

An abstract painting featuring a central point from which numerous lines radiate outwards, creating a starburst or sunburst effect. The lines are composed of various colors, including shades of blue, red, yellow, and white, which blend into each other as they move away from the center. The overall texture is grainy and painterly, with visible brushstrokes and a sense of movement.

GENESIS III

TOSCA LENCI

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The man staring across cascading greenery was not thinking as normally he would have been, of near-ready grapes on the vines, or nebbiolo sweetness catching light through crystal glass. On the veranda of the home of his family for three generations he thought only a wish to shut his ears to sound.

The blank television monotone heard through the front room's fluttering curtains had not changed since daybreak. *The proposal for a summit meeting has been rejected. Please stay tuned. The President will address the nation at any moment....*

The man's eyes were riveted southward, over and beyond fringed valley hills to the sky over San Francisco. His wife indoors sat robot-like before the repeating message. They had not exchanged words since the message began. He was not the type to feed fear needlessly in the face of the inevitable. Nothing is left to say, once monstrosity has won the upper hand. He believed he knew what the message would be—*nuclear war!*

Man's long journey of existence always evoked great empathy in the book-loving winemaker. Often, while trimming foliage to let light into under-hanging clusters, he had contemplated the many languages that had crisscrossed ancient rivers--differently shaped tongues each delivering their own treasured tale, from Egypt's pyramids to the gates of Babylon, Terah's Ur to Petra's Kaznah....

His gaze was unwavering; but he was aware of breeze-tossed sunrays dancing yellow and green at the vineyard peripheries, and tears gathered in his eyes. Knowing himself subject to the force that had flowed through all millennia, the hours of his days had passed like that placid river of spirit caught in song. Not that he had heard it inside places of worship, for he practiced a private religion; songs heard as a passerby, through church windows tall and wide.

The lilting sounds would put him in mind of sun risings and settings along lush banks of the Euphrates and Tigris, in days of humankind's ancestral sojournings. Unusual imaginings, for a man whose ancestry lay along upper Mediterranean shores, where alabaster statues stood doubly mute, their language dead unwritten. No, he had no family history tied to legendary rivers!

Why, then, did his mind's eye fill with blowing-over sands and seamless chains of the living, which, if man truly noted history, had funneled unbrokenly through Antiquity's core: tribes, archies, dynasties, republics--on and on, into the long corridor of 'Democracy.'

And now, what from it? Could Humankind ever join consciously in perfected governance? He asked himself.

No! He answered the self-put question audibly, for *there*, precisely, was where his disgust lodged: people never learned anything in time. As for the fatal threshold at which his epoch now was poised, only those unborn could possess knowledge to avert it. *Ancient history is all our history*, he thought, whisking wetness from his cheeks.

Of a sudden, without wondering what moved him, he strode down the wide wooden stairway, through the garden, and out into the embrace of his vines. *Men in this valley marked their years by your fruits*, he whispered, gently ruffling their leaves. *Through you, they anticipated their days.... To live strong and long enough to be able to say, "Two Thousand Twenty-- now there was a good year!"*

One perfect day could be a lifetime all in itself. By that ideology the winemaker had determined his days, refusing to genuflect to his own persona. Good friends chided him--"such a gentle unassuming nature--you would have made a perfect man of the cloth." As if he had been born that way; as if experience was not the highest of teachers, and satiation of youthful wanderlust the whole cure of the prodigal son.

He walked on. At the far side of the plot he sat on a stone bench beneath a fig tree, planted by his grandfather nearly a century before. Some 35 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean, his hunched figure, stock-still in the tree's moving shadows, had all appearance of a replica of the sculpted "Thinker." And, no more than a statue, could the winemaker know: out beneath the waters a young man from a foreign land--a boy, really, who had not lived long enough even to begin to ponder ancestral veins--was about to follow an order. It was not his job nor that of his purported 'enemy' counterpart in other waters, either to question the order or to ponder effects of the weapons they were about to discharge.

The objective witness in the winemaker--elbow on knee, chin cradled by palm--was

acutely aware of his identityless statuesqueness. He even imagined himself preserved eternally exactly as he sat--like a gentleman at table at Pompeii, in the last unwitting moments before Vesuvius blew its top....

Somewhere above the winemaker, JC the Younger's first thought was, *I can see the headline now--'Death Between Two Worlds!'*; but he was too well disciplined to court surging emotion. He flipped open the emergency analysis panel and entered the initiation code. The words, *Preliminary Test*, lighted instantly, and a scant five seconds later the dismal results scrolled onscreen--*prime chip failure!* Brice, the mission's tecky eagle, had used just 12 words, and only once, for that, quote, "one-in-a-million possibility we don't waste time worrying about."

Self-control and perfect piloting were the main reasons the Younger was certified for interplanetary flight at age 16. Data input at 5000 bytes a minute was another. Marhlo, the mission chief, first had enlisted the Younger in producing a new edition of the QUARC manual, who had no need to reach for the slim pod that held it. One needed to read mission failure procedure only once.

The rules were absolute. A pilot in present circumstances was allowed one (*one only!*) silent-beam message. No further contact until (*if!*) control was restored. It was unnecessary to enter ship position--quadrilateral 4, spoke 77, pyramidal point 45. All that was conveyed in the piezoelectric pulses between the *Nephesh* and home base.

JC the Younger didn't pause. He hit the Sb switch that released the dedicated keyboard, a concise message already programmed to his fingertips: *Gyro speed entry Zilens zone 1/25th + all systems green; non-full- resumption @ 1/4-diurnal signal; pretest potential=negative reversal.* He could not, however, stop the thought: *were the connections between fingers and the mind driving them soon to be severed permanently?* If the secondary confirmed the pretest, the sent message would be his last words home.

A high caliber brain bars conjecture at such a time and fulfills its moment of truth. Once again, Younger's will leap-frogged thought. He had the next line composed before the secondary

results popped onto the screen: *EA2 confirms; countdown + discrete landing system activating....*

But fingers remained poised above keyboard, their skin catching the last shine through the ship's now shuttering pupil. Ought he to add one, a last sentence? Only then did he realize the rules were silent as to personal content in a possibly final communiqué. *Purposeful omission on Marhlo's part?* he wondered. *If so, a reasonable one; there ought to be some indulgence here!*

No one had dared label the Younger a *braggadocio*; however, as some envious peers alluded out of his presence, he unquestionably had been a technical hotshot. He hadn't entered puberty yet, when the Minors' Rights Act proscribed age prejudice. Thenceforth he had only one goal. Even at this moment, was he to be asked, he would allege that anticipation of this assignment, alone, had been worth his present predicament.

Not that he wasn't concerned about conditions on the globe toward which the *Nephesh* was plummeting. Nuclear capability there had been confirmed 10 solars ago; the ship could come to rest on a despoiled land. *Holy Ancestors!* The Younger had a thought that did make his dauntless heart give a little lurch. *Should that be the case, I hope it's not Marhlo who casts a deciding vote whether to send a ship to look for me....*

The 'Younger' indeed had been exactly that: a goodly number of years younger than his mentor. A memory synapse piped Marhlo's voice against Younger's inner ear. "I hope a time never comes," Marhlo had said in their last, no-hold debate, "that we believe imposing order on our own planet isn't enough. When it comes to *governance*, once you've had as much experience as I've had in our *own* global management, you won't be so taken with galactical."

Marhlo and I had a definite difference of opinion there, the Younger thought, aware his face assumed a wry smile. He recalled his retort. "Always the wary one, ey, Marhlo? No tampering with developing civilization, no matter where it may be found." *And now*, Younger thought, *I get to explore it*. He let his fingers make a last decision and watched them type three words. *Love to all...*

Eyes glued to the clock he opened the Med panel and pulled a small oblong tin from its straps. Inside was a pressurized injector; in its nose, a capsule compuscribed to put his body to

sleep for precisely one local hour. *Thirty minutes programmed for automatic landing; another 30, to awakening—plenty of time to be done away with while still unconscious, should any discoverers be so inclined....*

The clock now showed 35 local minutes to putdown, five before the injection--*too much mind time when it might be one's last.... What ought a man to think about?--the last time he felt himself on the verge of ecstasy?*

Younger found, however, that Time On The Brink of Death chooses its own thoughts. Only now did he recognize how much his brave sense of self had rested on certain love. His older sister, with whom he wished he had spent more time. His father, not so very long dead...*now there was the finest of humans--Dad kept his aplomb all the way to the end and let us be happy in the process.... Mother, that woman of perfection...and Sienna—dear, dear Sienna!*

He clicked open the narrow tin and extracted the hypo. *The Nephesh will land okay; no problem there*, he reassured himself. His mind tried for levity. *Here's where Sienna might say*, "Hey, look at it this way: you just might get a chance to observe firsthand, the difference between 'feminism' and 'feministicism'!"—

Provided! The ship and me with it aren't blown to smithereens....

He unzipped his left sleeve from the wrist and carefully rolled the breathing latex up above the elbow. *Worse than peeling a live snake*, he thought; but he finally was able to slip the rubber tube around his lower bicep, tighten it, and pop in the capsule.

He re-zipped the sleeve and cleared the console top, tossing journals and drawing pad over his shoulder. He laid the emergency medical kit on the console and slipped his wrist through its strap. If he did regain consciousness (*no--WHEN I do!*), getting out with the medical kit was as important as getting out, himself. He took a last decisive tug on his harness and finally locked his seat into full recline.

The order of Younger's acts had not been in strict accord with regulations. Everything was supposed to be in readiness *before* the drug was injected; but in training it always had taken longer than his fellows for him to succumb. Now, however, he felt drowsiness on the verge of descent to oblivion...*thirty more seconds....*

There was a great deal to be said for training, when true fear kicks into the bargain. The Younger's mind automatically triggered QUARC's mental self-control method....

INITIATE AUTOHYPNOTIC PROCESS!

Lesson Review: ***On the abolition of the Metaphysical through recognition of the Absolute--***

Commence count.... Twenty seconds....

Self-will impulses down the spinal cord. Force them out each plexus to every centimeter of flesh and nerve....relax...relax...into the cosmic stream--

Fifteen seconds....

Let thought enter prime matter, wherein the heart's beats thrust upon universal pulsation--

Thought interrupted. *Who can imagine that worlds will continue to exist when one's self no longer does? But The Now was retreating from all, as Consciousness approached timelessness and feelinglessness, devoid of history or self, a primal state that knows neither substance nor form and takes not father, mother or lovers--*

Ten seconds....

Lesson Review: ***On the equationable reconciliation of Physics and Spirit....***

There is no 'god!' Only interchanging matter and energy, polygonal building blocks of energy neatly aligned between star and star, planet and planet.... Who are You and what is The I?--a bit of life's giving breath, moved by the same force that whisks the butterfly from its cocoon to where the wind that bears it also needs not to think, to go--

Five seconds!--

How many existences can Mind imagine being palpably elementally linked to It? Many the choices!--in wispy castles or upon jasper thrones, before tongues of fire or along emerald waters...

CHOOSE! VISUALIZE!--

A brilliant green beyond a shore of diamonds, sunlight bounding off sea and sand--

The light off of one grain began to expand. Just as it seemed ready to burst Marhlo

appeared, ankles welded in crystal surf. What a hero he had been to the small boy Younger!

"This time I'll teach you some new games," Marhlo called out.

"What kind of games?"

Marhlo laughed. "Pitching pentacles; shooting cubes--"

But, then, the Younger couldn't hear any more....

Below and east across the nation from the winemaker, a woman with flowing black hair marched fearlessly shoulder-to-shoulder with shouting compatriots, down the wide avenue toward the capitol. She could not remember when last she had slept, sometime before the growing nightmare became waking reality—

That the world's powerful had brought them to this brink!

The woman wanted to hold hope, that there was true chance diplomacy could reign. She looked straight ahead, seemingly oblivious to the surging crowd as far back as one could see. She was watching for one beloved man, to carry to them the words for which all waited.

The march front had reached the grand stairway of the capitol building, when of a sudden its doors burst open. Persons spilled forth as if running for their lives. Then she saw him—

"It's lost!" he screamed. "We've lost! ALL IS LOST!" His hands were outstretched, fingers shaking resistantly as would one's own, if purposed love was changed to powerless hatred.

A dewdrop hanging from a pine's needle, glaciated peaks, haloed waterfalls—all had been sacred to them; yet his hands seemed aimed at her neck. *If he did kill me I can understand why*, the woman thought--*absent father; unrecognized son!* *To whom but the beloved can the final horror be brought?*

Her spirit turned and fled that now-crazed crowd, flew the silvered sidewalk and up the marble stairs. So swiftly did she arrive at the portico it seemed thought alone had carried her there. In the distance a lucent band was rising but, at that point, she was lifted up! She heard no sound, felt no impact. *Up, up--*until she saw the city below as if through an immense convex lens,

as the first front of death-carrying light filled its canyons.

Too engrossed was she, at first, by that stilettoedly saturated, shimmeringly gleaming picture beneath, to wonder. Then, in the area of articulation of scapula and clavicle, she felt a feathery undulation of memory, the treading of hovering wings. Was she *flying*? What she was experiencing couldn't be true! Yet at the borders of self-awareness she knew a strangely tacit acceptance—

No! She countered herself adamantly; *this has to be a death-dream*. For now she was joined in that strange celestuality by a man whose face wore matching incredulity. About to withdraw sight nearer to herself, seeking answer--*am I, too, wearing my body still?*--her attention was taken away instead by a new flurry of color. Another, a young male appeared, holding by the armpits a child of four, or perhaps only three! They hovered there, full sentience too in their eyes, into which the woman's never left off gazing, one's to the other's. She felt as if she should know them, *but, from where?*

The boy's eyes were boldly confident; the child's, wide and calm. *Sweet youth--ever ready to accept proof of impossibility*, the woman thought fondly, surprised she could think humor at such a moment. The young man extended his arms and held the child out between them. Then, grinning assuredly, he slid his hands around and under the suspenders of the child's coveralls.

NO! The woman thought forcefully. *Don't! You may be able to 'fly,' and I may be able to, but how do we know that child can?* Despite seeming to comprehend the woman's expressions, the youth nonetheless let go with the detached certainty of a father bird nudging a fledgling off the rim of the nest. The child hung motionless--only a moment!--before obviously willing itself into position in a circle now formed by all four of them. In that instant the woman knew, indelibly: if one superior among them was to be, it was that guileless child floating free, least influenced by prior mortality.

4 – 7 NOVUS

The woman walked the meadow every 'Wednesday' afternoon, rain or shine. The mountains that rang the far horizon were a comforting view, a massive wall that contained her world. She knew their every peak and canyon, and the purple-hued spectra of their seasons. She also knew the meadow's floor by heart; and today she strolled automatically, surrendering sight to thought.

How came it that she, who recalled a self that never believed in a predestining god, now wished so much to believe herself one of four, specifically chosen persons purposed for some grand design? She tried again to unconvince herself. *Surely our perfect affinity for the challenges we faced was coincidence, only?* True, she felt as if her soul had loved with theirs before; but that was because of the union they had forged--*wasn't it?* Still, what was she to make of that entirely remembered, 'prior existence?' Were both *it and this* to be called Life?

She closed her eyes, walking on by rote. She definitely *felt* 'alive,' but so did one when dreaming. Had she had a nightmare followed by a fantastical dream and not awakened? Gone on, instead, to dream another, in which she waked, lived, and slept all over again? *Either I have been asleep all along and am, still--asleep and dreaming back in my bed, in that life in which this "I" first knew Consciousness, or—*

There it was--the only other conjecturable possibility: not just the same consciousness but the same *embodiment* of it!--mystically transported to another place in Time, whether or not interrupted by death. She stopped walking and opened her eyes. Her last paces ended at the very spot where that new dream had begun, the four awakening as if from a brief nap, to discover (*rediscover?*) themselves and each other.

She stooped, removed a stone from the path and sailed it toward the meadow's center. Her gaze sailed beyond, to the two-story farmhouse, grayed by winter afternoon light. *For all we knew, we might have been on Mount Ararat. Even with the house around us we nearly froze the first winter, afraid we would use up the firewood all in one season. It may have been easier for us, than for Noah and his troop, except they had the solace of relying on the dictates of Omnipotent Consciousness. We four had only our joined human one....*

She could not eschew, however, that the solitary homestead they found seemed purposed for their very survival. The well-stocked pantry, a plethora of warm coverings, and in the airtight shed an ample variety of seeds and a fine array of tools. Once joined, their quest to wrest a future was all consuming. But what would they *do*, if of a sudden figures of other people appeared on the mountain ridges, searching food or water?

"Oughtn't we plan our welcome?" she tentatively had offered.

"You mean, *response*," the young man had replied with a grim look.

The man had spoke the thought behind it. "*You* mean, what if it's a crazed mob, or bandits poke rifles in the windows."

"Yes.... On the other hand," the youth supplied, "any defense we might consider would be futile at best; and we have plenty to do as it is."

Silently they had searched each other's eyes. Finally the woman spoke. "Be it one or a hundred, all we *would* do is act...in accord with our natures." (She had wanted to include *peaceably*.) "I suggest we focus where it's most needed."

"Right! And first off I want to check that generator," exclaimed the man, out the door as the words left his mouth. *She's right*, had been his thought, crunching through the path, making note it needed clearing. *That's how I used to think about the possibility of visitors from outer space....*

Humor mixed with nostalgia, in the woman's memories of that first year. 'JC the Younger'--who could not imagine himself by any other title--straightaway christened the child 'Little jc'. The woman, herself, proposed 'Grandma' as her own appellation; that generational distinction seemed appropriate, given the small child and Younger boyishness. The man gracefully accepted 'Grandpa,' although she sensed it was a little discomfiting at first. Neither he nor she minded, when eventually the Younger added "JC" to them, too--a bit of proprietariness that went hand in hand with his matter-of-fact authoritativeness.

No matter the season, 'Grandma JC' rarely returned empty-handed from her meadow walk. In late fall, she collected vines for making twine and rope. In spring, blue cornflower nosegays, failing only the third spring when severe winter rains had sent seeds deep into the

ravines. The ravines bordering the meadow were strictly off-limits; broken limbs could not be courted.

In her life 'that had been' (she could not refer to it, even to herself, as "my past life"), the human brain had been likened to a computer. The programming of JC the Younger's brain exceeded all rhetoric, however. In her remembered world it had been theorized that the average human failed to use 80 percent of the brain's potential power. For her, the Younger was proof of it. He always was up studying long after the others' heads touched down, always up before they rose from the pillow. In five nights he devoured the homestead small but book-laden library, which seemed (here came that thought again!) assembled precisely for their survival.

"What you have there," the Younger had rattled off, handing her a long list, "is a 'descending subject index' according to needs. Major categories are subdivided into primary areas, and those subdivided in turn. For example," he pointed while he read, "WATER--Sources: Existing; Potential; Short-Term; Long-Term. WATER--Collection: Short-Term; Long-Term; Potential; WATER--Conveyance: Present; Short-Term; Long-Term, down through Pump/Maintenance, Pump/Anticipated Life, et cetera, with similar breakdowns under Food, Shelter, Agricultural, Medical and Pharmacology." He didn't notice her sharp inhale, as a myriad of possible illnesses and emergencies flooded her thought. Privately he lamented again; the med kit hadn't been on him, when he awakened....

He reacted modestly to her praise--the list also gave the library's available books on all its subjects, and where they were shelved. "You wouldn't think *this* anything to marvel at, if you knew Marhlo!" he exclaimed, inadvertently mentioning someone 'from before.' Embarrassed, he turned away quickly. "Why don't you be guardian of the list?"

"Thank you...JC," she replied. It was her first address of him by name.

"You're welcome. Let me know if you have improvements. Right now I'm due to check the well and cistern, with...uh...Grandpa." She had suppressed a smile; despite Younger stoicism, he, too, had had to make a special effort....

Grandma JC was treading carefully now over slick mud, on the lower path where the late fall sun did not reach. This afternoon she would return with a shoulder load of thick reed leaves,

which would be moistened with melted animal fat, stretched and gently hammered. Later on, after early-dark winter suppers, it was Little jc's job to set up the wood braider fashioned by Grandpa, and fasten alternating strands of prepared reeds to its top dowels. Little jc then would sit down in front of Grandma and hold the side handles tautly, while Grandma braided and wood crackled in the fireplace. Braided patches were sewn together for a variety of uses year 'round, from mats to log carriers to shoulder totes.

So much accomplished; yet how short the time now seems. It must be my age, the woman thought, flooded by memories of their first year. Every morning, a breakfast meeting; each day, a tome in itself. The stored supply of pencils and paper seemed large, but the Younger had skipped straight to the chase--a chalkboard would serve most purposes, pens could be carved, ink made from berries, and paper would be conserved by writing as small as legibly possible! Appointed official 'secretary', her neat record in the top bureau drawer detailed a 'New Time'. But would she know, ever, what to call the existence it embraced?

The first item of 'family' business had been adoption of *Robert's Rules of Order* (with some refinements, *of course*, by the Younger). Younger directness was evidenced at the start, when he stated flat-out, "Publicly pondering our respective—quote—*pasts* only will weaken us. I make a motion that we consider and adopt a reasonable method to deal with the unknowable." Thus unanimously was born "The Pact:" each would have a regular weekly alone-time to grapple privately with conjecture and emotions, and no time would be wasted sharing them.

Time indeed was at a premium, for every act demanded careful study. On the premise the well was solidly seated in groundwater, how much pumping time might the stored fuel provide? It was decided to save it for emergencies (*fire!*), and use the fresh creek's water for everyday needs. What efficient modes of labor, to conserve their vitality, might be devised, for hauling water and a year-round truck garden?

Morale was fortified the first month by hearty breakfasts from the homestead stores, while a plan for long-term nourishment was drawn. It had been possible in a prior society to abstain from certain animal uses; not so easy, at inception of a new one. Eventually skins would be needed to replace the garments they had found, and daily physical demands called for solid

protein. Reluctantly, trapping was added to the list. *One had to do what one had to do....*

At that point Grandma JC realized the morning sunlight had deceived her. *Might have known, that gleaning would take me into creeping shadows; I should be wearing two sets of skins.* She made a mental note. That very night she would re-stitch the front piece of her second set, where it was weakened from the many bendings over its belt....

"Move away from the hot stove--'round there, on the stool," Grandma commanded.

"Here. Peel this onion for me and tell me where we left off yesterday."

Little jc made certain to be balanced squarely on the stool before applying paring knife to the onion. "Space just *looks* like it's empty. It really is chock-full of energy."

"What else?"

The vocabulary requisite to the morning's 'test' was a challenge; but Little jc, who loved nothing better, straightened to full-torso height. "It's like a three-dimentional grid of energy lines going every which way."

Grandma JC held back a smile at the pronunciation. "Remember as we've said, the 'grid' isn't a real thing. It's just a way to picture how energy works within the whole. Anything else?"

Little jc's eyelids lowered into a memory search.

"What about relative power along the imaginary grid's lines," Grandma prompted.

"Oh, yes! Littlest 'dots' of energy are touching all ways, and everything is built around them--even you and I are."

"Good," Grandma said, noting the careful grammar. "Go on."

"The *kind* of things that get made depend on...uh...*conditions*...that bunch energy together into--" Little jc's eyes went slanted again. "What are those called?"

"Aggregations of containment."

Little jc repeated slowly. "Ag...gre...ga...tions of con...tain...ment."

"Very good," the woman patted the child's shoulder. "Give yourself a B-plus in Physics

for last week. That means you can review with your brother the--to use his jargon--the 'I-Revision to the Big Bang Theory.'"

Little jc, however, was not free yet as expecting to be, stayed by the hand of Grandma JC, who couldn't resist a review of her own. "Once upon a time," she began, tending browning pieces of chicken in the big iron fry pan, and ignoring Little jc's eye-rolling expulsion of breath, "there was a part of the Universe that was the coldest cold can get. That's because the 'grid,' there, was—"

"I know!" Little jc interrupted, overeager for release. "That part of the Universe was in its...uh...its..."

Despite remembering the Younger's description, Little jc couldn't remember the term and was glad he wasn't in the room. *Think of it like invisible thin sheets of glass, intersecting every which way--lines of energy in every direction through each and every dot of each and every touching pane....*

"That part was in *prime medium* form?" Grandma supplied.

"That's it."

"All right. Well," Grandma continued, "energy from stars all around, aimed toward that part, eventually began meeting at the center—no!" Grandma interrupted herself. "You know how I hate to see you lean back on the stool."

Little jc ceased the tilt just as, mercifully, Grandpa JC walked into the kitchen. "Something smells awfully good. What's cooking?"

"Chicken stew and a new solar system," Grandma answered.

Grandpa picked up a fork and made to stick a plump bit of chicken. Grandma shoved him aside with her hip. "Hand me that little cup of broth, please.... Now, where were we?" she asked, once the broth sizzled into sauce. "Oh, yes. Over time, so much sunstar energy filled that cold prime medium that, by and by, layers began to collect around the middle--"

"*'Bands of con-tain-ment,'*" Little jc remembered and interjected this time, hoping to quicken freedom.

"Uh huh...something like that onion," Grandma pointed, "which, by the way, I need now."

She sliced the onion into the pan. “So! Finally it got to the point where, as more energy pushed in, the filled-up core got so hot the energy started to melt together—“

“Fuzon!” Little jc blurted, arms thrown out dramatically.

“*Fusion*,” Grandma JC echoed correctly. “And, as *more and more* energy kept coming-- what do you think?”

“The ‘onion’ got bigger and bigger.”

“Good way to put it! Finally—remember we’re talking ‘eons’, *lots* of time going by--there came a moment when energy pressure from outside was more than the place could hold, and--“ Grandma JC hit the side of the pan with the metal cooking spoon, “BANG! The core exploded--”

“Fisshion!” Little jc exclaimed.

“*Fission*, preceded by *fusion*--excellent.”

Little jc slid off the stool, raised circled arms, fingertips touching, and grinned. “And a new sun began to shine.”

Grandma tilted her head to Grandpa with a self-gratified smile, and held out a sampling of stew. “See if this needs more seasoning--careful!” She blew across the spoon. “It’s very hot.” Grandpa carefully sucked off the sauce-soaked tidbit and smacked his lips. “*Dee-ee-licious*,” he said.

Grandma sat on the stool and put out her arm, corralling an obvious *may-I-leave-NOW* Little jc. “One moment. Almost done. Yes, that is when a *new* sunstar began to shine. But things stayed pretty wild around it for another long, long time, while different forms began to take shape, until eventually everything became balanced---”

“In bigger bands of con-tain-ment?” Little jc offered, having trouble with hers.

“Okay. Lastly, different *aggregations* of energy formed *within* the bands; and we call such aggregations--?”

“Mass!” Grandpa JC jumped in to wind things up, ever more empathetic with Little jc’s lot than Grandma was. “And we can picture masses as fitting around the prime medium, and around each other, in their own personal ways. How they *do*, depends on the conditions around them when they form.”

Grandma would have preferred including some “Old Science” atomic history, *vis-a-vis* electron ‘shells;’ but she pressed her lips together and let him finish.

“Thus we arrive at ‘elements’—particular masses created under particular circumstances, each with a uniquely individual face. Altogether, they make up every single thing we have--”

“Like the knife,” Little jc suggested.

“Like the knife. Bits all lined up in their own special way.”

“How, exactly, do they stay together?”

Grandpa hesitated, while Grandma wiped her brow. Her concurrent Younger tutoring had its own limits! “Why not let your brother fill in the rest? It’s time now to set the table.”

“Here; I’ll get the plates down,” Grandpa said, lifting four from the open shelf above the drainboard. “You can carry them.” Little jc collected napkins and flatware, and together they walked to the adjoining small dining room.

Little jc circled the table, arranging the place settings. “Grandpa?”

“Yes?”

“What does ‘prime medium’ energy look like?”

“I wonder.... I guess the lens of our eyes would need to be the size of the sun, to see one particle.”

“We’d have to have pretty big heads!”

“Yes we would!” He pulled out one of the chairs and sat down. “According to your haloed brother, no Science experiment could let one see the ‘prime medium’ or the ordered action inside it. *There*, however,” he gave the table a soft slap, “my knowledge is at its end. Your brother will be quite able, I’m sure, to tell you more.”

Grandpa didn’t fail to notice; in fact he laughed outright. Little jc’s face took on a certain expression he’d noticed of late, when the Younger name was used superiorly....

The first half-hour after supper customarily was a quiet one in the homestead parlor. That night was no different: Grandma and Grandpa in their respective fireside chairs, Little jc

reclining on cushions in front of the fireplace. Even the Younger managed for a while to stay seated, albeit perched on the nearby hassock. Where he was concerned, Grandma JC understood the drive of his fertile mind but was sympathetic with precocious Little jc, bombarded by Younger penchance to ask and then answer his own questions--as he was, then....

“So we have the ‘elements,’ and they compose what?--‘atoms,’ which compose what?--‘compounds,’ which do what?--join in countless ways to form the building blocks of everything.”

Little jc gave Grandpa a pursed lip look that the rapt Younger, naturally, didn’t notice.

“It doesn’t matter, really, what we call the parts and sub-parts and sub-sub-parts, because when we get to the smallest part that’s all there is; and here’s where it gets tricky. *Everything*--us, the furniture, trees and all—everything is made *of, around, and within* something we never can apprehend.”

“‘Appre-hend’?”

“That means seeing or grasping something.”

“Oh,” Little jc responded as if enlightened but turned over onto the pillows...*I just thought ‘know’ would have been a better word.....*

Grandma JC, meanwhile, apparently had been doing some deep thinking of her own. “Whether persons possess free will, I think, is not a matter solely of mind,” she said, laying aside her teacup. She picked up her latest needlepoint and inserted the needle into a stitch hole. “I think it’s a matter half of Mind and half of Matter.”

The three others, recognizing Grandma was in one of her philosophizing moods, caught each others eyes and exchanged ostensibly secret smiles. The woman, who had acute peripheral vision, drew the needle out and up, pretending not to notice. “Correct me if I’m wrong,” she continued, tightening the stitch. “Matter and energy are different forms of the same essence. Nothing of substance can come into or go out of being without ‘conversion’ of energy, invisibly or visibly—like boiling water from my cooking pot.”

Little jc jerked to a sitting position. “You mean those little waves I can see if I look sideways.”

“Not everyone’s as observant as you!” Grandpa piped up. He had not been dozing, as

his closed eyes suggested; and he felt a Younger put-down might be in the offing, because of Little jc's simple answer. The deflection, however, was needless.

Grandma knew the Younger hadn't been listening fully. "Want to pick up the subject from here?" she asked, catching him off-guard. Feet toward the fire, he had been wiggling a toe through a hole in his knit right sock. "In return," she prodded, "give me that sock and I'll mend it."

"Oh..." JC straightened himself and took off the sock....*free will...Einstein?...matter and energy interchangeable....* By the time he handed the sock over he recalled enough to join in. "Changes in properties in the grid--'Quantum Mechanics,' as it's called in our library--forces Science to an unimaginable realm. Like the 'Copernican revolution'—you remember," he looked at Little jc, "like it shook the early religious foundation of our library people. Conceiving 'energy' as a 'substance' begs the question, *are there no such things as 'acts of God,' only acts of Nature?*"

"Looks like someone's getting sleepy," Grandpa interrupted. "Come on, child. Time for bed."

Grandma JC shook her head and smiled as they went from the room, hand in hand. She pulled the hassock nearer, to spread tapestry across lifted knees. "It's hard not getting carried away," she said, after a long silence, except for the crackling fire. "I haven't digested it all, myself....the 'duality' of existence....the *only apparent* 'hardnesses'; the *true* 'softnesses'; the *only apparent* curves, the ubiquity of angles--"

"Appearance versus Reality?" Grandpa warmed himself at the fireplace, having returned from the house's unheated second story. There, as customary--despite puberty's advance--he had tucked the child in for the night. He took his current book from the seat of his armchair and sat down. "I thought the child would have had enough for one day, but you want to hear the last question I was asked, before I blew out the candle?--'I wonder if JC will describe the 'polygon of force' tomorrow."

The Younger, fixing a hardtack and jelly snack in the pantry, overheard. In his eagerness to join the conversation he almost tripped on the frayed edge of the rug at the parlor door. "I can't *wait* to handle that one," he said, spewing crumbs from the cracker just stuffed into his mouth.

“Got to bear in mind the vocabulary. And the vortex effect isn’t easily drawn in pictures.”

“Maybe I can embroider one some day,” Grandma said to herself.

“I think it’ll be easier,” JC continued around another cracker, “if I begin at the end, so to speak. Because it’s the configuration at the ultimate transcendence point that determines proximate vortex.”

“Hold on! *I’m* in trouble already!” Grandma looked up from her handwork. “Where and or what are the ultimate borders of containment between aggregates?”

The Younger finished licking a thumb. “Boundaries are far beneath isomorphical distinction. Remember those electron microscope pictures?—all those ferocious-looking little creatures that live far beneath human sight? Ability to perceive grid avenues of atomic containment remains as doubtful as ever perceiving subatomic particle action—at least, any place I’ve been,” he finished softly.

He brushed the last crumbs down his shirtfront into a cupped hand and tossed them into his mouth. “All that can be said is, quanta join together when particular configurations of them reach a point certain under specific environmental conditions, never separately distinguishable.”

“Like Grandma’s threaded portrait,” Grandpa pointed. “For it to remain whole, not a stitch can be extracted--”

“As in the marriage of Bohr and Dalton,” Grandma raised her needle high, pulling tautly on its thread, “Every angle, exacted!”

Grandpa and the Younger both laughed.

Grandma JC, at her frequent station by the kitchen sink, watched her adopted grandchildren turn from the front path and disappear under trees on their way to the creek. The homestead family defied neat parceling of development of personhood. JC the Younger was its immediate example of mentality’s potential, but Little jc gave the woman new consideration of the old saw, “Never tell a child something before its time.” Such quickness of learning and

comprehension, behind that contemplative stare!--what was the surrogate grandmother to think? That the child simply had unusual intelligence, or—*or what?*....

It was the time of cool mornings and hot afternoons before the first melt. Little jc, fishing pole steadied against a hip, dreamily watched two butterflies do a mid-air dance. Glittering splashes beneath watersheeted rocks at the drop of the creek sent shadow-searching ripples under the overhanging trees.

The Younger returned from downstream and laid down his fishing pole. Without warning he grabbed little jc's free hand by the wrist and waved it through the air.

"Hey!" Startled, Little jc's eyelids jerked to the highest. "What if a fish had been just about to bite?"

"There're lots more than one fish left in this pond. Besides you've caught two already. Concentrate." He moved the hand back and forth hard. "Feel anything?"

"Ow--yes! A twisting of my wrist!"

"Come on; time to pick up where we left off."

Little jc heaved a reluctant sigh but let go the pole without protest. There was a bargain to be honored. It had been agreed. They could spend the morning at the creek, provided the day's tutoring was included.

"Okay." JC let go. "Now do this: make a tight fist, sideways. Keep your arm rigid and swing your fist forcefully side-to-side."

The Younger method never failed to engage Little jc, even if at times it could make one feel clownlike and unappreciated...*like the helper (Torricelli?) to the great scientist I read about... ('Galileo'? 'Leonardo'?)...someone, anyway, who never got just due--*

"Hey you!--keep concentrating. Now do you notice anything?"

"A little breeze."

"In what does the breeze occur?"

"Air."

"What, exactly, *is* 'air'?"

What type of 'air' are you talking about here? Little jc conquered a flippant response--*air*

of what planet? The Younger took the long *hmmm* as studious thought.

"A mix of 'gases,'" Little jc answered finally, "that changes the farther away it gets from the ground."

"Uh huh. Go on."

Little jc behind closed eyes read off one of what privately were called 'Memory Index Cards,' and decided it prudent not to begin with the word, "Earth". "*Here*, about 78 percent nitrogen, 21 percent oxygen, a little bit of carbon dioxide and a littler bit of hydrogen. About 30 miles up—"

"In the 'stratosphere,'" interrupted the Younger needlessly.

"--about 79 percent nitrogen, 14 percent less oxygen, no carbon dioxide, and hydrogen's up." The Younger was graced with a wide-open blue-orb stare. "How's that?"

"Well...not bad." He cleared his throat. "Which takes us into the 'ionosphere'—"

"150 miles or so up?"

"Yeah, yeah," the Younger gave a you-little-know-it-all smirk. "But before going up into *that*, we need a picture of the 'quanta' workings within it. Take your pole--let's move up to the blanket where the books are." He caught the expression on Little jc's face and teasingly poked a rib. "What's the matter? Not up to a little astronomic calc of the missing 'element' to seize a top quark on a hexagonal base?"

That did it! "No...no...no!" Little jc backed him up with finger jabs against the chest until he tripped, then playfully dove on top of him, pulled up a bunch of clover and made to stuff it in his mouth. The Younger tumbled the attacker off onto the blanket. The strength surprised him. "Feed me clover, will you?" he laughed, a little self-consciously.

Watch out, Mister!-- Little jc turned a self-satisfied smile away and reached for the day's book. *If I have my way, one day you'll be eating crow!*

That evening had a particular spring sweetness to it, a breath of perfume on the air.

Little jc came out to the porch and plopped down on the swing next to Grandpa JC.

“Look!” Venus was brilliant in the mauve sky above the distant mountains.

“It must be full, tonight,” Grandpa answered. “Once I saw it through a telescope when it was just half-full. I expected to see only white light and instead saw a strips of pastel hues. Your brother, when I described it to him, was able to explain it—as you might guess! How the sun was hitting Venus full face but crosswise my point of view, so the light deflected ‘sidewise’ in different strengths off the globe’s roundness, thus a spectrum I saw.”

Little jc brushed aside yet another Younger marvel. “Did you have a telescope of your own?”

“I did! Astronomy was a hobby of mine. I was lucky to live in the countryside, no city lights to interfere with the night sky, back then, where--” he stopped. The contrast between his remembered youth and this young generation of his eclectic family caused a tingle down his back; Little jc was growing up too fast....

Little jc’s legs swang unselfconsciously up onto his lap. “You said, ‘back then, where.’ Where what?”

“Oh, you know. A place full of people...before Grandma, you and your brother came here....” The bare answer made him feel foolish, almost, as the rest withered away in thought. *‘Here’...where we awakened, from one lifetime into another, and have lived again as if this, alone, was Life....*

“I sailed a boat once, too,” he changed the subject.

“You did?”

“Uh huh—with a boy’s club; and, you know, the water was just smooth as glass--not a ripple. I learned how to man the ropes and tiller, and how to turn the front sail to bring the blow to the other side and take a tack.”

Little jc made sure not to seem too interested, sensing that Grandpa--obviously taking pleasure from memory--maybe was going to tell more than he ought.

“A person is at the mercy of the wind on a sailboat. Why, if there’s no wind, *one doddina gaw norplace*,” Grandpa said with old salt flavor. “Well, that day, there I was on deck all by myself. Everyone else was down below, napping I guess. All of a sudden there came a sound

like someone blowing his nose. You know—" he made a snorkel sound--"like that. So I looked around, but there was nothing! Then I heard it again, and again I looked around and saw nothing. And I'd keep hearing it, and I'd keep looking 'round, thinking, *everyone else is below deck...I'm all alone up here, and someone's blowing his nose?* Well, finally I looked over the side, and there was this *dolphin!*"

"What's a 'dolphin'?" Little jc had seen pictures in the library's books of seas, all kinds of boats, and fish, but not yet a dolphin.

"A sea dweller," Grandpa answered, "something like a small whale, with a dome-shaped head and big soulful eyes. And this dolphin was *that* near, I could reach down and touch it; but I didn't want to frighten it. Besides, I was a little afraid. I thought if I tried to pet him I just *might* lose a finger. But there he was, funny as all get out. Dolphins were clowns, you know--"

He winced inwardly, realizing he had used the past tense.

"Well, child, that dolphin was just playing a game with me. He was thinking, 'This silly boy doesn't seem to be going anywhere so I may as well amuse him!'" Grandpa JC laughed.

"Oh—a seal came by once too. Have you seen a picture of a seal?"

Little jc had but preferred listening to more. "I'm not sure...."

"They're something like dolphins, but they spend time out of the water. They have kind of flapping-fin feet that they use to pull themselves onto rocks and the like. And funny broom-like whiskers, with eyes almost as black as a dolphin's but bigger, even. Beautiful eyes--just about covering their entire head. Yes, all eyes and whiskers—"

"And do they like to be petted?"

"Probably!" He planted his feet flat on the floor. "Think I'll go in now." He tousled the platinum blond head. "See you at table." He did not like the feeling that had overcome him--*hatefulness....* Hate, that Little jc was denied so much of living's possible experiences; hate, that he could not insure the future. *I know why people have had need to believe in a god*, he thought on the way. *Bearing sole responsibility for life is too much, for man.*

"It still is remarkable, to me," Grandma JC said later, wrapping dinner leftovers to put in the cooler outside the kitchen door. "To have learned, from your brother, that if Humankind exists long enough all of it can have a good life."

Little jc lifted a dish from the pan in the dry sink and shook water off of it. Perhaps Grandma also was about to break the family code. "And it wasn't like that, where you came from?"

"No...", the woman replied, conscious of her voice's gutterly draw, but said no more....

8 – 11 NOVUS

Birthdays, it seemed, were celebrated anywhere and, according to their calendared years, it was the Younger's 24th --time for cake (raw apple with honey frosting), one candle to blow with a wish, and homemade gifts. This year, a soft cotton case from Little jc, for the precious magnifying glass, and a new sheath for his knife--leather prepared and cut by Grandpa, hand-stitched by Grandma.

There always would be boyishness about the Younger visage, but as he lingered at table the woman noticed a forehead now etched with worry lines. "No glory to me, or to my ancestors," the Younger shrugged off renewed praises. "No glory, simply because longer human-beingness allowed more discoveries, of the more that there is *to* learn."

How strange the contradiction she felt: sorrow for the boy lost to an enlightened existence, against a tinge of gladness for her own loss. Every moment lived in that 'before' had been in the midst of civil warring, and she, only one of a multitude impoverished by imperial ignorances. In this 'second life' (if that is what it should be called), she had been able to lavish love on every act, to being nothing but one fully alive, specific kind of woman uncritically immersed in maternal instincts.

Memories of perpetrated horrors she never would utter, as if to do so would unleash vermin into her *sanctum sanctorum*. Her former intellect had wasted enough of time, trying to

comprehend humankind tolerance of inhumanity upon itself while depending on one god or other in the process. Still, she was interested. Did Humankind's god-concept also eventually die in antiquity? she asked, as they sat together in the party's afterglow. Given the chronology of his globe, could he shed light on that?

"Cultural psychical adaptations to evolution follow a pattern as much as do material," he replied. "Mutual understandings manifest gradually in collective consciousness, just as they do in individual. With time, a global consortium was formed on my planet, to collect and conserve records of all religious orders and sects." He glanced past her and fingered the ends of his shoulder-length hair, as he was wont to do, when searching for succinctness. "Changing the notions of 'church' versus 'state' to *individual and* state took the better part of a century. As you might suspect, eventually the collective became 'agnostic,' concomitant with advances in Literature and Science. What before had been churches gradually became communal charities, but folks were not denied any personal beliefs or practices."

He rose from the table, then, and began clearing it. Grandma JC understood the little talk was done; moreover, she thought she read his inward gaze. In his society the term, "Utopia," had lost the taint of unreachability. What she wanted to know he couldn't say--whether it was possible, for one human to transmit wisdom of Time to anyone not descended from the living of it....

In the middle of that night Grandpa JC was awakened by back pain. He gripped the bed's headboard, planted feet solidly against footboard and gently twisted his body through the crunch between lumbar and sacral vertebrae. *You could have warned me sooner*, he thought with a lovingly look at the head on the next pillow.

The woman had chided him about watching his back, the night that they became that which Little jc believed them always to have been--all of Love to a child being civility and affection. They revealed much of their prior selves to each other, that night....

Other minds had been to him like dichroic crystals, refracting arbitrary beliefs depending

on the angle at which the light of reason struck them. He told her of his reformed days as a teacher, dedicated to distinguishing Consciousness from Body in the minds of his students. Wishing only to arm youth with simple facts, parental outrage had astounded him. Politics were not the cause, however, for his opting out; he simply could not stand the irony: young minds, wholly disposed to cleave to truth, doomed to repeat their adults' mistakes through denial of education available to prevent it.

"I was considered quite the radical, if not outright degenerate," he had confessed. "Folks didn't like thinking the potential of perfect nature streamed between genitals and brain, body and mind--"

"Self and Soul?" the woman had voiced simply, reserving further thought. She remembered feeling fated to love forever the man she once was with. Here, yoked with a stranger—possibly two last survivors of their history--Fate remained forever real; but 'forever' had taken on a whole new meaning. Nothing was served, however, by recounting life's romanticisms; poetic irony was best kept to oneself. And it had been too soon, in their union, to contemplate: if Fate were to perpetuate Life, it wouldn't be through the two of *them*....

Beside of him now, the woman stirred but didn't open her eyes. Was she sleeping still?

No, Grandma JC was not asleep. She was traversing to and fro in the present's past, a sometimes ridiculous kaleidoscope where each day juxtaposed practicality and esoterica...*making friends with wild goats, to breed them! Harvesting the medicinal garden...drying leaves and flowers for salves and herbal infusions, while the Younger coaxed purer distillations of essential resins. And that strange little pyramidal hot house he built....* So many times she had wished for a camera—like when seeing an elated, prepubescent Little jc meander through the blooming herb garden, after the Younger said *okay*, to helping with the pharmaceutical inventory.

Grandma JC had been matter-of-fact about her own competence in the pharmacy, which would not have surprised college peers, who took her future academic success a given. Instead, she had buried it in activism, supporting a colleague who, to her, was the last and greatest of patriots. She had felt no need to argue her choice. *Him, her aged mother, siblings, nieces and*

nephews.... No different than now had she felt then, a sheltering eagle; she thought of them in one or another way every day. Losing all of them instantaneously was very different from sequential losses of beloveds to visible death. Gradually, however, the circuit of grief for those of that life had closed around gratitude for those of this.

How enviable sounded the Younger's populace, protective of its progeny against toxicities material and aethereal, peace prevailing all the way to that day when one nevermore will rise from a fresh-linened bed in a high-ceilinged room, the door of which, under cascading bougainvillea, stands open to a sun-rippled courtyard. Her bond with the boy-now-man had forged conviction it didn't matter where Consciousness dwelled. All existence was subject to Universal Laws and humankind--its happinesses and miseries--to Natural Laws presented to wakeful Reason. Any grouping anywhere, sooner or later, would produce its own, the same, philosophy, sciences, discoveries—

At that point in Grandma JC's daydreaming, a slight bounce of the mattress announced that her bed partner had left it. She opened her eyes in time to see him quietly slip out the door. Sunlight edged the curtains, and soon she heard muffled chatter below. Morning, and breakfast—her very favorite time of day....

Spikes of lavender in the bed beneath the kitchen were showing above the window ledge, a later moment that could have been blissful, had Grandma JC not needed the cheese grater to prepare that day's lunch. The grater hung at eye level on the side of the cupboard, one old-fashioned cheese grater of the best metal for its purpose, made to last longer even than one human lifetime.

No amount of willed psychic inuredness can arrest stubborn associations. Every time Grandma JC lifted the grater off its hook, mind was doomed to regurgitate the same line...*almost as if...*, accompanied by an inexorable spurt of adrenalin at her core. *Could* it be?--that something *greater* than Nature had a hand in Life?

Younger heritage refused such speculation. Physics and Nature took care of the material world; and, whereas the woman had witnessed Humankind cross borders of reason and sanity--rationalizing terror in *il nome del Dio* (no matter how much history proved the fallacy)--the fundament of human spirit needed no atlas other than civilized humanity. All hope offered racial, gender, and religious equalizations from mid-20th century forward became inconsequential, in a global madness born--not of theocracy--of human deprivation, Religion's temples the fall-backs from those of economic power and the frontlines of ethnic cannibalism.

The woman had been adamant about preserving Little jc from mystical concepts. God-beliefs were to be studied along with legendary mythology! It had been a matter of simple delight, when Little jc found two kittens in the hayloft. That they happened to be male and female, and later produced a litter that in turn produced another, fell to the adults to keep the number within reason. The Younger had volunteered, mercifully extinguishing excessive newborns before Little jc discovered them. But the original two *had* appeared at just the right moment to entertain a solitary child; and despite professed objectivity Grandma JC still hadn't corralled her own uncertainty--

To imagine? That one was chosen for a second life because of the sheer magnitude of one's being? That lurking hubris troubled her. Hubris and Worthiness should be mutually exclusive! she would scold herself. One cannot simultaneously both be worthy and harbor the notion of being an instrument of Omnipotent Will, when--ontologically?---a necessary quality of Worthiness is knowing one's non-worthiness? God knows I'm no philosopher! It's enough, that Little jc is growing up free from potential rebellion against religious theories--

Just thank Heaven I'm not Mrs. Noah, she concluded, perplexed not a whit by the frame of references, forcing thought back to the present. *A cold supper will be nice--the last of the cured ham, and a fresh fruit salad with it--plums and apricots... Maybe pound cake for dessert?* She heaved a sigh. On the one hand it was kind of warm to bake. On the other, there were those eggs that should be used up before they went to waste.

The fire stoked, cake in the oven, melted-cheese sandwiches for lunch in a pan at the stove's back, Grandma JC had to whisk small droplets of sweat from her forehead; but it felt good

simply doing what needed to be done. Glancing through the window she noticed that the daisies at the far edge of the flowerbed appeared precisely the size of the embroidered ones around her apron. Captivated by how objects in the visual field did diminish “plane by plane,” recalling Younger words—“in a concerted ratio, from near to far”—her reverie was broken by the very sound of his voice, along with clinks of metal on metal, from the front porch.

“This is the best visible example of joinings of the medium. You see it’s as much *pushing through* as pulling towards—the iron’s orderly containment meeting the magnet’s finer sub-atomic organization—“ the Younger stopped mid-sentence.

Little jc must have held up a hand. “*Because*, the medium’s ‘harder’ than everything.”

Had they a thermometer that afternoon, it would have registered unusually warm; yet Grandma JC shivered. The words brought back her last sight of the world she once inhabited—how a human body, kept fused together by the squared speed of light, could be vaporized—along with the staggering disbelief of ‘awakening,’ in the valley.

Not one of them (except Little jc!) had been overcome less. Gaining voices, thoughts tumbling, they couldn’t give each other time to finish sentences. There, the man had proved equal to the Younger. He proposed a seven-day hiatus of constraint, during which, he stressed, they undertake nothing except rest and fortification. Quieting, they agreed that on the seventh night they would regroup, and initiate a plan of action—

Oh! He’ll be coming in for lunch any minute! Grandma JC reached for the kettle to brew tea. (Grandpa JC maintained that a hot drink on a warm day was a cooling thing, and the stovetop still was good and hot). As she turned toward the stove, Little jc and the Younger bounded through the door and the slick handle of the kettle, heavy with water, slid from her grasp. It landed squarely with a whoosh of sound that Grandma felt across her instep. “Goodness!” she exclaimed, jumping away.

“Sorry!” the Younger exclaimed back. “Didn’t get you, did it?”

“No, no; I’m fine. But wasn’t that interesting? I mean that, just before, you two happened to be discussing ‘attraction’ and ‘repulsion’ in the prime medium.”

"Hmm--eavesdropping, were you?" teased the Younger, immediately flashing a pop question to Little jc. "Now what do you suppose is the difference, between a full kettle of water falling, and a rain drop?"

"About a ton of torr," Little jc tossed off.

"WHAT?" Grandma stopped measuring leaves. "I must have missed something." She lifted a tray from the sideboard and carried it to the dining room table. All that divided the greenery outside from the sunlit inside were the window sashes.

"Well, the average raindrop we can see has a billion-trillion atoms, you know," the Younger said as they trailed after her. He pulled out a chair and dropped onto it. "Hey, Little jc, get me the chalkboard. Let's reduce our view to optic fibers. ... Let's see," he pursed his lips as he drew. "One hundred and forty thousand hairline thins can carry as many two-way conversations--all through a half-inch cable...."

Grandma looked away and began arranging placemats. She saw herself strung within a pulsating grid, soldered into existence precisely as Pinocchio's carved wood surrounded his essence. Looking back at the sight of the two of them, heads almost touching, reminded her, however. The moment of death, potentially determinable by so many things, was not, by the number of joyful experiences fulfilled. *And, if Consciousness has come this far, why not farther?* She knew the next thought, and something made her whirl. The man stood in the doorway. *But for Life to be recreated, it cannot be by the two of us....*

She gave her head a small shake and turned thoughtfully back to the table. He and she once had lived separately, man and woman in different human relationships, before those of their valley. From that life wherein Collective Consciousness had begun to lose dependence on a sentient god, they became subjects of nothing but the palpability of waking moments. But the feeling at times, that he could read her mind, had to be fantasy--

You know?" the Younger sprang up and clasped Grandpa JC's forearm. "That last batch of homemade brew is darn good!"

"*Not* before lunch," Grandma said sternly.

“Oh, no,” the Younger laughed. “I’m not going for one *now*. I’m getting some juice for me and the kid.”

Grandma followed him to the kitchen. She slipped on a quilted mitt, took the cake out of the oven and set it aside to cool. *What is there to worry about now? If only I could rely on there being a sentient God, to keep away dangers....*

The man came up behind her and put his hands on her shoulders. “There are new straw flowers in the meadow,” he said. “Why don’t we have our lunch out there?”

She reached a hand back over his. “I’ll be ready in a minute.”

“I’ll put our sandwiches on a plate,” he offered. “We can have tea later.”

Grandma JC served the Younger and Little jc, gave each a kiss on the cheek, and ran upstairs to change in the flowered cotton dress that was the man’s favorite. It wasn’t the body that dressed for him. It was the spirit of Woman that had walked with Man’s since the beginning of their existence.

Grandma JC and Grandpa JC always were amenable—gregarious, even--in the presence of the youths. In their private reality, however, neither needed much to speak, nor now could either imagine companionship greater than each other’s to seek. When she came down the stairs he was waiting on the porch, his back toward her. She knew he would not move from that spot—could not move from that spot—without her. All the men that had lived, was He, all women, She; and another summer would all be theirs....

Marhlo’s soul awakened that morning before mind could click into half-hearted re-assertions. For the first time he felt the hint of a wish that he was dead. A fantasy from deep Psyche had surfaced through sleeping hope: he had dreamed again of rescuing the Younger. *Why now? After all this time?* He turned feet to the floor beside the pallet bed and pressed forehead to knees, waiting for the after-thoughts to run their course. *Assuming...the boy landed safely...wasn’t killed by his ‘hosts’...*

Marhlo would not have hesitated an instant, if all required was pitting laws of probability

against risks assumed and himself against all odds. Probability was manipulable and assumptions were his business, were they not?--coming up, as he was, on the third regular session of the Interplanetary Relations Commission, where he was expected to nail consensus on the Tertiary Protection Program. Marhlo no longer could care about position and status; but long years of dutiful service whipped his head. *I ought to be reviewing the report!*

As always when he arose from bed, the first image Marhlo saw was himself, in a freestanding mirror opposite. Today it did not reflect the usual self-conscious lifting of posture. Instead the image was disturbingly confrontational. *You call yourself a direct descendant of the great Ansano?--he who conceived and designed the Primary Concealment Satellite that has shielded our discovery for two generations?*

Planet Three had had its Copernicus, Newton and Einstein. Planet Five, its Jhone and Andreh (*don't forget Lehmin!* Marhlo imagined the Younger interrupting). Ansano--Five's leading philosopher-scientist--had lived *circa* the time of Three's Galileo Galilei. Ansano had been first to theorize that evolution of human consciousness followed a universal pattern, no matter where it appeared. Three's early great global flooding, and that loss of the knowledge collective, may have delayed its development some five centuries. It was just a matter of time, however, Ansano reasoned, before its scientific advances would reveal Five's existence.

The young Ansano had apprenticed in QUARC's Language Conversion Section, deciphering receptions from planet Three; but it was in astrophysics that he was destined for glory, inventing the way to postpone discovery: an isochronal, geosynchronous satellite programmed to project the heavens sequentially around and beyond Five as if the planet didn't exist. Within three solars of his design the ingenuous satellite became reality.

To the same degree that Marhlo idolized his great ancestor, he had reveled in being the Younger's heroic mentor. Since the boy's disappearance, the graft of stock and scion had been hanging in a vacuum of inaction. On one side was Marhlo's love of The Law and its society, dedicated to self- preservation. But what joy under any law, absent the beloved?

Even QUARC discipline had become useless to dispel his neurosis. Consciousness no longer could detach Time's flow from the bog of mental chatter. Now in advanced years--body on

the verge of its twenty-fifth solar--Marhlo found that the capacity to escape paralyzing thoughts was in an inverse ratio to the tenure of incarnated awareness.

He had been prepared to be without the Younger presence a long while, *but never to see him again?*

Grandpa JC fluttered the grass under the serape. The sun was at its peak. Silently obeying Nature's heed they both disrobed and reclined on the coarse wool, their skins lightened from winter's coverings.

Grandpa's shoulder-length hair was nickel gray. His body still was lankily lean, loosened flesh over muscles belying the adamantine strength once all his. *Just yesterday*, he thought, *we kindled the last fire of winter as moon and sun faced off at the equinoxial tangent.*

Grandma JC's waistline was that of a younger woman but her hair, also long, was grayed, showing only hints of its former chestnut brilliance. Between blades of grass she could see all the way to the great northern mountains. *This valley is all of any earth I need*, she thought. How far away!--failed national economy, raging global emotions, speechless survival in the wake of technological revolution....

She turned toward the man and curled a calf across his thighs. Softly she traced fingertips up his arm from pulse on upturned wrist, across valley of elbow to a bicep that even in relaxed state coaxed fingers over its mound. *Sixteen years....*

He lowered his eyes to meet hers, again only seeming to have read her thought. He had nothing but comfort in mind. Each seventh day for him was divinely conscious immersion in Time Present, and each seventh awakening he made the same vow. He would take from the day every beauty within his power to grasp. Soon enough, tomorrow, for the next decision, wending toward them as certainly as were they, toward it. He brushed strands of the woman's hair from her cheek. *Not today!*

All alone in that sunlight scene they looked like paradisaical beings, but mortal they persisted nonetheless. An early rising, a busy morning, and the sun combined, Grandpa JC

quickly fell asleep.

Ordinarily the woman equally was able to surrender to seventh day tranquilities. This particular 'Sunday,' however, standard litanies failed her. In that respect, she was not alone....

12 –15 NOVUS

"Human perception may have its limits, but it's still a remarkable faculty," the Younger said, as he sat cross-legged on the floor next to Little jc.

Afternoon chores and Grandpa JC awaited him, but he just couldn't resist more input before leaving Little jc to the day's study. "The permanent ground curve of this glass," he referred to the magnifying glass in hand, "is quite different from your lenses. Behind those blue irises...*(there's that supercilious tip of my chin again!)*, your lenses are like soft crystal—transparent, polygonal cells that adjust instantaneously to each plane focused."

No lie, Little jc thought, fully familiar with ciliary processes and the iris frill of tiny muscles, that automatically accommodate lenses to focal planes.

"The rays that reach the eye are refracted first by the cornea toward the lens, through which the image is reracted again," the Younger continued. No matter, that Little jc knew how images reduced from one medium's density to another; the Younger was on a roll....

"Your lenses always are more rounded on their backs. From there, the final image-carrying rays pass through the vitreous fluid to the retina at back. Two types of cells in it, 'cones' and 'rods', feed the picture into the optic nerve. Amazing, huh! How tiny that registered image must be, compared to size of view?"

Little jc also didn't need emphasized the vast reduction of visual percepts conveyed to brain, frequently having lain on the ground contemplating 'space' and imagining how--except for small peripheral portions--the entire universe beyond was compressing through pupils a mere two-fifths-inch diameter onto the *one-seventeenth-inch-diameter* macula. And, if *that* wasn't beyond imagining, consider *its* acutest heart--*the fovea: one-seventy-fifth-inch diameter!*

The Younger handed over the magnifying glass. "The molecular serration of that glass is nothing compared to the ultra-fine surface of the eye's pliable lens. Here," he instructed, "position it above the chapter title until you see the print clearly--where it intercepts a 'wider' slice of the approaching image. See? Getting a clear image depends on where the glass is held."

Bowman's discounted theory might be mentioned at this point--Little jc thought, reaching back to lift ponytail of hair from where it had been trapped between t-shirt and sweater--that the ciliary processes also may compress the vitreous, causing the lens to advance--like those fish with lenses that moved back and forth in their sockets....

Little jc instead handed back the magnifying glass and took the book in both hands. JC unwound his legs and stood up--not that he took the hint; he had kept Grandpa waiting long enough. "Keep in mind that that book doesn't tell the whole story. You can choose *where* to look, but lens reaction is determined *by where*; but more about that later. I'll be back before you know it. And just wait," he turned, catching a parting expression that managed to look more like anticipation than welcomed release. "*Binocularity* is where things get *really* interesting!"

Little jc slid down, flopped over, and pulled the book on top of a cushion. It was easy to imagine oneself on the illustration's horopter, and the far and near parts of the visual field entering the eyes without being felt—

Much like being looked at by the Younger, and not being seen.

Marhlo, never before the type to count solars, wondered suddenly. *Didn't he just have a birthday? Let's see. Gone more than five solars.... Why this one's got to be his tenth, regardless Three's circled the sun 15 times and we have, only five....*

Soundly dispirited, despite little time left before his meeting, Marhlo ran his hands along the bookshelf until he found Ansano's journals. The browned pages fell open to the notes on Linguistics....

The level of civilization manifest in a society is a product of mutual comprehension of

definitions that determine the level of reasoning. We arrived to function with one global lexicon, while Planet Three is burdened, still, by countless regional ones.

The diary notes presaged lectures later given at Strobe University, where every young person was guaranteed a free summer in residence and learned relativity with simplicity. Marhlo turned to the chapter “On *Time*”....

Planetary revolution, a relative reference for measuring time, says nothing about absolute age. Planet Three covers 2.83 mean of the sun in the time of Five’s one. Aging, however, occurs in universal time. A person who entered existence on Three at the exact moment I, myself, was born on Five, would count his years differently—according to number of revolutions—but not be near-triple my age.

Always, at that point in a lecture, at least one student would be sparked to reason aloud prematurely. “Aha! Then *motion* must determine Time, regardless the number of revolutions—“ “Think again!” Ansano would prompt. *Time on planets is calculated relative to apparent solar time, not on Absolute Time—*

At that point Marhlo was prompted himself by a nearby chime. *Is it already in advance of 10 b.z.?* He replaced the book on the shelf, crossed to the priory-white sidewall, and stepped on a floor button. He had a clean robe off its hanger before the closet door’s opening slide stopped. *I don’t intend to be late for the last session of my career!*

The unpremeditated thought made Marhlo all the more hurried. It embraced more than one decision....

Little jc heard the door open but didn’t turn to look.

“What part are you reading now?”

“*Hering’s* third eye.”

“Ah, the third eye! That grandly elusive nemesis of adolescent humankind.”

Were it not for Grandma, Little jc, regardless weather, would live in shorts and shirt. Now, for seeming inexplicable reason, the body in them turned deliberately slowly over to its back, separating the two.

JC turned away quickly. "...Ummm, yes...the third eye.... He stripped himself of his soiled work shirt and threw it aside. "The notion that the picture 'out there' is real--not some concoction of brain—is a hard one to give up."

Little jc lifted to a sitting position and pulled the tie from pony-tailed hair. "Another vestige of the clinging to free will?"

"Inevitably. Physics' unveiling of 'Ultimate Reality'—that union of atomic, electromagnetic and gravitational actions—demands recognition of the very thing that causes its elusiveness: the observer's absolute integration in the field."

He sat again on the floor, reached for the book and leafed its pages. "In retrospect it's ironic--" there was a tiny halt when their shoulders touched-- "that light *itself*-- with its *only apparent* 'dualistic' nature--obscured matters, its omnidirectional reflections relative to the viewer's position and action through the medium being constant in all directions. For example, there are uncountable images projecting of you and me which eyes all around us would receive, were others here. But let's get back to what I said about lens reaction being connected to what's 'out there.'"

Little jc lay back again and tucked front shirttails beneath the shorts' waistband, creating a shadow at the sternum.

"Uh...," JC leafed haphazardly through the book. "Uh—well, take looking at sunlight glancing hard off shiny metal. You couldn't make your eyes focus on the surface of the metal because of the energy of the glare. Your lenses could focus only at some plane above it. No matter how you 'slice' it, there always is going to be a pressure point certain to the plane...."

Behind closed eyes, absorption in the timbre of the Younger voice had tripped a small symphony of thought.... *How unlike maturing plants are we! A plant has but stateliness to lend...a human organism, ever-present Consciousness with which to contend. Oh to be like*

scotch broom on the hillside, blossoming and giving off seed, only shading its young to serve Nature's need—

"Hey! You're not *listening* again!"

Little jc abruptly stood up. "Sorry. I need to help Grandma with supper."

He stood also and put his shirt back on with a little trouble buttoning it. Little jc felt a sudden swell of friendliness, unexpectedly reached up to help, and said, "We can work more this evening if you want." He caught the fingers, thinking he would give them a teasing squeeze, and was startled by a thought of bringing them to his lips.

"Okay--" he said, almost tripping over the desk chair, "--it's a date."

Oh dear, Little jc's mind finished its score. *Was there purpose here to be served, as well as cause?*

Fifty solars had passed on planet Five since the geosynchronous satellite was placed in orbit. The strange daytime shadow moon had been Five's constant companion so long, few lived who remembered the sky without it. Besides shielding against discovery, the satellite provided fine-honed data. Marhlo's great-grandfather's generation had monitored initially crude nuclear power on Planet Three; his grandfather's generation, Three's stages of extraterrestrial exploration and deployment of communication satellites.

Reviewing Five's posture toward Three every three solars had been deemed sufficient until the last year of Marhlo's journeymanhood, when the Global Council took heed of increased magnitude events on Three. The issue, whether to continue Five's long-standing policy of isolationism, was put before the people. The vote was unanimous to continue non-intervention as long as possible, but also to prepare for it—first, by financing a fly-by, information gathering mission....

Striding the curved path to the Symposium Center, Marhlo didn't notice that the vines had climbed another story since he last looked. His mind was turned inward, remembering how the vote had heralded a new heady time in Astroscience. His rock-hard approach catapulted him to

the forefront of a two-tiered operation. The G-Energy System went into final manned tests sooner than anticipated and performed flawlessly, which mechanics proceeded rapidly to position a mid-flight supply station. In comparison, the "PCS"--primary concealment satellite--had been a snap. Parallaxedly compensatory to relative ecliptical paths, its underdisk had been calculated per the formula of diminution correspondent to Three's telescopic reception. A way station, on the other hand, involved a solar orbit, besides an underdisk calibrated to absorb and emit light in relative concert with its passage across the entire celestial outscape.

In the earliest days, pilot physical safety had been paramount. Now it became pilot mental stability. The interplanetary astronaut's successful endurance of time-absolute, about which Marhlo had misgiving even as a student, had dominated his thought....

Nearest approach with Planet Three, 91-and-a-half million distance-solis. Double it there and back, 183,000,000. Figure overall travel an average 3 distance-soli per time-elapse soli per soli, 183 million divided by 3...61 million...divided by 96,000 soli per solar--

Despite the *Nephesh* speed it would take a very special person to spend such a long time alone! On that score, Marhlo's belief that the Younger was more than able hadn't changed; If only he could feel as sure, however, about what more challenges had been given him. He glanced up through the transparent dome to a now fully bright sky. *I was mistaken*, he confessed to the heavens. *It isn't myself as the boy's mentor I miss. It's him, being mine....*

Little jc's favorite haunt for 'alone time' was sitting at the bank edge of the creek.

When was it that they started telling old stories... Not that any one of the three ever told a story woefully; but tinges of sadness were unavoidable, and Little jc's sensing could not have been more acute. *I think, around my 12th birthday--when I began to imagine what it would be like, to remember a 'past.'* *They made that day awfully special. Like I had become 'grown up' overnight!*

I appreciate that I've known less sorrow than they; but I'm not sure it would be a disadvantage, knowing about a 'before' life! They've had reassurance among them in sameness

of experience. Yet is it possible?--that individual identities persist from one realm to another; that a separate consciousness can manifest in endless embodiments, from the beginning of human time, no matter where? And in such a closed system, in what form would Consciousness exist?

Little jc drew a bare foot along the water's surface....

It appears that some great divide in collective consciousness has to precurse any 'copernicum'—those who insist individual consciousness possesses eternal identity but lives only once in human flesh, against those who believe the cognated self is transient and ends with the body's death. But what is that self, which either clings to identity like a plum's flesh to its skin, or needs imagine not existing at all?

Little jc had no problem with free will negating involuntary predestination; and accepting ultimate fragmentation, becoming anonymous parts of another temporary identity, was not so difficult. If prime matter was reused repeatedly, wasn't 'reincarnation' inevitable? Philosophical distraction about past lives, however, was short-lived itself, today. It was The Future that really concerned Little jc. How to handle one's *present* surging self?—that sensed core of memory born not of books--*concrete* visualizations that could make listening to JC's lengthy postulations so *tortuous*? Didn't he have even *one* clue?--

Well I'm certain about one thing. Little jc shook water from feet and lay sidewise the creek. *I'm not about to ask him yet, where seeds of consciousness exist in his otherwise perfect model....*

The sun was shining brightly when Marhlo exited the Symposium but *his* identity was lost in shadows. He felt a stinging in his eyes as he threaded through the excited chatter streaming past. He had loved nothing more than the free noon lectures beneath the cavernous skylight, when young and old from every segment of society overflowed woven rugs on the atrium's marble floor.

"How can we measure pulsation?" Marhlo had asked one most memorable day. And this boy, mind you, piped up at back. "The same way one measures angulation!"

Marhlo didn't know it yet, but he had found his 'futureman.' He took the Younger home that very afternoon, to show him the family 'treasure'--the famous Ansano 'marbles' that once had visited every regional Child Park. The boy Younger had lifted each of the stair-stepped glass spheres high, but he didn't need to look through them to comprehend the intricacies of bifocality.

Ansano would challenge the children not just to wonder at a hawk's flight, to imagine its vision—how it could see from on high a mouse in the field. The old mentor left undisturbed, however, those who preferred to lounge under drooping trees, entranced by dropping leaves. They belonged to a different muse. His youth, in QUARC's Language Conversion Section, was spent deciphering data steadily received from planet Three. It cemented his theory that accretions in human consciousness followed universal patterns, and that no one other factor of civilized development was more significant than mutual language comprehension. An English lexicon eventually was assembled. It didn't surprise Marhlo to discover that the Younger already had mastered the phonemes and grammar.

Before long, the Younger was set to studying the scale of exterior depths, as recorded by the particle-current-probe activated at the turn of the cyclisennium. Soon he was truncating Ansano's formulae--seizing a value for equalizing interplanetary distance-time with a lapse-time-constant, relative to three frames of reference. "Standardizing the ratios can eliminate a whole generation of calculations," he prophesied, pupils large with enthusiasm. Marhlo recalled feeling a twinge of fear; he did not recognize it, then, as parental.

Marhlo had considered himself a natural for the Secondary Concealment Division. Privately--basking as he did in identification with his famous ancestor--that subconscious pride had carried over to his role with his young protege. *Ansano and the Younger.... The Younger and Ansano...* "Graduate to Life!" he often had exhorted young recruits. "Everything about living depends on Mind solving its own complexities, and cross-thought is the nemesis of Consciousness as are cross-winds to the navigator." Yet how long he had been swimming back and forth, in his! "It's inevitable," he had expounded. "Humankind has to reach a point of total confusion before every major revolution in its precepts"—

No different for an individual! Marhlo thought, denying the urge to look back at the imposing edifice, where reposed all vigor of his life's prime. Any sentiment would do an injustice to its relinquishment.

The Younger ordinarily gave over easily to sleep. Not so, this night. Something about the day had opened a curtain to a future crowded with new unknowns. More than ever he yearned for Marhlo's presence....

To see him learn about Three's 'Newtonian' era...how Ansano was Leonardo and Galileo, combined, of Five's solar 557! To see the beauty of drawn Euclidean geometry that Five took up a full octave. How he loved contemplating those "side issues of immortality" embraced by a closed system!--forms and subforms occurring and reoccurring, constituted and reconstituted, deliberating whether Consciousness, itself, had substance within that fixed whole.

There was a big difference between individual calamities and cataclysmic; as to the latter, the Younger's orb had been very lucky. He felt sadness, imagining physicists never to know the joys of the greater discoveries to be had; their history could have been that of his civilization, where military weaponry was a thing long past. *Marhlo knew it*, the Younger thought. *"Wisdom of Time is the parent of all."*

The Younger had felt infallible, celestially centered beneath the lab's open dome. Cones of images descended heaven's quark-stepped trellises, through the binary TETs and their telescopic optic chiasma, to register plane by plane on the computer screen. In truth, he never had abandoned the possibility of returning home. Tonight, however, his Ego-self felt severed permanently, in a vast void between that youth and the man's life here still to be lived. He knew he never could leave his present family--especially Little jc!--even if given the chance...

Has the story of the people of the books come to an end? And what will all of it come to mean for our future?

Little jc's pronunciation improved naturally, as it does with children, but it retained a particular metric uniqueness and tone. The males found it more enchanting than remarkable, whereas Grandma JC doubted it was a simple human anomaly. She believed she recognized an unusual construction of mouth and tongue.

Then there were those coveralls, preserved in a small chest with other memorabilia. Grandma, an avid seamstress, never in her past had come across such a fabric--an unusual double-weave of opposed diagonal biases, all warp on one side, all weft on the other. *And what about the coverall buttons?* Unnoticed by the males, Grandma had replaced them very quickly with two ordinary ones from the sewing box. She hadn't asked herself why, at the time. Now--distracted from lighting the lamp in the darkened bedroom--she realized she literally had forgotten all about them for years.

There was but one place where they could be. She pulled out the bottom dresser drawer and reached far back until her fingers touched velvet cloth. She loosened the ties of a small pouch and four objects tinkled onto the dresser top. Two were gold bands--one, hers; the other, the man's. They had removed them the October night they considered themselves wedded to each other, and any reaction of Grandma JC to hers had faded long ago. The other two objects, Little jc's original buttons, seemed alive, gathering light from the dark. The reflections from their fine, diamond-patterned surfaces seemed to be sending a silent message....

"Grandpa?--"

It still was a bit strange for the man, enjoying a mid-morning break the next day, to hear himself so called.

"Yes?"

"Wouldn't it have been easier to make wine than beer?"

His first response was a silent *Huh?*

Little jc, aware the query was demanding careful forethought, waited patiently.

"Ultimately, as did all matters--do still--it came to a vote," Grandpa JC began cautiously. "Our very first law, proposed by Grandma, was that the basis of every law would be the well-being of the younger generation." He had been careful not to say, *future* generations.

Little jc's mind annoyingly drifted to its last image of the Younger, sans shirt, a loose lock of hair falling over his forehead. When attention reclaimed itself Grandpa JC was amid a new sentence....

"...so it eventually fell to us to decide between 'goods' and 'bads' of alcoholic drinks. Now, I never was in company that drank too much; Grandma, on the other hand, had suffered some bad experiences." He set the porch swing going with a push of the foot. "In your brother's former society, people were free to make mild alcoholic beverages at home for personal use. Strong alcohol was restricted to prescribed medicinal uses. Given the Younger's maturity, he had equal voting status here."

"And he preferred beer to wine, and Grandma voted with him?"

"No. That wasn't it. What we had were grains, not grapevines...." Grandpa JC had a wistful moment. He would have enjoyed trying to make a good wine the old way, before one could buy potassium meta-biosulfate....

"Oh--" he resumed. "Grandma introduced a condition of her own!" His grin told her that, while it might be wiser if he didn't reveal more, he would anyway. "You see, she had been a tobacco smoker; and, when the subject of self-indulgent substances came up, she perforce had been without a smoke for a long time." He pulled hard on his ear as if to stop his mouth and lapsed into silence. Little jc knew, If there was any chance to hear juicier detail, the last thing she should do was show that she cared....

"This explains the cigarette papers we found!" the woman had exclaimed that gusty October night she discovered a 'secret drawer' in the desk. In it were crushed dry leaves in a small tin. The man never had taken to smoking, but the woman had hand-rolled a cigarette for herself then and there.

They were alone, enjoying the last of the firelight, when after a spell she blurted, "It's easier for me to believe that everyone I left behind died." The pupils of her eyes were at their widest; her usually dramatic voice was even more so. "It's more merciful, than imagining them suffering--or living to produce deformities of their, our prior selves."

She shook her head and took a deep breath, as one does before deep confession. "But there's more than that, to what I feel. What was left behind has stopped mattering to me. I am as near to being happiest here as ever I expected to be." She rose from her chair forcefully and spread her arms like wings of a bird waiting to gather its brood. "How I love this existence that we have forged together. In it, 'the Word' has assumed its true majesty--for us, language has equated to life itself."

She saw willing submission in his eyes. It's true, he had agreed in thought. We, a fragile remnant of a vast parade of incarnations, have known human experience beyond the old system of things....

A time might come when their adopted seed would strike out toward the ever-beckoning mountains. But for Time Being a level platform had been laid and a divine pyramid, designed. He rose then and took her in his arms. He saw by her eyes that she would cleave to him until they had climbed it together and, 'god' willing, know all of living from its height. As dying-fire darkness enveloped them, his mind drew a scripturally symbolic equation of pure union of The Word in The Flesh, and certain of it did he remain to the day....

Little jc, who had reached the end of self-discipline, scuffed the swing back in motion.

"Where was I?" Grandpa asked.

"Grandma'd been without a cigarette for a long time."

"Yes. Right. Well, a few seeds we found were of a plant that can be made into tobacco or tea, and Grandma was familiar with its medicinal effects. So, making a long story longer, the final agreements were: one, we would try to produce strong alcohol for pharmaceutical purposes; two, as time permitted, JC and I could try to make beer; and three, Grandma could try to grow the herb seeds as a special tea." There he brought the porch swing to a dead stop and slapped his

thigh. "You know? I do believe she got the best end of the deal. Never *did* get used to warm beer."

"What were you and Grandpa talking about so long out there?"

Grandma JC wasn't prying, only looking for conversation while preparing piecrust.

Little jc took a nip of the dough and sucked it between tongue and palate. "Alcohol beverages and...um...other things."

"Oh?" Grandma couldn't prevent the word from spinning a small trill. "Thinking of trying some beer, now that you're 16?"

"Maybe."

Grandma looked sidewise at her. "Grandpa told you how we reached agreement on such matters?"

Little jc, plucking another piece of dough, nodded.

"And he told you my special tea story?"

Little jc examined another bit of dough as if it was a precious stone. "Just how you came across it," and added, copping a glance at Grandma, "but I started it all with a question, now that I'm at the end of the medical book."

"To...every...thing...there...is...a...season," Grandma quoted, the words punctuated by pauses of breath between knuckle kneads and dough flops. "I'll admit I had strong prejudice against alcohol. But your brother emphasized that individual self-control is attained, not by banishing history, by acting upon what it has taught." She paused for the delicate maneuver of moving rolled dough onto pie pan, patted the dough in place, and turned sticky hands to the water pail. "Anything else you want to know?"

"I meant to ask Grandpa--was your tea herb used a lot?"

"Unfortunately, not--despite evidence of its therapeutic usefulness. No; it was legislated against, thus fostering a gold mine of illegal trade that put it with other illegal deadly substances,

which left curious youngsters vulnerable to the entire spectrum.”

Little jc walked to the open door between kitchen and library and paused just inside the cool dimness. The two rooms could not have been oriented better for her year-round studies. In winter the open door admitted heat from the wood stove, while summer’s hottest sun didn’t reach it until late afternoon. “One thing....”

Grandma JC, shaking water off her hands, half-turned at the waist. “Yes?”

“In the United States of America history book, the term *Feminism* is used in a chapter on female emancipation. Was that the same kind of political term as ‘isolationism’?”

Grandma leaned against the sideboard, chuckling as she dried her hands. “‘Feminism’ involved more than which of two national courses of action was most reasonable. Let’s see.... How can I describe it?” She pressed her fingers against her lips a moment. “You probably read how common woman’s lot gradually grew less restricted, as to education and participation in Mind’s nobler endeavors--”

“After centuries of being Society’s domestic servants?”

Grandma JC laughed heartily this time. “That about states it! There wasn’t, however, full consensus among women. Some found reasonable Man’s counter--that he over time had been no less forced by human circumstance than they, and that under Earth’s terra lay many bones of men who gladly would have served woman roles rather than be butchered in wars. Collective consciousness still had a way to go, to distinguish Consciousness from Form--to validate the former as possessable of exponential mixtures of characteristics, regardless labeled *masculine* or *feminine*. As I recall, a newer term was afloat. I think it was ‘*feministicism*—the attitude of women who saw Consciousness as genderless.”

Little jc took a step back into the kitchen. “‘Egalitarianistic’?”

“There you go!”

Grandma JC arrested a full inhale until Little jc pulled the door shut behind her. She would have given more detail had there not been, at bottom, an animosity that still could be dredged.... *That conditioned ignorance that could grip either gender!--be it through culture,*

nurture and/or religion.... Blindness to evolution of Consciousness beyond labels--immature emotions that stymied recognition of Woman's and Man's joined subjection, in the course of human development---

Good grief! She undid her apron and turned toward the window. She could not have imagined a greater contrast than between those thoughts and the one as she spied the plaid of Grandpa JC's shirt, between cornstalks at the far side of the truck garden. To have been granted *that*: a truly joint venture in existence with Man—mind and mind; unfettered consideration in every thought, word, and deed.

Time for me to rest on the porch swing, she decided, and was surprised to find the Younger there, a most rare, disconsolate look on his face. Was now the time for her to speak? Not of many things, as the Walrus said--only one....

"Everybody wants to tell their own story and have it listened to, at least once," she began without prologue (softly, knowing how Little jc seemed able to hear the creak of the porch swing from a mile away). "You know, Little jc's intelligence needs to be respected as much as yours. Having read almost every book on the shelves doesn't compensate for hearing intriguing personal stories from three sides. You've been the most gallant of mentors, but it's important now that you be a friend."

The Younger didn't respond, and Grandma JC remained silent. *This feels like trying to describe how a prism renders light, without one in hand!* She didn't know, however, how much her concern meant to him, coming from a woman he admired beyond measure. He was about to say that he finally had seen the light on his own, when they both thought they heard a sound around the corner of the porch. *Grandma's said quite enough!*--Little jc, who had come to stand there minutes before, purposefully rustled the climbing rose, waited to the count of three, and then hopped up the side yard steps and plopped down between them on the swing. "Whew--I do believe it's going to be quite warm an afternoon! What's for lunch?"

Word had spread, apparently, of Marhlo's stance at the morning assembly. The lieutenant at the kiosk that evening was standoffish, as were others Marhlo had to pass to get to where he wanted to be.

The *Nephesh II* testing was shutting down, staff dispersing by the time Marhlo arrived at the hangar. The ceiling was full open still to the darkening sky. His eyes traveled the webbed parapet that clutched the ship--an enormous, aery, pellucidly pale chartreuse preying mantis, capable of dropping from dome to dome with the fleetingest of touches. He recalled JC the Younger at the foot of the gantry, impatiently submitting to a last flight suit check before climbing aboard *Nephesh I*.

No assumption was to be made when it came to pilot safety, but ship performance had not been a concern for Marhlo. Flight suit improvement, however, curiously had dominated his dreaming as much as waking thought during months preceding. He *never* would confess it, but dream associations had been the most useful!--

His hand, sifting barely moist sand, encountering unexpected foreign objects--

Yes!--*damn* the statistics. Rock debris on landing was not predictable; a pilot's spine needed more protection--something less potentially invasive--

Lots and lots of mulberry stems--one, a lustrously slim spiral in an artful rendition of a twice-retrograded freefall--

Again, yes. Something supplely stronger--a small rearrangement of atoms in the mesh....

Marhlo had set the lab at work on it the very morning after that dream. He remembered how he had fidgeted with the new suit longer than its occupant could bear. "Can't wait to ski the medium, huh?" he had said with a levity he didn't feel, as the Younger finally started up the ladder, then turned for a last wave and called back. "Not *skiing...floating through* it: *dust in resonance!*"

The sound of the hangar's closing overhead brought Marhlo back to the present, now empty of personnel. He was doubly worried. The last thing he wanted was a confrontation, but he had been at a loss to deny Sienna's imperative to meet her there. She was less than half Marhlo's age but knew him better than any other human being, living and dead.

She entered so quietly he was unaware of her presence until she was standing right in front of him. His avoiding gaze was a total giveaway.

"You're going." She sighed the words softly, a combination of awe and fear of being overheard in the echoing cavern. "You are! Take me with you."

He looked her in the eye then and shook his head. She interpreted his facial expression quite correctly. *No way* would he take this last of them into the unknown.

Sienna ducked under the gantry, crossed the cold cement and, hands on hips, stood directly beneath the *Nephesh II*. Ringed by the ship's spidery legs, which were programmed to retract in flight at precisely one-eighth the speed of light, she looked to Marhlo like the mantis' innocent prey....

"Lately we've been working on the very heart of the system, the hardest part to visualize--literally as well as figuratively." The Younger twirled more corn syrup over the last of the pancakes, his favorite lunch. He side-eyed Little jc. "Mind some more science talk?"

"No, of course not," replied his companion, liking the way he had said, "we've been working."

"Reconciling physical laws absent the prime medium is a juggernaut for Physics anywhere. Particle experiments only show apparent random behavior, while any formula combination of subfields won't work without an undefined 'constant' in the equation. Where gases are concerned, for example, things like solar winds and magnetopauses get left hanging in the breach. Beyond the atmosphere--out there in the superconducting intergalactical regions--the kinetic system that holds our bodies together doesn't exist." He remembered, then, to exercise some will over his tongue. "Well, you know how amazed I am by all of it. Finished?"

He failed for a moment to respond to Little jc's nod, whose eyes opposite the sunlit window seemed to glisten more than usual. He carried plates and cups to the dry sink, and Little jc brought the kettle from the stove, poured warm water over the dishes and added soap. Leaning against the sideboard, he wondered *how is it, I didn't notice sooner?* How long had it

been, that he no longer could look across the top of Little jc's head?

He pushed himself around and fixed a gaze out the window. "Let's see.... Where were we?"

"Out between stars?"

"Hey, you can finish up here later. Come on," he urged, taking a wet hand.

The parlor retained vestiges of the past evening's comforts. The hearth pillows still were dented, and Little jc sprawled over them anew.

The Younger moved Grandma's mending and perched himself on the footstool. "Our library folks intuited probable union of the four forces—

(Electromagnetic, weak atomic, strong atomic and gravitational..., Little jc privately filled in---)

"But they had a way to go, still, to associate the ineffable 'constant' with what was called 'dark' matter.

(Materially as well as figuratively?)

It was *relative* to gravity (*--no pun intended?*) that the cleverest of compensations had to be invoked. One of your ancestors, a man named Cavendish, demonstrated it. He hung two lead balls on the end of a rod so that they suspended, *ostensibly* freely, in 'space.' Then he brought two larger lead balls close—"

"How do we know Cavendish is one of *my* ancestors?"

The question caused him to take a full look at Little jc, whose hair was spiking rays of the sun as it cut low under the west side curtains. He tossed off the interruption with a smile and shrug of shoulders. "As we know now, the lighter lead balls turned because of the greater interference in the balance of the 'constant.' A lot of experimentation was done to check out what was called 'the law of universal gravitation.' Certain theoretical calculations worked, since relationships within the force—whether conceived coming from within or without objects—yield the same results; but only between two bodies. When a third was added, perturbations resulted that couldn't be explained, even with superimposition of the 'Trojan System.'"

Little jc sat up. "The 'what' system?"

“Trojan,” JC repeated, facing squarely what now was a frame of sunlight, attention caught by the drawing of a long lock of gold hair between lips. He slapped his thighs. “If I don’t get the plot weeded the next seeds will go in late. Tomorrow we’ll get back to concept of constant proportionalities in the space between us.”

He went to the hall and pulled his work shirt off its hook. Jamming his arms into it as he went down the porch stairs he felt a surge of warmth to his face.

Little jc rolled over on the pillows. *You meant, that ‘space’ that isn’t between us!*

Poor Younger. He couldn’t understand how one might conceive oneself a child of yet another planet. Moreover, he’d shown no interest at all in a certain book that Grandma JC had replaced on the library shelf, when Little jc ‘came of age.’

Poor Younger, Little jc thought again, her sympathy, if whimsical, sincere. *A little biology certainly wouldn’t hurt....* Mind’s eye saw the two of them as diamond-pointed iotas on a bead along the same line of the ‘grid.’ What might it be?—when two bodies driven by the universal force finally met?—

Fission? Fusion? Probably both....

Regardless, the Younger didn’t have a chance!

Marhlo’s youthful daring was long gone. He had followed capsule timing to the letter. When peripheral vision closed to a focal slit, he dropped his eyelids altogether; and, compared to the Younger’s metaphysical *mantram*, Marhlo’s was downright pragmatic....

FIFTEEN SECONDS!...

On Fixed Subjectivity to Vision—

What is the breadth of Man’s eye facing the ferocious wind, the oncoming tidal wave, a forest afire? Consider the diameter of the retinal macula upon which all is received! Consider the finite fovea at its center!--

TEN SECONDS!...

On Fixed Subjectivity to Ultimate Perception...

The diameter of a nanometer is one billionth of a meter. Ponder the magnetic distance between quarks in a visible raindrop--

FIVE SECONDS!...

On the declension, only conceptualizable, of circles into lines, lines into triangles, and triangles into fractals, unto imperceivable ultimate reality...

To think it possible--to geometrically track dynamical triangulation through subfields tetrahedral, octahedral and beyond--is delusion!....

The injection's purpose was a nanosecond from totality; Marhlo was at the gate of nothingness, in a grid of motion within which Reason's echoed amplification silences all ego-artful gods that threaten true divinity—

Who said, "Sleep, that knits the raveled sleeve of care"?

Grandma JC laid aside her teacup and pulled the threaded needle from its current stitch hole. "The human mind is contained in matter; but matter alone cannot *know* anything, in the sense of consciousness. Therefore, mind cannot answer the question, whether it does possess free will. Is that right?" Little jc caught the Younger's eye and nearly laughed. Grandma's 'pop quizzes' had a way of coinciding with a cup of her 'special' tea. "Now who was that ancient scientist of our library folk—the one credited with establishing that matter and energy were equal?"

"I wouldn't call him *ancient*, exactly," Grandpa JC interjected with a smile at Little jc.

"That would be 'Einstein,'" Little jc answered dutifully. "His formula, Energy equals Mass times the Speed of Light squared, demonstrated that matter and energy are different forms of the same thing—"

"And that energy comes and goes through matter!" Grandma interjected with a teacher's air.

"Like steam crawling up from the cooking pot," Grandpa JC posed simply, never minding playing the less-enlightened one.

“What do you think about all that?” Grandma asked Little jc. The Younger, about to speak, himself, pursed his lips noticeably.

Little jc, after a quick look at the Younger, thought a moment before beginning. “‘Quantum mechanics’ inevitably forces Physics to rethink creation-by-Nature *versus* creation-by-‘God.’ Despite energy’s begging recognition as *substance*, there’s natural resistance to saying that it is, for a religious commonweal yielding to the epistemology of its time.”

“Said perfectly,” the Younger honored the remark. Grandma JC’s eyes sent him a direct look of appreciation. *My mother was right*, she thought, taking all credit for his new sensitivity. *One word to the wise is sufficient.*

“Tell us why,” The Younger prompted Little jc.

“Well, besides accepting that there is no such thing as substanceless ‘space,’ there’s no room for ‘acts of god’ in a unified field that demands a closed system—“

“And our library scientists were in the midst of it, without knowing it?” Grandpa JC asked, ever ready to be the straight man.

“ Exactly. And where, then, in such closed system, could exist that thing called ‘free will?’”

Grandma JC peered over poised needle for an exact opening between warp and woof. “There was an old saying once, ‘to see is to believe.’ I guess our library people couldn’t envision in mind’s eye, yet, the ‘picture’ that Philosophy first must draw,” she said.

It caused the Younger to remember how Marhlo loved telling the story of their planet’s accompanying revelation. Having heard it so many times he could quote it by heart: *Oh how presumptuous can be this thing called ‘Man!’* Marhlo always began. But the Younger detoured memory and jumped up, instead. “Ever look at that old scrapbook here? The popular versions of blind progress make for great reading.”

The Younger, not having waited for answer, fetched the scrapbook from the library. He turned the yellowed sheets gingerly, interjecting comments as he read headlines aloud. “‘*Is Earth Inside a Ring of Cosmic Dust?*’ Well, of course!... ‘*New Formula of Perception’s Constant Angles of Ratio?*’ Duh!... ‘*Can Stable Habitability Orbits Exist Elsewhere in Earth’s Galaxy?*’ Now there

they could have used Ansano the Great's formula, of the stabilization of planets formed in the field of one solar type star at AU distance—“

Little jc was reaching that certain point—

“OH! And these! *‘Quantum Physicists Suggest That Constant May Be Contained in Olber’s Paradox...‘The Fine Structure Constant’...‘Dark Energy Makes Up Two-Thirds of the Universe—the Key Link?’—closer, but no cigar, as Grandpa would say! And what about this?—‘Is the Higgs Particle the God-particle?’*”

Familiar with the old clippings, in no mood to sit through a full review, feeling an urge to wander out by the creek and see the insects that came to feed at night, Little jc was forced to interrupt and plucked a loose long hair off sweater sleeve. “So how long did it take *your* scientists, to find out they’d never get laboratory temperature high enough to electrify gas, or down far enough—or collider speed great enough!—to conceive beyond Euclidean geometry, fractal math, and where computers could take them to mimic, *quote*, ‘God’?—that, *en fin*, the ultimate model of X^2 equals Infinity was eternal prisoner in the realm of Philosophy?”

Standing and pulling the sweater down neatly, Little jc pretended not to notice the silence, and asked the Younger cheerfully, “Want to take a walk to the pond with me?”

The silence continued as they walked, while the Younger made a little show of policing the path, breaking off twigs and branches that really weren’t hindering. *He’s so naive*, Little jc thought. *He simply can’t understand that I see human history from no history at all. I can’t conceive of repetitive wars and dying of brothers and sisters side to side. And what can Time Past mean to anything? It’s what happens within Time Present—within which all is magnetism!*

“What’s that tune you’re humming?” JC broke in suddenly, turning and stopping in the path. “Sing the words for me.”

It had been an unconscious thing, a little melody out of nowhere. Little jc replied with knitted brows. “I don’t know any words...but I think it’s called ‘Music of The Primes’.”

Who couldn’t love the Younger, the sleepy woman asked herself. Perhaps it was the tea,

or maybe the heady parlor conversation that was keeping Grandma JC awake... *That golden lion mane curling at broad shoulders...ah, even at my age I note a physical attribute first! But all that brawniness would be worthless, were it not for a nature capable of treating anyone like blooded family....*

It caused her to remember a man that had lived almost 2000 years before her original birth--an ecclesiastical philosopher, he came to maturity at a factioned time in his home territory. Many believed him to be a legitimate heir to govern its theocratic nation; and, as his followers grew in number, he became a problem for local competing parties, eventually drawing on imperial power. At one great assembly (it was written), he had asked, "WHO is my mother, my sister, my brother?—everyone, who does the will of 'God'!"

'God'?...no....Younger good will was born of that of *Humankind*, at an apex of its own development, where differences of bloodlines, age, and gender were things of a dim past. Knowing that human consciousness could so progress drowned the last of Grandma JC's remorse for the society left behind, and set fire a desire to be part of the greater one....

Yes, we had had the books; yes, JC supplied much method; and, yes, we have produced some medicines. But in reality we are less equipped than the Asklepiadai hundreds of years before that ecclesiastical philosopher. Remarkable medical advances, on a distant planet, are nothing but stories here, she worried.

The man beside her had not fallen to sleep either. Aching fingers caused his thoughts to creep also to their 'clinic'--a back room not more than a closet--and its neatly labeled containers. *Takes me five minutes just to hook the hemp fasteners on my jacket,* he thought; but that was the least of his worries. *My god, how old am I--sixty-six? The 'Devil's number' but one!*

How many ways were there to die? *Three*, he decided. To be killed outright by a fatal accident, or, like his father, in a useless war in a foreign land.... *To drop suddenly from heart failure or stroke? Or lingeringly, from sheer organ decay? Flesh and blood is shorter lived than guarded glass--all of our windows, save the attic's, still intact!*

It was not contemplation of his own death, however, that chilled him; it was the thought of

leaving his little family bereft. He was confident that he and the woman could find ways to deal with their own fate, so long as they had each other. *But how much more easily flesh and blood could be recreated, than ploughs and nails*, was his last thought....

He awakened next morning later than usual even for a seventh day. When he found the woman gone he knew instinctively where to look. Standing from bed to draw up his trousers he saw past the bedroom window the colors of her figure, crouched at the base of the south meadow hillock.

He slipped feet into sandals, pulled the coverlet from the bed, tossed it over one shoulder and buttoned his shirt cuffs as he went. Approaching the hillock he soon noticed that the dome roof visible beyond it had been bared of its protective fronds.

The Younger had been enthused when the man proposed that they build a quonset. For JC it was like reconstructing history. He immediately threw himself into calculating a docahedron frame and predictably impatient, waiting for cedar strips to soften for the skeleton. Typical Youngerness insisted on bedrock for drainage beneath the planked floor, and there had been numerous trips to collect balsam to treat fresh wood for paneling.

Grandma JC accepted Grandpa's hand for leverage as she arose from her knees. "Cleared the path too, I see," he said.

She tucked patchwork gloves into her apron pocket. "Mainly the thistles. Come look," she led ahead, "it withstood its first winter and spring rains quite well." She chuckled. "Even that whitewash he concocted." Protective coverings were gone also from the structure's four small windows, through which, at times of solstices and equinoxes, the Younger hoped to see what he had planned.

The woven thatch door curtain was drawn aside. Grandpa JC hunched shoulders as he entered and knew, then, why the woman had been missing from the homestead all of the previous afternoon. Four large pillows that he'd seen airing on the porch two days before were arranged symmetrically on a heavy white rug centered in the small room—

Now where in the deuce?... Then his mind's eye recaptured scenes from his first sight of

the homestead. *That woman's had that rug stashed away for years, and I never realized it was gone.* Had she anticipated future use, too, of those other items she so stolidly had earmarked as "not immediately necessary?"

Grandma shook open another saved item--a fresh sheet--above the pillows. "Go 'round and help me with this," she ordered politely. When it was laid smoothly to her satisfaction she folded back its top border of white embroidery. A nightstick on the floor just beyond the head of the 'bed' held a new candle. Grandpa bent over and touched his fingers to a small enameled tin nearby. "*Matches?*" "A few that I saved," the woman replied, a special softness to her voice.

Lastly he noted, just inside the doorway, the bowl of forced-bloom hyacinths from the kitchen window ledge. Grandma picked it up, walked over to him and gave him a light kiss. "These need a bit of water. Don't go away; as soon as that's done we'll go home. I'm hungry, too!"

Grandpa took the blanket from his shoulder, folded it neatly and placed it at the foot of the pillow bed. He walked to the west window and bent to look through. The woman was kneeling under the trees at the spring, the morning sun's rays slanting through the overhanging branches. Love was his total feeling but the word was dissolved in its essence, and none other could take form in his thought. Beholding the companion incarnate of his soul, he was aware only of the memory of memories....

When Marhlo came 'round his heart valves surged as if they had been constricted all eight solars since the last Younger words. The first thing he felt was exhaustion, a residual combination of drug and emotion.

The *Nephesh II* had landed safely.

He waited a reasonable period to be certain no one was in the vicinity, then opened the hatch slowly not knowing what atmosphere he would encounter. The air was thicker, as he expected, but breathable. He circled the squatting ship, surveying for breaks in the spidery

flanges that ringed its circumference. The retractor had failed; otherwise, the ship seemed intact. A bit of repair and it could make the trip back; he'd worry later about *that* landing.

Main thing now, *he* was in one piece; except of a sudden he realized how cold he was. . It was climate, not shock however, that Marhlo felt. The ship had come down on a mountain ridge, and for the first time he looked beyond his immediate surroundings.

Marhlo's home had its own grand endowments, but the scene and its hues he now saw were startling. A few miles east the landscape sheeted upward into deep-faceted ranges, purple peaks thrusting against a sapphire sky. Westward, a small mountain valley lay in front of a setting sun. Marhlo saw what seemed manmade structures of some sort but could make nothing of their faces, as the sinking sun's rays splayed from behind....

Too far to start out now.... He turned back to the ship. Need to think.... Decide what will be useful to take.... Devise a sure way to mark a return path....

Back on the *Nephesh II* he adjusted the pilot seat into fetal position and activated the thermal wrap around him. Last thing he wanted to contemplate was, if the Younger had been as successful as he had, in landing, why hadn't there been any communication?

All that's for the sunrise.... Too tired now to think about any of it.... But what manner of people there? What class of civility?

His wondering was brief, however, as words of his beloved mentor ushered fatigue quickly into sleep. *'Life' is nothing more than cognated knowing, ever ready to have introduced never-before thoughts in any superimposed reality. Irrespective the state of existence Mind encounters, the Unconscious possesses all that is necessary to accept the more that can be discovered....*

16 NOVUS

"Full moon tonight!" exclaimed the Younger, tossing aside a well-worn book. "Should be coming up just about now. Grab your jacket Little jc."

He led the way, turning left to the path that bordered the east side of the house, past the sleeping chickens in their coop, and not stopping until they reached moist ankle-high clover at the edge of the northern plot.

“There!” the Younger pointed unnecessarily. Thin hovering clouds over the horizon were etched with gold as the moon showed its face below them. He let his arm down across Little jc’s shoulders. All grown up, that little kid he had helped hold a fishing pole, tie a bow, reach for plates on the shelf. He couldn’t let himself think about it. “Will you look at the size of it! Oh, I mean, the *apparent* size of it,” he bumbled.

So like him, diving into science for relief! “You mean, how bigger it looks there than when it gets high?”

“And of course you know why.”

Little jc dipped away from his arm. “Let’s see.... Taking into account the radius from us to the edge of the globe, we’re seeing it now through a longer length of our atmosphere, at which edge a larger image is captured and refracted--”

He reached across for a sharp tug of long hair. “Smarty!”

Little jc pulled away, bent down, pulled out some grass and tossed it in his face, thinking, *-you’re lucky I didn’t finish with “according to Snell’s Law!”*

“Hey--quit it!” he laughed, making to run away.

Little jc ran after, jumped on his back and made as if to bite his ear. “Oh, and you don’t think *you’re* so smart!”

The Younger’s knees buckled and they went down together. “Okay! Okay,” he surrendered and stretched out on the sweet green bed. Little jc lay crosswise, as he remembered so many times past, using his diaphragm as a pillow. The head on his midriff was different now—heavier, pleasantly so....

“Look at that bright star above,” he distracted himself. “Just think how enormous it really is, and the countless converged images of it projecting over this hemisphere. Even your and my eyes get a different view. Not that we can tell the difference.

"I remember when you started teaching me refraction," Little jc's voice came softly, as the Younger's fingers began to stroke through silky hair.

"Our little kitchen experiment--the knife in the pitcher." He changed the stroking to a rub of the head. "What a curious little kid you were."

Little jc sat up facing the moon, higher now in the sky. "There was a lot to learn. Not that I've learned it all. But I do understand why Physics takes so much time to unravel Reality--how, where our library's era ends, revised macro scale perception yet had to be followed by the ensuing micro to lead back to the whole--"

"Needing the correspondent revolution in Psyche," added the Younger, doing a sit-up. He slid around and sat cross-legged, thinking how long it had been since he'd enjoyed talking this much, when a Marhloism interjected.... *Wisdom is real; collectively, it, also, is necessarily evolutionarily cumulative....*

"You've heard me say this before, I know," the Younger filled the silence. "Mind can't turn its world view around 180 degrees overnight--"

"--'to master conception of an omnipresent constant that never can be seen.'"

"Yet there it exists, in every fundamental equation--"

"--for which Einstein had drawn the simple proof! "

"Science can't avoid a period when the totality of 'relativity' between 'general' and 'special' theories goes begging. Breakthroughs get attached to one name, but no fundamental discovery ever sprang from just one brain. And formulas aren't 'invented'--they exist already, just waiting for the iteration that sucks into simplicity all the theoretical tags." He lifted both arms back in a big stretch. "It's sad, seeing how close our library people had come. 'Flavors' and 'strings' were but a decade away from redounding to shifting intensities in an angular closed medium--"

"They couldn't see, yet, beyond the 'curves'?" Little jc punned freely.

The Younger laughed. "Like Suhrtain, one of our physicists, put it, paraphrasing Einsteinism's formula gravis. One cannot sense the medium because one is part of, and parcel to it."

Little jc's voice sounded (of all things!) coy, face turned so near toward his he felt the warmth of breath. "What about when *two* are part of and parcel to it?"

"I've been *thinking* about that," he acknowledged, with a telling smile--coyness, it seemed, was contagious. "And you know, I'm wild about scientific experiment."

Little jc, suddenly losing nerve, abruptly stood up. The Younger, left staring at the slim legs, was coming to terms finally with Grandma JC's enigmatic remark.... *There's more than one school of science that works through us. Don't be surprised if Little jc becomes teacher there.* He stood up, turned the young woman toward him and cupped her chin. Her lips told her he was ready....

Maybe it was the wet socks. A small shudder began at Little jc's knees and rolled up her spine to the Younger's engulfing arms. Then his hands moved to her upper arms and gripped them tightly for some moments. "I think it's time for us to get back," he whispered finally. "Tell you what. I'll race you to the back door. Last one there gets to make the hot toddy."

Purposely he let her gain the lead. Watching the flying legs and swinging hair, his emotions captured their own galaxy of diminishing cones of reflection. In those moments, stars brilliant overhead, he was no different a man than those who had believed that focus was a matter of will—facts arrested by feeling, his heart purely gladdened by what it saw....

The woman had not lighted the lamp or closed the curtains yet; moonlight reflected the bedroom that night in a pointillistic canvas of silver-white to black.

She had had both a physically demanding and memory-provoking day. She took a clean nightgown from the bottom bureau drawer. As she lifted her head, the letters of Little jc's first handiwork, framed above the bureau, jumped out from a white background: *Consideration, Caution, Creativity*. They were Younger bywords, coined by him the first year and captured by Little jc with berry-dyed floss in her tenth. The woman recalled the deft small hands working the needle (...*the precious needles...not one lost in 16 years!*), and how the little girl had queried the Younger. "Aren't 'consideration' and 'caution' the same thing?"

The Younger had replied that consideration logically preceded caution. However, the very next day--jabbed in the eye by a snapping branch, while clearing shrubs--he had been hard put to argue the child's ensuing remark that, perhaps with regard to accidents, caution might best take precedence. (Fortunately, there had been no damage to his eye other than a temporary irritation of the sclera....)

Grandma unbuttoned her skirt and tugged it from under her feet. She felt especially weary. A short time earlier she twice had carried a large kettle of heated water to the upstairs washroom. The climate had proved reasonable and the well, durable--each year, rain, never ruinous, replenished the water table. Still, a bath was a luxury. *Mustn't let the water get too cool*, she thought, but sat down naked on the bed instead.

Their valley indeed had supplied each thing truly needed. Sheep, cows, a bull for breeding; berry bushes along with fruit and nut trees; fish from the stream, a coop of chickens. Much definitely could be labeled 'miraculous;' but she had striven not to dwell on benevolent godly intervention. It was their own reasoning, alone, upon which they had to rely. Coincidence and synchronicity could explain the rest, *couldn't it?*

Grandpa, entering the bedroom later, heard sounds of the woman at her bath. He, too, found the moonlight pleasing. He went to stand at the window, taking care not to strike his shin on the chair nearby, as he had more times already than seemed reasonable. The hayfield to the west, softened by the moon's light, was tawny as a young cub's pelt. He saw it as soon it would be, thickened for the scythe. He rested his hands back against the chair, feet crossed, and allowed himself a rare savor of pride.

They had made every season a full life unto itself, and every day as well. How had the woman put it? Their life was to be an interrupted but continuing dream, to which they would return with each morning's awakening. *Ah, but where would we be, without JC?* he thought, never done marveling at the immediacy of Younger focus. He recalled the boyish excitement at the books walling the small library, eyes going over titles like a soft brush over cat's fur.... *Can you believe it? Here's one on collecting bees, making candles, tanning leather—but we don't need to kill animals. We'll wait until they die a natural death, to use hides for sandles, tool grips,*

etcetera, etcetera! And this one tells how to make a tannic infusion from oak. We'll never run out of oak trees!

Together they had graded fields for gravity irrigation, restricting sizes for sensible management, staged seed planting to meet year-round needs. The supply of lamp oil stored at the homestead, however, could not last indefinitely. Olive trees were available, but olive oil altogether wasn't fit for burning. If Grandpa were to title one thing as 'miraculous,' it would be that seemingly deliberate supply of *colza* seeds stored with a neatly printed, instructive card.

Of all the crops seeded, tended and harvested, none grew under more vigilant care and bated breaths than those jolly rows of cabbages. To his mind, of the many solutions devised--of all bestowals by serendipitous 'chance'--the matter of the *colza* seeds reigned supreme. How could there be a thing called home, without a light burning in the window?

His body was weary, too, but mind wasn't ready yet for slumber. He left the bedroom and quietly made his way down the stairs to the parlor, and the sanctuary of his easy chair.

Little JC opened wide her closet door and reached back for the white beribboned gown Grandma JC had given to her a full year before. She removed it from the hanger and laid it on the bed, remembering her thought at the time. *When in the world would I wear that?* Now she could not wait to have its softness upon her and let her thoughts go in all clarity--of how it would feel in it to be embraced...*of how a kiss through it would be felt by the skin...of how the top ribbon, when loosened--*

Well!—*hadn't Grandma said?* "I believe there'll come a time when you will want to wear it and then, don't hesitate."

There was no use pretending. In his bedroom easy chair, under the suffused glow of the oil lamp beside it, JC slapped shut his book. *What's the use--tonight I couldn't care less whether planets are spheres or squares....*

The lamplight-softened yellow of the bedspread reminded him of her hair, and thought traveled the imagined loosened length of it to rounded shoulders and supple back. He closed his eyes...*his cheek brushing the sweet-smelling thickness, hands girding the waist, bodies relaxing... curve fitting reciprocal curve—*

No? He rose defiantly. *This will not do!* He strode to the closet and flipped off a hook the light blue kimono, a gift from Grandma JC on his last birthday. No more could he remain confined in that room the night than could Helios exert a will against the steeds of his chariot, to rein in the dusk. Nor, immobilized for the moment, robe hanging to the floorboards, could he arrest recollecting a recent fishing outing with Grandpa JC....

A mixed breeze bounced leaves across the projecting faces of the noonday sun, sending gold coins of different values dancing about their feet. "No matter how keenly the intellect may feel itself separate from body," the man had said as the Younger rewound his reel, "beware of hesitation that state can invoke."

DAMN! The Younger gave sound to an instinctive curse from his surrogate parents' past. *Good thing Grandma's not within earshot*, he thought automatically. He whirled to the dresser and took a fresh towel from the drawer. He wrapped a bar of soap in it and rolled the robe around them. *What a smug 'god of Science' I've been!-- Naturalism through Pantheism through Monotheism through Agnosticism--to arrive in the end at 'Duotheism?': a reign of physics in the realms of mind and body, witness of my own inextricability from that cogeneration!*

He reached for the wick screw....

"Actually--" Grandpa had continued, a controlled thrust sending a bright fly to the pond center, "life's pleasure can double, once one knows an unconscious joining of existence and experience." He smiled as if the words came from a heartwarming memory. "No greater satisfaction is there, I think, than simultaneous satiation of sensing and soul"....

The Younger felt an unexpected peacefulness pervade him, then. He extinguished the lamp and stood a few moments longer in the dark. The pounding of his heart, the rushing thoughts, quieted. He left the room door ajar so as to leave silently, along the hall and past Little

jc's door, its outline edged by darkness within. He would bathe in the cool spring, sleep in the dome, and perhaps dream about beauty that longed for Time's passage.

Like those of unwelcome events, sweet moments of destiny approach with the same unflagging sureness....

Drowsiness finally had descended on the man in the dark parlor, but something caught his ear. Was that a soft padding down the staircase? He straightened in his chair and peered into the hallway, uncertain until there came the creek of the screen door. The small glass vessel suspended by a chain—their igniting source, in which they had kept their holy light burning more than 16 years--swang ever so slightly to and fro....

“Ah--” Grandma JC, emerging from the washroom upstairs, expressed her gratitude audibly--“now, bed!” As she reached up to pull shut the curtains, she caught sight of movement at the far end of the front field. So swiftly, however, did that airy whiteness disappear beneath the crown of the orchard, she was not certain she had seen anything at all....

Little jc paused at the southeast corner of the orchard. Under its tallest tree JC had taught her ancient and modern mythology. She paused and took a deep breath. *No need to hurry, was there?...*

The Younger, far beyond being served by delving into science, flailed himself over the grass. He heaved a big self-disgusting sigh. What had he done, when Little jc and he arrived at the creek the other night?--launched into yet *another* dissertation! *Before*, on a night such as this, his mind would have been awash with calculations of mass and densities and polygons of

dimensions and intersecting avenues of light, past the song of hydrogen in a silent hum along an Asimovian scale. *Before* he would have been enchanted by puzzling equations between Time-Here and Time-There, where a day was 27 'hours' of 69 'minutes' and each of those equal to 900 micropulses. But all of that was before all pasts--his and those of everyone he had left—had redounded into one blissful moment.

He stared up to the stars as if to search for home. Even did he possess the third eye of a great hawk he wouldn't be able to find it. But it gave him a bit of solace, thinking of it out there, steadily turning—the seasons longer, thus sweeter; glades and ponds absorbing summer's gammas; the full-spanned winters from first crack to last....

Yet Time eventually renders everyone nameless, me among all, he smirked at himself. *What was that smug thing I was so fond of saying?--about answers always being findable?* The sky was not going to reveal a blessed thing now, about a past still to be created—

Wait!—a new sound to the night....

The Younger bolted upright; and for a split second he might almost have believed in angels, as soft whiteness fell upon him....