

A PIG IN THE RUMBLE SEAT

and other short stories

by

EDWARD HUJSAK

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“Your book arrived this morning. I went directly to “Lily.” It’s just such a beautiful story.”

Judy Reeves, Author, writing Instructor, University of California

“A Visit With Oliphant - The imagery is fantastic, beautiful! It really makes the reader feel cold (and this reader is in the tropics!) You can hear the sounds described and feel the wan, winter sun. Really poetic.”

Heather Blakemore, Linguist, Translator. Brazil

“The Wall - which in terms of the rendering of the main character’s psychology and the integration of the action, was very finely worked out. The milieu, the motivation, and the action have the kind of unity that the best short stories achieve, and in going back to it, I was struck by how well you convey the protagonist’s agonized self awareness, as in this passage: “It is human nature, I suppose, that a person, driven by emotion, can put rational thought aside and pursue a line of action toward a predetermined objective as if riding on a rail that has no options for an exit or stopping, like the train that struck the Larro family.” I’d been thinking in similar lines, oddly enough, and envied the clarity and the image with which you rendered the idea.”

David Ackley, English Professor, Colby College

“Goodbye Charley - It’s out of this world, and then some. I’m holding my breath for emergence of silicon-based DNA. Great job!”

Joseph Deptula, Buffalo, NY. Retired Rocket Engineer

‘Ed, You are a wonderful story teller. I enjoyed once more the poem about the mocking bird and Joy playing Mozart. And did you really lift a 300 lb pig?’

Professor Will Ogden, Composer, University of California

“Escape - Your story about Shaster and Camile was fascinating. A material halfway between matter and antimatter! I am looking forward to what happens next when they go from .25c to .50c, and more.

William Ketchum, Engineer, San Diego, California

“I enjoyed the eponymous story, “A Pig in the Rumble Seat.” I had a 1934 Model A roadster with a rumble seat which my brother and I bought about 1940, paying \$27 after thinking about it for three weeks. And I enjoyed “The Bird that Did Not Want to Fly.” Enclosing a piece that I wrote for The Zamoro Club on Mark Twain.

Dr. John Carson, Cardiologist, La Jolla, California

“I laughed so hard! You are a remarkable writer. Good luck with the book.”

Edward Curriden, Entrepreneur, San Diego, California

Excerpts from Review The Book:

I absolutely loved this book. I don't have to choose a favorite story, I would be hard pressed to do so. Mr Hujsak has a way with words that gives the reader the impression of being on the scene for each tale. I think we are fortunate indeed, that this talented fellow has chosen to share his stories and memories with all of us. There is truly something for everyone in this book -. Lauri Coates

Edward Hujsak has assembled a collection of stories from his own life as well as a broad range of tales of the 1930's depression in his book. He is laugh out loud funny - a highly intelligent and skillful writer. Articulate and brilliant, Hujsak is a natural communicator with a gift for telling stories that keep you “listening” or in this case, reading. A Pig in the Rumble Seat is excellent entertainment, refreshing, and skillfully packed with a balance of information and story.

Richard R.Blake

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*To Joy, who made so many
allowances for my shortcomings*

GOODBYE CHARLEY

As usual, Ydek was hard at work in his laboratory on the very top floor, where no one, absolutely no one besides himself was allowed to venture. Even his most trusted servant, the ubiquitous traveller Impto, was not allowed beyond the outer quarters where Ydek and Eva resided. Impto was away. Eva was splayed out by herself in the atrium, star bathing.

In this place, outside the known universe, where time, by human standards, elapses according to desire, slowly or in fast forward, the curious observer may watch events unfold over billions of earth years, from the birth of a star, development of its planetary system, to its final demise in a collapse or a brilliant explosion. And who is to say this is not possible, when in the human race, days are languorously slow during youth, while they seemingly pass extremely rapidly with aging? Time is perception. Only the most advanced creatures mull over it and count the seconds, hours, months, years.

In this place an interstitial matrix of plains surrounds a city of

towers. At the center stands the tallest, a full seven kilometers in height, the tower where Ydek labors.

On the outskirts of the enclave, where the fog banks begin, a domed structure broods, a half sphere, obscured at most times by ashimmering plasma that surrounds it. Inside, huge rolling spheres spin in a canted raceway that looks like an enormous ball bearing. At its center, a blackness so deep it reflects no light. Impto passes through it frequently on his errands for Ydek. Ydek himself ventures out occasionally, when curiosity about the progress of his cosmic tinkering overcomes him.

Eva shifted the folds of her elaborate, boneless body this way and that. She found it difficult to acquire a comfortable position. Eva was ovulating again. Such a futile thing, this vestigial curiosity that spewed periodically from her immense body. Until now it had been simply swept up like dust and deposited into the chutes that connect to the incinerators. These millions of minuscule ova had no use whatever. After all, with eternal life, what was the logic behind fostering progeny?

This time, however, a sterile tube led from her body to Ydek's laboratory. Ydek, Eva's eternal mate, had insisted on collecting all the microscopic eggs for a purpose he had not yet disclosed to her. He had only told her that he was working on something important when he inserted the tube. Something important is indeed afoot, Eva thought. She had not seen Ydek so happy since he had created that double helix thing. He'd tried a thousand times before finding what he was searching for. At first it seemed just an interesting exercise in geometry. Then he'd discovered the force that caused the helix to attract nutrients and replicate itself. Ydek theorized that the force had to be everywhere, alongside the weak and strong nuclear

forces, electromagnetic forces and gravity that govern the behavior of the universe. Ydek's discoveries led to the time of the scattering. Eva remembered that Ydek and Impto were gone for unusually long periods of time,

She had watched and worried as they entered the plasma shrouded dome with their cargoes of "seeds" and disappeared through the dark portal on a mission to alter life-friendly planets in the outer cosmos. Ydek had told her of his plans and it had frightened her. It seemed to her that the result could only be an intrusion on the way of life that had been so comfortable for her. She wondered where it would all lead.

Eva heaved a deep sigh. She was certain that Ydek would be leaving her again. For sure, all this industry was leading up to something momentous.

* * *

Ydek had been ambivalent about the initial seeding. There was so much that he did not know. He was quite confident that the "seeds of life," as he called them, were inherently durable and would thrive if positioned in receptive environments. He had already learned that they were likely to mutate to conform in the best way to those environments. But out of a thousand likely receptors, only a half dozen planets, in different solar systems, appeared to have the ideal environments for the seeds to take hold and develop. Ydek named the planets Idi1 through Idi 6. They all orbited stable suns and had surface water. They had atmospheres rich in carbon dioxide. Ydek needed that, because all his double helixes were carbon based. For his invention, photosynthesis, carbon dioxide and oxygen were es-

sential to life.

Ydek soon chose to forget about all but two of the planets. Idi 3 in particular excited him because the seeding had taken hold with prodigious results. Idi 1 was similar, but slower in its development. It held promise of becoming a more benign planet than Idi 3. The others were disappointments, as they showed little sign of accepting the seeding. Ydek decided that they would need some variant of the double helix to kick them off. Maybe a strong silicon component. Some day he would look into it.

Ydek watched the progress on Idi 3 with fascination. He had not expected that land-bound growth would grow roots in search of nutrients, or that the oceans would spawn creatures with mobility. In the after logic, that, of course, should have been expected. He had predicted, though, that the nutrients for land based growth would come largely from the atmosphere, so rich in carbon dioxide. He'd guessed correctly that a tropical climate, plentiful moisture, energy from the sun and limitless carbon, would produce a virulent growth that would spread across all the land masses and would slow down only when the carbon was used up, leaving an atmosphere rich in oxygen. On dying out, it would leave mountains of organic matter that would eventually be covered in this yeasty place by turbulent movement of the land masses. He wasn't sure where this was leading, however. Subjectively, he had hopes that there would appear an end product so advanced that he could communicate productively with it.

Ydek soon came to realize that the sea creatures were oxygen consumers. These mobile life forms captured his attention. He watched them mutate from one form to another. He observed developing food chains, where one species survived by preying upon

another. He watched with interest as some creatures were chased by predators into the shallows, where they evolved to gulp oxygen from the air instead of extracting it from water. He was pleased when some species, driven out of the water, skittered into the shelter of the plant life on the land.

While all this transpired, Ydek's mind was occupied with other thoughts. Eva's wasted ova. He had to find a use for them. He could readily turn them into embryos, but what then? He sensed that the answer lay in what was developing on Idi 3. He would watch more carefully. Eventually, he felt certain, the opportunity would appear without an exhaustive search on his part.

There were setbacks, so severe that at times Ydek believed that the whole experiment was for naught. Idi 3, to say the least, was unstable, with its shifting land masses and proliferation of volcanoes. Then, on occasion, it would be struck by a wandering asteroid, with impacts so severe that nearly all life forms were extinguished. His beautiful blue planet turned brown and remained so until torrential rains cleaned up the atmosphere and it turned blue again. The resilience of the life forms stunned him. He waited, with infinite patience.

One day Impto brought him news of strange creatures that had emerged from the forests and begun to spread out across the lands. They were nearly naked and appeared to be extremely vulnerable. They possessed few of the physical attributes of the various furry predators that roamed the lands. Ydek's immediate thought was that they would never survive. He soon saw that he was mistaken, as these new creatures did something new. They developed killing tools that enabled their domination over all other living forms. That was just the beginning. These creatures were thoughtful, inventive.

They exchanged information. They multiplied and spread out across the planet. They passed through a hunter, gatherer stage, through agrarian societies, then rapidly into a mechanized, materialistic world, which seemed to satisfy their needs for safety and comfort.

Through it all, Ydek was bemused by their need to worship unknown gods. Admittedly, there was some logic to it during the times when there were no explanations for natural phenomena. Eventually, many gods were abandoned in favor of two or three. These were believed in so fiercely that wars were fought in their names. Unbelievably, the humans, as they called themselves, tortured each other in the names of their gods. Ydek thought to himself that if these gods existed, he didn't know of them, and indeed, given the immense variability of the disasters and troubles that befell these beings, whatever god existed must be neither benevolent nor punitive. The god would simply be, and as such would have little or no perceptible influence on these innocents.

A more serious thought bothered Ydek, that brought him to believe that he must act soon if his next experiment were to be successful. These humans were so vulnerable. The last pandemic had wiped out half their number. Worse still, he had spotted a rogue asteroid, a big one, on an intercept course with Idi 3. He didn't know. They might get clever and intercept it with thrusters to throw it off course. Failing that, they were doomed, for sure.

Ydek called Impto into the spacious lounge adjoining his laboratory. He had decided it was time to move out with his new venture. Eva lay relaxed in her preferred hollow. Impto crouched in a corner while Ydek drifted from one end of the lounge to the other. He stopped moving, flexed the fingers of one of his many limbs and brought forth a pair of holos, two elaborately dressed humans

standing side by side.

“They are so ugly,” Eva shuddered, “What can you possibly do with something like that?”

“Eva, they are intelligent beings. Come a long ways. They have done many unexpected things, some even beyond anything achieved by those introspective tribes outside our doors, from whom, as you know, we have come to expect nothing. Idlers, to the last one, addicted to pleasuring themselves.”

Eva looked doubtful, while Impto waited patiently for the next development.

“I’ll show you something interesting. It will take a little doing, since they act in a different time frame than we.” Finally, he turned to Eva, and said, “Listen to this. These are opera singers. They will sing from the last act of an opera written by one of their own, called La Traviata.”

The walls of the huge lounge echoed the strains of the singing duo. Eva lay quivering and her normally blue body turned pink, a sure sign that she was enjoying herself hugely. Ydek looked pleased. He was always learning new things about Eva.

As Ydek flicked the holos out of view, Impto said, “So what is your plan?”

“I have in mind moving to the next generation. I want to try another way to populate Idi1. I have been working at this for some time. I am now certain of success.”

Impto’s bulk swelled and shook, showing his puzzlement, but he said nothing.

“We’re going to join with the humans to produce the next intelligent species. Use them. Use them as hosts for a metamorphosis of our own derivation.”

Eva moaned. She already had an inkling of Ydek’s next ven-

ture.

“I had the idea that the humans could be the incubating environment for Eva’s embryos.” He said this quietly, respectfully, but Eva moaned again. Ydek’s voice then filled with glee. “It’s nothing short of fantastic. The intelligence accumulated in the human is passed on to a new advanced being that quite surprisingly will arrive fully developed.”

Impto appeared doubtful. “How do you know it will work?”

“I know it will work because I have already tried it. And it did work. Let me introduce you to Ptera, the first of the new beings.”

With another flick of his fingers Ydek brought forth a holo that raised Impto on his haunches. He tilted forward to see better. Eva screamed with delight.

The new holo revealed a being of ineffable beauty, a shimmering whiteness, slightly smaller than the human it had come from.

“The body is a quarter the density of the humans,” Ydek said. “Unlike the humans, the brain is distributed, like ours. The wings were a complete surprise. For the life of me, I don’t know where they came from, but they will be useful. These wonderful creatures will communicate in the language of the humans. They will be comfortable moving through three dimensions.”

“What happened to this one?”

“She lives alone on Idi 1, waiting for companions to arrive.”

Impto was stunned. “So what’s the plan?”

“I have a stock of embryos. I will take care of the implants. Your job will be collection and transfer to Idi1.”

“And how am I supposed to do that?” Impto sounded his doubt.

“We will limit the incubation to one area of the planet. You will take them through the hyperchutes, of course. I have already done

it successfully with Ptera. There are several ports on Idi 3. The one I used is near a place the humans call Roswell.”

“You’ll be discovered. These humans are clever. Then what?”

“I don’t think so. There is a malady called schizophrenia. It’s the ideal curtain. What happens at maturation will be your problem. The host will die at that point and separation will take place. The time and place of it, to hide detection, will also be your problem. I’m sure you will be up to it.”

“How long is the, er, gestation period?”

“You need to know that. The incubation period spans exactly one Idi 3 year.

“So. When do we begin?”

“ We leave immediately. You will accompany me when I do the implants, to record the identities.” Ydek turned to Eva, who had already turned a dull gray, anticipating what was coming. “I will be gone a while, Eva. Do be patient. I will return soon.”

Ydek nodded toward a dark case at the doorway. Impto moved toward it, picked it up, and the pair departed toward the transfer dome to undertake Ydek’s mission.

* * *

Charley Mansfield slumped in his pajamas on the edge of his bed. He ran his fingers through his hair as he got his thoughts together in the way he usually did at the beginning of each day. He had a headache. Charley seldom had headaches. He prodded the inside of his right ear, but felt nothing wrong. Sometime in the night he had woken to a terrible itch in his inner ear, too deep to allay it by poking his finger in the opening and cranking it around. After a

few minutes the itch had abated and he had gone back to sleep. But now the headache was there. He didn't understand that. He looked forward to the hot cup of coffee that he depended on to kick start his work day.

Charley was a sculptor, a good one, world famous. He had his studio in a cavernous Quonset behind his rambling adobe home in Taos, New Mexico. There was a foundry at one end. An array of computer controlled machine tools lined the walls. A heavy duty crane rolled on overhead tracks. Charley preferred to work alone, but when commissioned to do a large work, he called in machinists foundry workers, glass specialists and apprentices to help him. The apprentices worked for free. It wasn't just anyone who got to work with the great Charley Mansfield

Charley had had a major work going on the floor of his studio, and it was finished, ready for packing and shipment. He had placed a bid with a New York architect and won a contract to produce a four part sculpture to be placed on the grounds of the new library at the University of Khartoum He'd had this idea long ago - to produce a work based on the Sanskrit mantra: Om Mani Padme Hum. Their meanings had stirred him.

Om is the sound and silence throughout all time, the sound of eternity, that invokes all that is otherwise inexpressible.

Mani is the essence of all being, beyond all matter, all phenomena, all change and all becoming. The Jewel of the world.

Padme means "In the lotus." The world, like a lotus, unfolds its petals of spiritual progress, revealing beneath the leaves of delusion the adamant diamond of Mani, jewel of Nirvana.

Hum is a dedication of being, a sense of the fullness of life, of Isness, at rest in the very center of the universe, part of things, in

the present, vibrantly aware as though it were your last moment on Earth.

Last night he had stood at the center of a square and gazed at the sculptures in the four corners, placed according to their intended installation.

OM, a big blue ball suspended in a red wye frame, three meters above the pedestal.

MANI, a one ton crystal made of cast acrylic, mounted in a green laddered cradle, low enough so it could be touched.

PADME, Three vertical intersecting white steel arcs, crowned with a broad gold ring, in the center of which was mounted a carved malachite ball, enfolded by simulated petals.

HUM, a giant red rendition of humankind, in clean welded flat panels, with upward stretched arms.

A strong cup of coffee and Charley's headache was gone. He got up from the kitchen table, where toast lay untouched, upon hearing a pair of moving trucks rumble into the yard. He went outside to direct the workers to the studio. The remainder of the day was spent packing the sculptures and loading them into the trucks. Charley felt a letdown as the drivers headed down the driveway and turned into the road that led to Santa Fe. He always felt that way when his works left the studio. There was always a lull, a low point, while he mulled at the choice of projects to undertake next. Sometimes it took days to decide. In such instances Charley would leave the studio for a few days alone in the mountains. There he would decide what to do.

Charley lived alone. He might have married, but a tragic event early in his life had caused him to consider himself undeserving. After that he had avoided advances by the opposite sex. There were many, for Charley was an attractive man, a full two meters in height,

with an unruly shock of prematurely gray hair, steel gray eyes, oddly Slavic facial features and the lean frame of an athlete. He was a celibate, and it was in his nature that having adopted that way of life, he would be true to the commitment he'd made on one tragic day.

* * *

It was three hundred years to the day, March 11, 2111, when the original New Madrid fault in Missouri experienced a violent shift, opening a deep chasm that ran for a hundred fifty kilometers north and south and almost a kilometer at its widest point. It drew attention from geologists worldwide, not only because of the rarity of the occurrence of such a schism in the earth's crust, but because of the magma flow that could be observed in its depths, moving rapidly in a northerly direction.

The Memphis Rift, as it came to be called, was also an attraction to some of the younger element in Memphis, who were recreation bent even as the city struggled out of its wreckage.

Charley was a member of one such group, who discovered that the thermals above the rift, caused by the hurricane of wind deep inside the chasm, were ideal for hang gliding. The powerful thermals were sufficient to lift the gliders to altitudes as high as six thousand meters. From that altitude they could glide all the way home to Memphis. They indulged themselves in other games, the most exciting of which was a joust between two contestants, each carrying a staff, in a struggle to gain the most points by touching the opponent's glider while the rest circled above, enjoying the spectacle.

Charley had a best friend, Rudolph. Together they enjoyed the attentions of the lovely Jubilee Watson, anthracite black, a Phd in

philosophy, lean and long legged, with a stride designed for the Kalahari desert. She loved them both and could not for the life of her favor one over the other.

The last time Charley hang glided at the Memphis Rift, accompanied by Jubilee, Rudolph and a dozen friends, he had challenged Rudolph to a joust.

“Okay,” Rudolph said. “I’ll tell you what,” he said in an aside. “Winner takes Jubilee. Loser bows out. It’s about time we brought this crazy romance to a close.”

Charley thought a moment. “She may not go along with that. She has a mind of her own.”

“Matter of male dominance,” Rudolph said. “In the animal world, the bulls go at it with each other. The tough ones get the females. Admittedly, we’re not quite that base, but the idea is still valid. High score will score with Jubilee.” He showed his teeth in a mirthless smile. It was a spur of the moment idea, but not the first time that he had thought about how he might win Jubilee for himself.

The two were evenly matched. Charley felt that his chances were as good as Rudolph’s, although he was not that keen on resolving what Rudolph had concluded was a problem. “Let’s do it,” he said, “but let’s keep the why of it to ourselves.”

The gang suited up, harnessed themselves into their broad, monofilament carbon fabric covered wings, stepped off the edge of the edge of the precipice one after the other, plummeted and then elevated rapidly above the chasm as they caught the thermals. The observers rose to a high altitude, where they appeared like vultures, circling above anticipated carrion.

Charley and Rudolph were the last to go. Jubilee decided to

remain on the ground, when, on inspection, she discovered a small tear in the wing fabric that she had recently replaced. She helped them into their harnesses and checked the poles for their supply of marking chalk before placing them in their hands. She gave each a parting kiss, unaware that she was the object of the contest.

Charley and Rudolph rose rapidly to an altitude of two thousand meters, where they had ample room to maneuver. They circled, watching each other, diving and rising, waiting for a gust that would place one or the other in a position to perform a quick attack and retreat. Charley dipped, banked and soared, scoring the first point as he caught Rudolph in an awkward turn. Rudolph looped, banked and scored, then immediately attempted another but missed by several meters.

Charley saw his opportunity, faked an approach, veered, scored, doubled back and scored again. Charley's wing had one chalk mark. Rudolph's had three. The rules of the game declared that the first to gain ten points was the winner.

The circling observers above sensed that something out of the ordinary was afoot. This was no ordinary joust. The maneuvers were too quick, too risky. They spiralled down to a lower altitude to get a closer look at what was happening. They couldn't tell one from the other due to the identical nature of the gliders. But one appeared to be much more aggressive than the other.

Rudolph circled wide. Charley paced himself, watchful, waiting for another opportunity for a strike. Down below, a ribbon of red was still visible. It's movement had slowed in the year since the catastrophic opening of the fissure. Sulphurous fumes that rose from the abyss seemed stronger on this day. He wished that they had ascended to a higher altitude. Instead, they seemed to be drop-

ping in altitude in the fury of their encounter.

Rudolph picked up altitude rapidly on a gust, then dove in a steep incline. Charley, alarmed, saw a crash coming. “Look out!” he shouted, and banked rapidly to get out of the way. The maneuver caused his wing tip to score the surface of one of Rudolph’s wings. Charley gaped in horror as the fabric tore away and Rudolph spiralled down on one wing toward the yawning rift, like the spinning seed of a maple tree. There was nothing he could do. Jubilee screamed as she watched Rudolph plunge by. They watched, horrified, as a puff of black smoke rose from deep down in the chasm.

Charley didn’t win Jubilee. The shock of losing Rudolph was too great. He went away to school to continue his art studies. Jubilee left Memphis for New York, where she took a teaching position at Columbia University. Charley was aware of her fame, but neither attempted to contact the other, and they never crossed paths in their travels.

* * *

Charley sat by the fire he had built by a mountain lake, miles from his studio. He gazed into the flickering flames, deep in thought. Leaves of surrounding aspens shimmered in the light. Bullrushes that grew at the lakeshore stirred as a hidden animal navigated among the stalks. An owl, close by, hooted twice from its perch in the trees and got an instant reply from a distant relative. Charley had been out for eight days. Each day he had hiked along a different radius from his camping spot. They were familiar trails, but ever changing with the passing seasons. Charley looked for the changes. His favorite saying was “nothing lasts,” and his meanderings in the

wild bore that out.

Charley was thinking about his next project. He wasn't even certain that he wanted to undertake it. Twenty doors for a palace being constructed for his princess by Sadeem el Sadeem, Engineer Sultan of Pan Arabia, the visionary who had paved the Arabian Desert with solar cells and installed the superconducting cables through which most of Europe's energy needs were now being met.

At first Charley was skeptical. A carpentry job, he'd thought. But the emissary from el Sadeem was persistent. He had been directed to seek out Charley, in preference to all other artisans to do this work. Now the picture began to form in his mind. Each door a separate work of art, decorated with fine marquetry depicting such images as strutting peacocks with jewels in their splayed tail feathers, a leaping faun beside a placid lake, a fiery horse's head with a jewelled eye and flying mane, rich floral interplay, hand blown glass doorknobs, bevelled glass, stained glass, hand cast bronze hardware.

Charley smiled to himself. He thought about weaving a hidden story into the work, a story about an African girl whose name was Jubilee, a story about how she was discovered to be a lost princess, who eventually came to marry an Arabian prince. It would be secretive tale, no one would ever discover it in the doors, scattered throughout the palace.

It was late when Charley crawled into his sleeping bag and fell asleep. He woke early, packed his goods and headed down the mountain.

The ensuing months were a flurry of design, planning, and procurement of materials for the project. Charley contracted with a woodworking firm in Santa Fe to produce perfect rosewood blanks

for the doors, measuring a full three meters in height. As he surveyed the blanks stacked against the wall of his studio, Charley was staggered by the size of the task he had undertaken. Artists and craftsmen appeared and camped in trailers parked outside his studio. Charley felt better about the job. It would be an artistic tour de force. Physically, he was confident that he was up to the task, though it seemed odd to him that he was picking up weight. He consumed more food than he was used to. But then he thought it must be associated with the adrenaline rush that came with the project.

During the day and sometimes far into the night the studio hummed with activity. One by one, Charley's delicate sketches were rendered into exquisite bits of artistry and worked into the rosewood door's textures. Month by month the project moved toward completion, until one day the doors stood finished in twin rows of ten on the studio floor.

There was a big celebration. Charley invited the public to view the doors before they were shipped to Pan Arabia, where they would never again be viewed by other than the Sultan's family and close associates.

Late that night, when everyone had departed, Charley remained in the studio. He paced around the finished doors, satisfied that he had achieved another major work, but with regret that all would soon be sequestered in a faraway place.

Charley preferred to have his works in the open, available to everyone, to touch, to stand in their shadows, to feel a message, private to each individual that is hidden in every artistic work. He stopped by his drafting table, sat down and casually sketched the eye of a horse. He had the idea that he could have crafted the eye on the horse head marquetry so that it would appear to be following

a person who walked about the room. But it was too late. The job was finished.

As he sketched, he felt his stomach growling. He was hungry. It seemed that he was always hungry of late. And he'd continued to gain weight. Still, he felt well, so there seemed to be no cause for concern.

"Poko?" he called out, to trip the computer that hung on the far wall.

"Yes, Charley," came a calm response.

"Order a pizza."

"Yes, Charley. The works, as usual?"

"The works, Poko. And a jug of coffee."

"Will do. Debit your account?"

"Yes Poko."

"The usual gratuity?"

"Yes Poko."

"May I have something sweet, please?"

Charley looked around. "Did you say something, Poko?"

"No, Charley."

"That's strange. I thought I heard someone."

"I did not hear anything, Charley."

Charley suddenly felt an urge for something sweet, though he had shunned sweets for most of his life. "Order a dozen chocolate truffles also, Poko."

"Yes Charley."

Soft laughter, like water burbling over rocks in a mountain rill.

"What the hell?" Charley turned from his drafting table and peered into the darkened studio. "Someone out there? Come on

out!”

“I can’t come out, Charley. I’m inside you.”

“Jesus Christ! I’m hearing voices! I’m going bonkers!”

“You’re not going bonkers, Charley. You’re my host. I live here, with you.”

Charley heaved a big sigh. He was tired. This was just a dream. Still, he felt inclined to play along. “Okay, let’s say I’m your host. Why are you here, and what do I call you?”

“What I do know is that I am developing. At the same time, I am learning everything you know. And you can call me Jubilee. I do so like that name.”

“That name is taken. Choose something else” Charley reached across his drawing board and lifted from a shelf a delicately crafted maquette of Jubilee, made of fired black clay. He cradled it carefully in one hand and traced its reflective contours pensively with the other. He’d had in mind a three meter statue of Jubilee when he made the maquette. He would pose her naked, standing on one foot, with the other raised to a near horizontal position behind her. He would have her arms and hands lifted, in the manner of a native African, about to place a burden atop her head. He would have her staring straight ahead, judging the distance across the Savannah she was about to travel.

Charley peered toward the far wall of the studio, where a huge block of black granite, covered with dust, rested on a pair of floor dollies. He decided that the time had come. Tomorrow the workers would pack the Sultan’s doors in individual crates. The following day they would on their way to Pan Arabia.

“She is beautiful. Did you know someone like her?”

“That would be none of your affair.”

“Don’t worry. If you did, I’ll find her. There is so much here. She is here, somewhere in your memory ”

“Good luck.”

There was a long pause. “Then I’ll settle for Jessica. You don’t happen to have any hangups over Jessica, do you?”

“Jessica was my mother.”

“I know.”

After a little thought, Charley said, “Okay, I’ll call you Jessica.” Then he felt foolish at having succumbed to what had to be a dream.

At that moment a delivery boy on an electric cycle rolled on quiet wheels into the studio with Charley’s dinner order. Charley took it from him, then, using his drafting board as a table, began to eat. When he finally downed the truffles a contented hum seemed to be centered in his brain.

“Jessica? Are you there?”

“I love you Charley. I’m going to sleep now.”

Charley thought for a while about his “condition.” He knew enough about schizophrenia to think that he might be experiencing its onset. Still, the thought of consulting with a specialist, though it had occurred to him, was unacceptable. He would be instantly categorized, medicated, and possibly torn from his work. He wondered if there were others like him who heard voices, but would never admit to it for fear of the stigma it might bring. Maybe tomorrow it would be gone. This could all have been some kind of waking dream attributable to his exhausted state. Charley left the studio and went to bed. He slept soundly until dawn when noises emanating from the studio woke him. The truckers had arrived.

The next day Charley stood alone in the open doorway of his

studio as he watched the vans bearing his twenty doors rumble down the gravel driveway. It was late in the afternoon. The sun had dropped out of sight behind the mountain, tinting wispy clouds a bleak yellow. Snow for sure tomorrow, he thought. He wouldn't be going for his usual hike in the mountains. At the same time, he didn't feel the usual let down that he experienced at the end of a project. It was a huge relief to watch the departure of the doors. Somehow he felt comfortable at the thought of being snowed in, locked away from visitors for a while.

“Good-bye doors.”

“Oh Christ. Not you again.”

“Oh, I'm still here, Charley. I'm not going anywhere for a while.”

Laughter, delicate as glass wind chimes, which Charley had to admit was pleasant to listen to. Charley had all but forgotten about the hidden voice since he had downed the truffles two nights ago.

“I observed that you were very busy. I didn't want to disturb you.”

“Well, you are disturbing me now.” Charley flicked the wall switch and paused while the big metal studio door rumbled down. He turned up the lights and headed for the black granite monolith, a flawless block of Swedish ebony black that had stood for years, gathering dust where it was parked on rollers by the studio wall. He pulled the heavy block away from the wall and rolled it to a spot in the middle of the studio floor, where it would be flood lighted at night, and bathed in natural light through skylights during the day. Next he arranged portable scaffolds around it. He then drew up a table on which he placed an assortment of mallets and cutting tools. In one corner he placed the maquette of Jubilee, anchored to a rotat-

ing platform.

“Oh Charley. How exciting! You’re going to do Jubilee!

Charley grinned to himself. He had actually done Jubilee. Many times. But that was before the tragedy at the Memphis Rift. “That was an interesting thought! I want to know more.”

“Forget it. It’s none of your business.”

“But it’s so interesting! Never mind. I’ll find it here somewhere.”

“I’m sure you will.” Charley turned his attention to his computer. He didn’t want interruptions while he worked this sculpture. It had to flow from beginning to end, like an inspired musical composition, like Handel composed his Messiah. He had no way of knowing that Jubilee would not only be his triumph, but also his final work.

“Poko?”

“Yes, Charley.”

“Take messages. I’m not available for calls.”

“Yes Charley.”

Charley began to chip away at the granite block. He used a pneumatic powered chisel to speed the job of roughing out the outlines of the sculpture. The rest would be meticulous hand work. For several days the studio reverberated with the staccato sound of the air hammer. A pile of black chips gathered on the floor beneath the scaffolding. At day’s end Charley was covered with dust, He emerged from the studio with the appearance of a coal miner exiting a mine shaft, hungry and exhausted. He bathed, ate a huge meal ordered in by Poko, and then spent the evenings sketching the finer aspects of the Jubilee sculpture.

“I don’t think that I can stand this much longer, Charley.”

Charley rubbed his brow. He'd gotten used to the voice, and it had ceased to worry him. He took pleasure in sparring with it. He loved the tone and texture, and it seemed not to be getting worse or affecting his work. Everything was the same as before, except for the fact of his unceasing hunger and weight gain. He thought he would work that off during his next hike in the mountains.

"Sorry. I'm about there. From now on the work will be much -quieter."

"Call me Jessica."

"Okay Jessica. I'm all done with the hammering."

"I think she will be beautiful, Charley. I can see her in your mind. Not like the maquette at all. Have you changed your mind?"

"Let's just say the final work seldom if ever turns out to be identical to the maquette. For one thing, the proportions are totally different.

"Hmmm. I think I like what you are doing much better."

Weeks passed. Jubilee approached final form as Charley chipped, filed and polished, chipped, filed and polished. Sometimes, when Jessica was quiet for an extended period of time, he wondered if what he now judged to be a temporary anomaly had passed. "Jessica, are you there?"

"I'm studying, Charley. There is so much here. Sometimes I think I'm never going to get it all."

"Well take a rest. Talk to me. Sing me a song."

"There isn't much time, Charley. I will be leaving you soon."

"Oh? And where will you be going, may I ask?"

"I don't really know. I sense it will be a faraway place. Something will take me there."

Charley grew silent as he worked. He felt his heart beating

rapidly as he guessed that Jessica was more than a voice. Something unthinkable had occurred. He had a sinking sensation that the fullness in his body meant something more than a simple weight gain. He got down from the scaffolding and rolled it away. Jubilee stood fully formed, three meters tall on her pedestal. She was beginning to glow. He walked around her, lit from the skylights, making mental notes of regions that called for more work. He rolled the scaffolding back into place and climbed the steps to the upper platform where he could reach the upraised arms and Jubilee's remarkable head, her aquiline nose that flared at the base, full lips, and eyes that appeared to come alive, staring into the distance. A thought occurred to him.

"I am following you. What you are thinking won't work."

"Why not? Let's say you have it all wrong. I will be leaving you. I will be going to that faraway place you speak of."

Jessica was silent for a while. "No, it is not possible. I know all your thoughts."

"Are you so sure? I have pockets of information that even you can't reach," Charley lied.

Silence.

"Jessica?"

There was no answer. Charley smiled to himself and returned to his work. He guessed that he had shaken her.

One day, as Charley was putting the finishing touches on the sculpture, Poko interrupted him. "There is a call for you, Charley."

"I told you, no calls, Poko."

"Sorry, Charley. I had sensed that you had completed your work. Someone who identifies herself as Jubilee asks to speak with you."

Charley hesitated, then said, "Put her through, Poko."

"Yes Charley."

“Charley? Are you there? It’s Jubilee. Remember me?”

Charley blanched. A voice from the past, as clear as when he had last heard it over twenty years ago. The soft alto voice of the girl he had bedded, a bit tremulous, as it was when they had parted for good after Rudolph died. “Such a surprise,” he said. “I never expected to hear from you again, after.... you know.”

“I’ve never forgotten. It was all something I never understood. Crazy, isn’t it? Not what you would expect of a noted psychologist.

Are you well, Charley? I hear so much about your work. I thought I would see you at one of your exhibits. I’d hoped to find you there.”

“I never go to them. Yes, I am quite well, but not as slim as I used to be. Getting old, maybe.”

“Well guess what. I’m no longer the svelte, tall lady you knew.” There was a long pause.

“Are you there, Jubilee?”

“Charley, I want to see you again. I want to talk with you. So much has happened.... and recently...”

“Tell me.”

“Charley, have you ever heard voices? I think I’m going crazy. No, not insane crazy, but I feel something has a hold on me”

“Oh Christ! You too? I’ve been hearing a female voice for months. But I got used to it.” Charley turned his attention inward. “Jessica, You there?” Then he spoke to Jubilee again. “I don’t hear her now. She’s a bit ticked off. Do I sound crazy too?”

“Mine is a male voice. It comes and goes. I can’t get close to it. It’s mellow, but doesn’t make much sense. I feel like it’s sucking the life out of me. Charley, I want to see you. Can we meet somewhere?”

“I would like that, Jubilee.”

“Let’s meet half way... at the rift... where Rudolph died. I have the feeling that it would bring everything together somehow. Did we mess up, Charley?”

“Yeah, big time, underneath it all. But we did well anyway, wouldn’t you agree?”

“Oh yes. Charley. There has never been anyone since you... and Rudolph.”

Charley’s laugh had no mirth in it. “A couple of goddam celibates. Look, I’ll take a flight out tomorrow. I’ll meet you at our regular spot before sunset. Do you remember how to get there?”

“I do. I’ve been there several times over the years. The rift is filling up, Charley. It will be one of America’s biggest lakes. I’ll see you there,” Jubilee said, and closed the line.

* * *

Charley drove to the space terminal outside of Albuquerque the following day and boarded a short ballistic hop to Memphis. Arriving there in a matter of minutes, he rented an electric for the drive to the rift. He didn’t know the roads anymore, but after dialing in the coordinates for his destination he felt confident that he would travel the hundred kilometer distance to the Memphis Rift without trouble. The trip was uneventful. As he approached his objective he became concerned about gathering clouds in the east. Jessica wasn’t speaking. She was singing, but the words weren’t clear. Charley thought about a play he had once seen where a demented maid sat in a garden of flowers, singing to herself, weaving a garland for her hair.

For the better part of an hour Charley drove along a multi-lane highway. He then turned onto a two lane road which he fol-

lowed for several kilometers. Then he turned again onto an unpaved road, bordered by fields of sparse grasses. Dust devils rose from the parched soil. At the road's end he stopped where signs warned of danger ahead. There was an automobile similar to his parked there, but Jubilee was not in sight. Charley's heart picked up a beat in expectation of seeing her again.

The sky darkened. Charley bucked gusts of wind as he got out of his car. He paused by Jubilee's auto and looked inside. A purse lay on the seat. He looked about and called, "Jubilee! Where are you?"

Lightning streaked from the clouds beyond the far wall of the rift, followed almost immediately by repeating thunder claps. The setting sun behind him peeked briefly from behind clouds and cast a quick rainbow across the horizon. Then it grew dark again. Charley felt a spattering of rain. He neared the edge of the rift, turned, cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted "Jubilee! Jubilee!

"I'm sorry Charley. Jubilee is no more."

Charley faced the big rift again. "What makes you think so?"

"Your conversation. I heard her. Jubilee was a host, just like you. I wanted to tell you, but then I thought you had figured it out for yourself. It was there. I know you were thinking it."

"Christ." Charley looked down at the gathering waters. The chasm was filling, but it still had a hundred meters to go before it reached the crest. The water below looked black and forbidding, lit by lightning flashes.

Charley suddenly felt weak. He felt as though he was standing on a vibrating table, like the earth was shaking beneath him.

"It's time, Charley. I so much enjoyed knowing you. I think I did love you."

Charley's attention was drawn to a round ball of light in the

distance. It hovered above the rift and appeared to be approaching. It shuttled from left to right and back again. He felt a huge shudder run through his body. Then he saw a figure flutter before him, lit by its own glow, a white form that he thought the most beautiful being he could ever have imagined.

“Jessica!

Jessica paused and looked at Charley with soft round eyes. “Good-bye, Charley,” she said, and disappeared into the hovering light.

“No!” Charley called out. “Jessica!” He lunged forward. The edge of the rift crumbled beneath his feet and Charley catapulted into the dark waters below.

* * *

Ydek pondered Impto’s report. Impto had delivered a thousand new creatures to Idi 1 over the course of several Earth years. “A hundred percent success,” he said, with some measure of pride. Do you plan to continue with the program? “

“Well done,” Ydek said. “No, Impto, I think we have done quite enough. We will see how things take root now. You did fine work. I am quite optimistic.”

Impto felt a pleasant glow from Ydek’s compliment, but he was puzzled that Ydek showed little sign of elation, such as he felt. He was not aware that Ydek was already at work on another plan.

Ydek was thinking that he could contrive a generation beyond this new species on Idi 1. He would use them as hosts. Idi 4 had now claimed his attention. He’d already demonstrated that the silicon based double helix was self-replicating.

Ydek’s distributed brain hummed like a well oiled engine. He

was at his best when a new idea showed promise.