without a fight. Writers can have no pride when it comes to survival, and they do have some options for fighting the Brand Name Syndrome:

1. *Word of mouth works, so plant your name.*

I go into bookstores and say, "I see you don't have any books by a horror writer named J. Edward Ames. That's a shame. He's good." Bookstore people are always looking for new names to pass on.

2. *Do your own press release.*

A simple, neat, professional bit of P.R. fluff about you and your work may help a busy editor fill a hole on page 12 (for newspapers, include a glossy B&W photo, either 5x7 or 10x12). So far a simple one-page press release has gotten me interviewed in the newspaper, invited to go on local radio, invited to local signings, and even asked to speak for pay at writers' conferences.

3. *Sign your books at local bookstores—signed books sell.*

When my latest novel came out, I visited two-dozen retail outlets that carried the book. I took along neatly printed index cards: OUR COPIES OF DEATH CRYSTAL ARE SIGNED BY NEIGHBORHOOD

AUTHOR J. EDWARD AMES. They all sold. It wasn't just a few more measley sales, it was more word of mouth.

4. *Work the high-school circuit.*

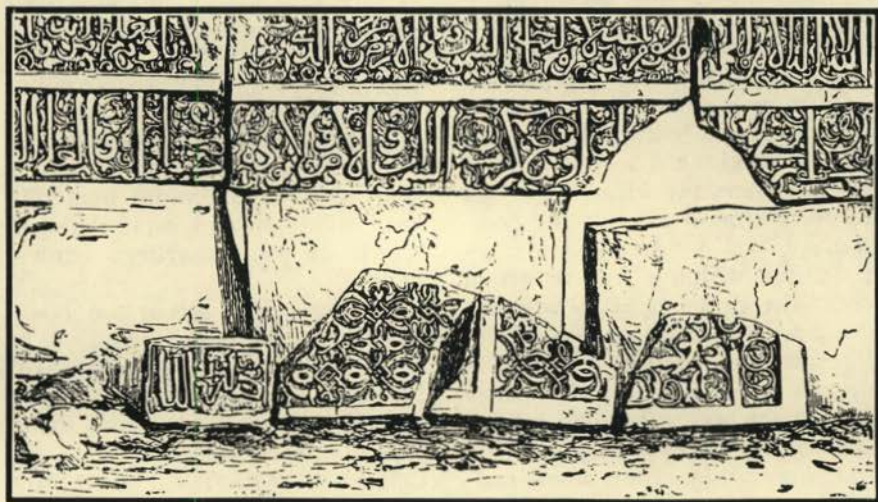
I refuse to corrupt elementary children. But some of my best potential fans are wearing Def Leopard t-shirts and bored to hell by college-prep English. You can contact local schools and offer to speak to a class or two. I take my book covers and pass them around, write my name in big letters on the board, beg them to buy my books. This is America's future—why not make a few of them fans for life?

5. *Make a "high percentage" direct appeal to anyone who knows you.*

All it costs is a postcard. Of course your mother knows your book is out. But it's amazing how many people we personally know, people who may not know about our books: former students & teachers, classmates, fellow workers, Army buddies, apartment managers, hair stylists, anyone who might say, "I know that person!"

**John Edward Ames** is a full-time writer who lives in New Orleans, LA. His fiction has appeared in a number of high circulation and middle-weight publications including *Chic*, *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, *Gallery*, *Colorado-North Review*, *The Penny Dreadful*, *Cavalier*, *Doppelganger*, and he will have a story in the upcoming edition of the mass market anthology *Borderlands*. His non-fiction has appeared in *The Writer*, *The Writer's Handbook*, *Afraid*, *HWA Newsletter*, and *The Final Draft*. He spent 3 years in the Marine Corps as a correspondent, including time in Asia as a stringer for *Pacific Stars & Stripes*.

John has 3 Horror novels in publication: *The Force*, *Death Crystal* (Leisure), and *Spellcaster* (Zebra). Leisure has signed John to write 6 books in the Cheyenne series (Nat. Amer. Westerns) under the pseudonym Jack Slade. Then he'll return to his first love, Horror. ○





# WORKSHOPPING & THE CLOISTERED WRITER

J. C. Hendee



Having spent time around writers in both publishing categories—those involved in “popular” and “literary” press—I’ve been exposed to many philosophies on developing a writing talent. One of the ideals I’ve run across is that of the secluded artist: those individuals who feel it imperative that writers must cloister themselves away to delve the secrets of their art and become the spiritual embodiment of the proper approach to fiction and its craft.

*Bourgeois crap!* Writers write about life and existence, no matter what genre they favor. A hermit knows very little about what’s going on in the world.

This idea of the cloistered writer is perhaps more prominent among the “literary” writers, but I’ve seen writers for the commercial “popular” press fall victim to this same state of mental constipation. Every writer needs a certain level of physical and/or psychological privacy, as does anyone, to get their work done. But there’s a limit.

The “cloistered writer,” hidden away in sanctuary, contemplating the deep meaning of the craft and their work is a fallacy, a fairytale, a hollow romanticized stereotype. It has nothing to do with being a writer. Writers need to be with other writers, with other people, and every successful writer in the business today knows that. And all the up-and-coming and newly established professionals I’ve come in contact with have at one time or another all been

involved with writers' groups. Most often in a workshop environment.

A "workshop" is *any* arrangement of writers who read each other's work and give critiques on how the stories could be improved. Yes, some of you out there have been "workshopping" and didn't consciously recognize it as such. Workshopping is not only good for your development, but also allows you the enjoyment of spending time with others of a similar interest and helps you build a support system for when times get rough and your hope runs a little low. And believe me, such times will occur more than once—they have to all writers. But there are details you must consider to find the *right* workshop environment: parasitic symbiosis & a mutual degree of development.

Writers who critique each other's work are feeding off each other. That is why I call the process *parasitic*. They use each other to further their writing careers by learning where their weak spots are in craft and what they might do to improve, making their work more accessible to a reader. But it must work both ways; both writers must get something of value out of the interaction. If you expect someone to give you a beneficial critique, you must be able to do the same for them. That is why the process must also be *symbiotic*. The process benefits the "host" and the "parasite," critiquer and critiquee, and the two must be able to exchange positions. Any other arrangement is of no value.

*Mutual degree of development* means that the writers involved are at approximately the same stage of the writing game. Some variance is no problem, but highly

advanced writers and beginners are usually not able to establish a symbiosis... and the arrangement becomes *purely* parasitic and detrimental to one or both parties; the give and take becomes one-sided.

In the hope of helping you find a good workshop arrangement for yourself, let me outline some basic definitions that might be useful in your search.

Workshopping can be done many ways: group meetings, by mail, by modem, fax, or phone. For now, we'll concentrate on group meetings. I'm not talking about major workshops you pay for, audition for, etc. And I'm not talking about convention workshops. Both of these are purely critiquing sessions where you are having your work reviewed by someone(s) higher on the developmental ladder of writing. They are not adequate or regular enough for real workshopping.

It is very important that you honestly appraise your skill level and find the appropriate type of workshop in order to gain anything from the experience. You'll find out soon enough whether you have chosen correctly. An inaccurate assessment of your development, which is followed by your choosing the wrong level of workshop, will be obvious when you become lost by critiques above your head or bored with discussions of craft details you've obviously mastered (according to comments from editors). If this happens, it will also indicate another problem you must address: you are not appraising your skill level accurately.

Workshops are broken into 4 categories of writing development: Introductory, Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced. The catego-

ries are defined as follows....

1. *Introductory—for the individual who is just starting.*

This workshop is for individuals who have decided to try writing and have usually published few works, if any. The workshop should have writers interested in a diversity of genres, allowing everyone to gain some exposure to all the possible fields of fiction. Learning something about the areas of reader interest in other genres will help the beginner to learn of new ideas that can be incorporated into his/her own general or genre-specific writing. Writers involved at the Introductory level should concentrate on the basics of plot, character, setting, and technical skills. The 100/200 level writing courses at colleges fall into this category. Recommended projects: conceptualizing, idea development and short stories.

2. *Beginning—for individuals interested in continuing with writing as a vocation or serious avocation.*

This workshop is for those who have begun to sell a few pieces of fiction, probably in the small and middle-weight press, occasionally for cash pay, and are looking to advance and increase their publishing credits. At this point a separation begins between "popular press" and "literary" writers, and the differences between the two fields should be carefully explored by the individual. Writers involved in a workshop should be studying the markets, publishing trends, business and submission etiquette, tone and style, effective methods for eliminating writing problems, editorial processes, and developing their individual information networks. (Current in-

formation is the life and death of all writers!) The 300/400 level writing courses at colleges fall into this category, as do convention workshops. Recommended projects: short stories, vignettes, maybe some novelettes, and possibly formulating a first novel.

3. *Intermediate—for the devoted and already advancing writer.*

This workshop is for individuals who have begun to sell work regularly, with a reasonable number of sales to the middle-weight magazines and maybe a few to prozines and in-house anthologies. Small press sales count for very little at this point, since they count for very little to major editors. This type of workshop should be genre-specific! But not sub-genre exclusive; ie., all fantastic fiction writers, all mystery/suspense, all romance, etc. working in individual workshops. Some 500 level writing courses are in this category, though they lack genre-specification and attendant business information. Some paid workshops also may fall into this category, though they are usually pro-critiquing sessions and not true workshops; most are not worth the money and should be approached with extreme caution. Writers should be working on intensive market research, development of "narrative voice," multi-plot interaction, cross-genre approaches, fiction fads and trends, and furthering editorial and publishing contacts. They should also study the proper formats for partials, synopses, outlines, and proposals... and know the differences between them and why certain editors and publishing houses have their preferences in novel submission format. Anyone who

believes that finishing a novel makes them ready to submit it has not learned enough. Recommended projects: a *saleable* novel, and *anything* that will sell and sell big!

4. Advanced—for *established professionals with multiple and recurring pro-zine and novel sales.*

At this point, anything goes. The writers involved may take whatever path they deem necessary, having comprehension of their art and *the business*. In fact, there probably isn't a need for workshopping, and any gathering will most likely be for socializing with peers, information exchange and net-working. Recommended projects: what you know will sell,

what you think will sell, and what the editors are *asking* you for.

With these guidelines, and a little flexibility in interpretation, anyone should be able to contact and evaluate a particular writing group, and then determine if it is right for them. Once you've found the right one, stick with it! When it comes time to move up the ladder, don't look back.

Different writers will advance through this system at different rates, and there are different levels because people do move on and advance. That is what workshops are for... advancement. Any other purpose means it's not a workshop and shouldn't be bothered with. ○

### HE THINKS

There she sits peeling the label off her beer bottle  
[like usual]

Passing me swift seductive glances  
[and smiling]

Yes, I want her, but I'll sit and act like I don't  
[save it for later]

I really don't know her, you see,

Yet we do walk together  
[and make love]

...What's her favorite color?

...Where was she born?

...What's her middle name?

[it doesn't matter]

Just sit and enjoy myself

Yes I see her looking at me

Yes I want her

[like usual]

save it for later.

—Libby Gray

**AUTOMATIC LOVE**

With no more buttons to push  
What can we do  
No longer automatic  
Unexpected reactions come  
As if we have no say of  
What we want  
Or need to have  
Satisfaction  
No longer guaranteed for  
What is the point to  
Continue on  
The basis of preconceived  
Disappointment when  
There is no logic to  
Such a course  
    and yet  
        we're driven as  
If our thoughts should have  
No legitimate part  
To speak of it  
Requires a  
    thought  
That forever bars the way and  
Leaves us cold and scarred and alone  
In cognition.

—John Clare

AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE

Think it over...

And swallow confusion.

Heaven and Hell have always been  
Inscribed upon our young brains...  
As phosphorous cloud  
As burning sea

Far beyond the sight  
Of open eyes  
Never to be possessed.

When shadow falls across your soul  
And acid tides turn  
What will matter?

Flesh becomes psychotic dream.  
And at the end  
We all beg to sleep again.

—John Clare



*Fugue* is a digest of multi-genre fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. Issues are published at the end of the Fall and Spring semesters at the University of Idaho. Each issue contains vignettes, poetry, stories and commentary chosen to satisfy a wide variety of tastes in literary entertainment. The magazine is staffed entirely by English majors presently attending the University and is funded by the ASUI, the English Dept., and advertising by local merchants. A single issue of *Fugue* is only \$3.00 retail, US funds.

**Submissions:** Use a cover sheet with the following information on it (*no exceptions*): name, address, phone number, *word count* (fiction) or *line count* (poetry), title. Do not put your name on the manuscript. Manuscripts must be typed with one-inch margins on all sides, double-spaced, with title and page number in the upper right corner of each page. Include a #10 SASE with your submission for a response. Make a copy of the manuscript for yourself—the manuscript will not be returned. Submissions should be delivered to: *FUGUE* c/o University of Idaho, English Dept., Brink Hall Rm. 200, Moscow, Idaho 83843. Response time is 12 weeks. No simultaneous, reprint or disk submissions.

**Editorial Process:** Each submission is read by several staff members who critique it, then pass it on to the managing and executive editors for final decisions. All readings are done "blind." Staff readers will not be aware of the identity of the creator. *FUGUE* is looking for a wide range of genres—Mainstream, Experimental, Fantasy, Mystery/Suspense, Metafiction, Historical, Science Fiction, Magical Realism, Horror, Fantasy, Western, Cultural, Speculative, etc. *Fugue* is a showcase for all types of *entertaining* literature.

# GUIDELINES

FOR SUBMISSIONS TO FUGUE

Based upon the overall critique of the staff, material will be chosen for the upcoming issue. In some cases, we may contact a contributor for a re-write, clarification of text, or notification of necessary editorial changes.

**Stories:** These must be complete and concluded, with good characterization and plotting. You must make the reader *feel* without resorting to standard cliché tricks. Endings should have a foundation in the plot and not simply pop out of nowhere. Experimental formats are acceptable, but we do not cater to an elite readership—the story must be comprehensible and enjoyable for anyone. Average word count is 3000 words, but we consider any length up to 7000. Book excerpts, chapters, and serializations will not be considered. Payment: \$10-\$20 according to length.

**Novellettes:** Any story with a length of 7500 words or more. We are twice as critical in this category of literature. The length must be justified by superior content. Payment: \$30.

**Vignettes:** Many of today's published short-short stories are actually vignettes—stylishly rendered scenes/events that emphasize imagery and impression over plot. This type of work is sometimes referred to as "sudden fiction." A mood of "endlessness"—scene carries forward/backward beyond the text—should be maintained. This is perhaps the most difficult type of fiction to write and still maintain as engaging for the reader. Maximum word count is approximately 1000 words. Payment: \$5.

**Poems:** The modern standard is "free verse," but we would like to see a wide range of other forms as

well. We consider all premise and non-premise themes without restriction, from the serious to the utterly whimsical. Payment: \$2-\$5 depending on length and content.

**Non-fiction:** We are looking for well-constructed commentary, articles, essays, reviews, etc., written in a comprehensible style aimed at the public, not at literary peers. All articles, essays, and commentary must relate to *contemporary* works, authors, or issues relating to the writing business, or to a generally well-known, widely read work of literature. The maximum word count is 1000 words, but longer works may be considered if exceptional. Payment: \$5.

**Fugue Staff Submissions:** The staff is allowed to submit work for publication in the magazine. Such submissions will be read "blind," as for any submission, with readers chosen by the executive editor. No special consideration will be given to any submission by a staff member of *Fugue*.

**Final Note:** If you have further questions, write to: Exec. Ed., FUGUE, University of Idaho, English Dept., Brink Hall, Rm. 200, Moscow, Idaho 83843. Include a #10 SASE for response. All queries will be answered within two weeks.

If necessary, for resolving a problem or answering a question not covered herein, you may contact the Executive or Managing Editor locally by phone. Do not call us about the status of your submission—no information concerning the status of any submission will be distributed under any circumstances, except via your SASE after the submission has been fully reviewed by the staff.



