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FOR A WEEK Mr. R. Childan had been anxiously watching the mail. But the valuable shipment from the Rocky Mountain States had not arrived. As he opened up his store on Friday morning and saw only letters on the floor by the mail slot he thought, I’m going to have an angry customer.

Pouring himself a cup of instant tea from the five-cent wall dispenser he got a broom and began to sweep; soon he had the front of American Artistic Handcrafts Inc. ready for the day, all spick and span with the cash register full of change, a fresh vase of marigolds, and the radio playing background music. Outdoors along the sidewalk businessmen hurried toward their offices along Montgomery Street. Far off, a cable car passed; Childan halted to watch it with pleasure. Women in their long colorful silk dresses . . . he watched them, too. Then the phone rang. He turned to answer it.

“Yes,” a familiar voice said to his answer. Childan’s heart sank. ‘This is Mr. Tagomi. Did my Civil War recruiting poster arrive yet, sir? Please recall; you promised it sometime last week.” The fussy, brisk voice, barely polite, barely keeping the code. “Did I not give you a deposit, sir, Mr. Childan, with that stipulation? This is to be a gift, you see. I explained that. A client.”

“Extensive inquiries,” Childan began, “which I’ve had made at my own expense, Mr. Tagomi, sir, regarding the promised parcel, which you realize originates outside of this region and is therefore—”

But Tagomi broke in, “Then it has not arrived.”

“No, Mr. Tagomi, sir.”

An icy pause.

“I can wait no furthermore,” Tagomi said.

“No sir.” Childan gazed morosely through the store window at the warm bright day and the San Francisco office buildings.

“A substitute, then. Your recommendation, Mr. Childan?” Tagomi deliberately mispronounced the name; insult within the code that made Childan’s ears burn. Place pulled, the dreadful mortification of their situation. Robert Childan’s aspirations and fears and torments rose up and exposed themselves, swamped him, stopping his tongue. He stammered, his hand sticky on the phone. The air of his store smelled of the marigolds; the music played on, but he felt as if he were falling into some distant sea.

“Well . . .” he managed to mutter. “Butter churn. Icecream maker circa 1900.” His mind refused to think. Just when you forgot about it; just when you fool yourself. He was thirty-eight years old, and he could remember the prewar days, the other times. Franklin D. Roosevelt and the World’s Fair; the former better world. “Could I bring various desirable items out to your business location?” he mumbled.

An appointment was made for two o’clock. Have to shut store, he knew as he hung up the phone. No choice. Have to keep goodwill of such customers; business depends on them.

Standing shakily, he became aware that someone—a couple had entered the store. Young man and girl, both handsome, well-dressed. Ideal. He calmed himself and moved professionally, easily, in their direction, smiling. They were bending to scrutinize a counter display, had picked up a lovely ashtray. Married, he guessed. Live out in City of the Winding Mists, the new exclusive apartments on Skyline overlooking Belmont.

“Hello,” he said, and felt better. They smiled at him without any superiority, only kindness. His displays—which really were the best of their kind on the Coast—had awed them a little; he saw that and was grateful. They understood.

“Really excellent pieces, sir,” the young man said.

Childan bowed spontaneously.

Their eyes, warm not only with human bond but with the shared enjoyment of the art objects he sold, their mutual tastes and satisfactions, remained fixed on him; they were thanking him for having things like these for them to see, pick up and examine, handle perhaps without even buying. Yes, he thought, they know what sort of store they are in; this is not tourist trash, not redwood plaques reading Muir Woods, Marin County, PSA, or funny signs or girly rings or postcards or views of the Bridge. The girl’s eyes especially, large, dark. How easily, Childan thought, I could fall in love with a girl like this. How tragic my life, then; as if it weren’t bad enough already. The stylish black hair, lacquered nails, pierced ears for the long dangling brass handmade earrings.

“Your earrings,” he murmured. “Purchased here, perhaps?”

“No,” she said. “At home.”

Childan nodded. No contemporary American art; only the past could be represented here, in a store such as his. “You are here for long?” he asked. “To our San Francisco?”

“I’m stationed here indefinitely,” the man said. “With Standard of Living for Unfortunate Areas Planning Commission of Inquiry.” Pride showed on his face. Not the military. Not one of the gum-chewing boorish draftees with their greedy peasant faces, wandering up Market Street, gaping at the bawdy shows, the sex movies, the shooting galleries, the cheap nightclubs with photos of middle-aged blondes holding their nipples between their wrinkled fingers and leering . . . the honkytonk jazz slums that made up most of the flat part of San Francisco, rickety tin and board shacks that had sprung up from the ruins even before the last bomb fell. No—this man was of the elite. Cultured, educated, even more so than Mr. Tagomi, who was after all a high official with the ranking Trade Mission on the Pacific Coast. Tagomi was an old man. His attitudes had formed in the War Cabinet days.

“Had you wished American traditional ethnic art objects as a gift?” Childan asked. “Or to decorate perhaps a new apartment for your stay here?” If the latter . . . his heart picked up.

“An accurate guess,” the girl said. “We are starting to decorate. A bit undecided. Do you think you could inform us?”

“I could arrange to arrive at your apartment, yes,” Childan said. “Bringing several hand cases, I can suggest in context, at your leisure. This, of course, is our specialty.” He dropped his eyes so as to conceal his hope. There might be thousands of dollars involved. “I am getting in a New England table, maple, all wood-pegged, no nails. Immense beauty and worth. And a mirror from the time of the 1812 War. And also the aboriginal art: a group of vegetable-dyed goat-hair rugs.”

“I myself,” the man said, “prefer the art of the cities.”

“Yes,” Childan said eagerly. “Listen, sir. I have a mural from WPA post-office period, original, done on board, four sections, depicting Horace Greeley. Priceless collector’s item.”

“Ah,” the man said, his dark eyes flashing.

“And a Victrola cabinet of 1920 made into a liquor cabinet.”

“Ah.”

“And, sir, listen: framed signed picture of Jean Harlow.”

The man goggled at him.

“Shall we make arrangements?” Childan said, seizing this correct psychological instant. From his inner coat pocket he brought his pen, notebook. “I shall take your name and address, sir and lady.”

Afterward, as the couple strolled from his store, Childan stood, hands behind his back, watching the street. Joy. If all business days were like this . . . but it was more than business, the success of his store. It was a chance to meet a young Japanese couple socially, on a basis of acceptance of him as a man rather than him as a yank or, at best, a tradesman who sold art objects. Yes, these new young people, of the rising generation, who did not remember the days before the war or even the war itself—they were the hope of the world. Place difference did not have the significance for them.

It will end, Childan thought. Someday. The very idea of place. Not governed and governing, but people.

And yet he trembled with fear, imagining himself knocking at their door. He examined his notes. The Kasouras. Being admitted, no doubt offered tea. Would he do the right thing? Know the proper act and utterance at each moment? Or would he disgrace himself, like an animal, by some dismal faux pas?

The girl’s name was Betty. Such understanding in her face, he thought. The gentle, sympathetic eyes. Surely, even in the short time in the store, she had glimpsed his hopes and defeats.

His hopes—he felt suddenly dizzy. What aspirations bordering on the insane if not the suicidal did he have? But it was known, relations between Japanese and yanks, although generally it was between a Japanese man and yank woman. This . . . he quailed at the idea. And she was married. He whipped his mind away from the pageant of his involuntary thoughts and began busily opening the morning’s mail.

His hands, he discovered, were still shaking. And then he recalled his two o’clock appointment with Mr. Tagomi; at that, his hands ceased shaking and his nervousness became determination. I’ve got to come up with something acceptable, he said to himself. Where? How? What? A phone call. Sources. Business ability. Scrape up a fully restored 1929 Ford including fabric top (black). Grand slam to keep patronage forever. Crated original mint trimotor airmail plane discovered in barn in Alabama, etc. Produce mummified head of Mr. B. Bill, including flowing white hair; sensational American artifact. Make my reputation in top connoisseur circles throughout Pacific, not excluding Home Islands.

To inspire himself, he lit up a marijuana cigarette, excellent Land-O-Smiles brand.

In his room on Hayes Street, Frank Frink lay in bed wondering how to get up. Sun glared past the blind onto the heap of clothes that had fallen to the floor. His glasses, too. Would he step on them? Try to get to bathroom by other route, he thought. Crawl or roll. His head ached but he did not feel sad. Never look back, he decided. Time? The clock on the dresser. Eleven-thirty! Good grief. But still he lay.

I’m fired, he thought.

Yesterday he had done wrong at the factory. Spouted the wrong kind of talk to Mr. Wyndam-Matson, who had a dished-in face with Socrates-type nose, diamond ring, gold fly zipper. In other words, a power. A throne. Frink’s thoughts wandered groggily.

Yes, he thought, and now they’ll blacklist me; my skill is no use—I have no trade. Fifteen years’ experience. Gone.

And now he would have to appear at the Laborers’ Justification Commission for a revision of his work category. Since he had never been able to make out Wyndam-Matson’s relationship to the pinocs—the puppet white government at Sacramento—he could not fathom his ex-employer’s power to sway the real authorities, the Japanese. The LJC was pinoc run. He would be facing four or five middle-aged plump white faces, on the order of Wyndam-Matson’s. If he failed to get justification there, he would make his way to one of the Import-Export Trade Missions which operated out of Tokyo, and which had offices throughout California, Oregon, Washington, and the parts of Nevada included in the Pacific States of America. But if he failed successfully to plead there . . .

Plans roamed his mind as he lay in bed gazing up at the ancient light fixture in the ceiling. He could for instance slip across into the Rocky Mountain States. But it was loosely banded to the PSA, and might extradite him. What about the South? His body recoiled. Ugh. Not that. As a white man he would have plenty of place, in fact more than he had here in the PSA. But . . . he did not want that kind of place.

And, worse, the South had a cat’s cradle of ties, economic, ideological, and god knew what, with the Reich. And Frank Frink was a Jew.

His original name was Frank Fink. He had been born on the East Coast, in New York, and in 1941 he had been drafted into the Army of the United States of America, right after the collapse of Russia. After the Japs had taken Hawaii he had been sent to the West Coast. When the war ended, there he was, on the Japanese side of the settlement line. And here he was today, fifteen years later.

In 1947, on Capitulation Day, he had more or less gone berserk. Hating the Japs as he did, he had vowed revenge; he had buried his Service weapons ten feet underground, in a basement, well-wrapped and oiled, for the day he and his buddies arose. However, time was the great healer, a fact he had not taken into account. When he thought of the idea now, the great blood bath, the purging of the pinocs and their masters, he felt as if he were reviewing one of those stained yearbooks from his high school days, coming upon an account of his boyhood aspirations. Frank “Goldfish” Fink is going to be a paleontologist and vows to marry Norma Prout. Norma Prout was the class schones Mädchen, and he really had vowed to marry her. That was all so goddam long ago, like listening to Fred Allen or seeing a W. C. Fields movie. Since 1947 he had probably seen or talked to six hundred thousand Japanese, and the desire to do violence to any or all of them had simply never materialized, after the first few months. It just was not relevant any more.

But wait. There was one, a Mr. Omuro, who had bought control of a great area of rental property in downtown San Francisco, and who for a time had been Frank’s landlord. There was a bad apple, he thought. A shark who had never made repairs, had partitioned rooms smaller and smaller, raised rents . . . Omuro had gouged the poor, especially the nearly destitute jobless ex-servicemen during the depression years of the early ’fifties. However, it had been one of the Japanese trade missions which had cut off Omuro’s head for his profiteering. And nowadays such a violation of the harsh, rigid, but just Japanese civil law was unheard ofIt was a credit to the incorruptibility of the Jap occupation officials, especially those who had come in after the War Cabinet had fallen.

Recalling the rugged, stoic honesty of the Trade Missions, Frink felt reassured. Even Wyndam-Matson would be waved off like a noisy fly. W-M Corporation owner or not. At least, so he hoped. I guess I really have faith in this Co-Prosperity Pacific Alliance stuff, he said to himself. Strange. Looking back to the early days . . . it had seemed such an obvious fake, then. Empty propaganda. But now . . .

He rose from the bed and unsteadily made his way to the bathroom. While he washed and shaved, he listened to the midday news on the radio.

“Let us not deride this effort,” the radio was saying as he momentarily shut off the hot water.

No, we won’t, Frink thought bitterly. He knew which particular effort the radio had in mind. Yet, there was after all something humorous about it, the picture of stolid, grumpy Germans walking around on Mars, on the red sand where no humans had ever stepped before. Lathering his jowls, Frink began a chanting satire to himself. Gott, Hen Kreisleiter. Ist dies vielleicht der Ort wo man das Konzentrationslager bilden kann? Das Wetter ist so schon. Heiss, aber doch schon . . .

The radio said: “Co-Prosperity Civilization must pause and consider whether in our quest to provide a balanced equity of mutual duties and responsibilities coupled with remunerations . . .” Typical jargon from the ruling hierarchy, Frink noted. “. . . we have not failed to perceive the future arena in which the affairs of man will be acted out, be they Nordic, Japanese, Negroid . . .” On and on it went.

As he dressed, he mulled with pleasure his satire. The weather is schon, so schon. But there is nothing to breathe . . .

However, it was a fact; the Pacific had done nothing toward colonization of the planets. It was involved—bogged down, rather—in South America. While the Germans were busy bustling enormous robot construction systems across space, the Japs were still burning off the jungles in the interior of Brazil, erecting eight-floor clay apartment houses for ex-headhunters. By the time the Japs got their first spaceship off the ground the Germans would have the entire solar system sewed up tight. Back in the quaint old history-book days, the Germans had missed out while the rest of Europe put the final touches on their colonial empires. However, Frink reflected, they were not going to be last this time; they had learned.

And then he thought about Africa, and the Nazi experiment there. And his blood stopped in his veins, hesitated, at last went on.

That huge empty ruin.

The radio said: “. . . we must consider with pride however our emphasis on the fundamental physical needs of peoples of all place, their subspiritual aspirations which must be . . .”

Frink shut the radio off. Then, calmer, he turned it back on.

Christ on the crapper, he thought. Africa. For the ghosts of dead tribes. Wiped out to make a land of—what? Who knew? Maybe even the master architects in Berlin did not know. Bunch of automatons, building and toiling away. Building? Grinding down. Ogres out of a paleontology exhibit, at their task of making a cup from an enemy’s skull, the whole family industriously scooping out the contents—the raw brains—first, to eat. Then useful utensils of men’s leg bones. Thrifty, to think not only of eating the people you did not like, but eating them out of their own skull. The first technicians! Prehistoric man in a sterile white lab coat in some Berlin university lab, experimenting with uses to which other people’s skull, skin, ears, fat could be put to. Ja, Herr Doktor. A new use for the big toe; see, one can adapt the joint for a quick-acting cigarette lighter mechanism. Now, if only Herr Krupp can produce it in quantity . . .

It horrified him, this thought: the ancient gigantic cannibal near-man flourishing now, ruling the world once more. We spent a million years escaping him, Frink thought, and now he’s back. And not merely as the adversary . . . but as the master.

“. . . we can deplore,” the radio, the voice of the little yellow-bellies from Tokyo was saying. God, Frink thought; and we called them monkeys, these civilized bandy-legged shrimps who would no more set up gas ovens than they would melt their wives into sealing wax. “ . . . and we have deplored often in the past the dreadful waste of humans in this fanatical striving which sets the broader mass of men wholly outside the legal community.” They, the Japs, were so strong on law. “. . . To quote a Western saint familiar to all: ‘What profit it a man if he gain the whole world but in this enterprise lose his soul?’” The radio paused. Frink, tying his tie, also paused. It was the morning ablution.

I have to make my pact with them here, he realized. Blacklisted or not; it’d be death for me if I left Japanese-controlled land and showed up in the South or in Europe—anywhere in the Reich.

I’ll have to come to terms with old Wyndam-Matson.

Seated on his bed, a cup of lukewarm tea beside him, Frink got down his copy of the I Ching. From their leather tube he took the forty-nine yarrow stalks. He considered, until he had his thoughts properly controlled and his questions worked out.

Aloud he said, “How should I approach Wyndam-Matson in order to come to decent terms with him?” He wrote the question down on the tablet, then began whipping the yarrow stalks from hand to hand until he had the first line, the beginning. An eight. Half the sixty-four hexagrams eliminated already. He divided the stalks and obtained the second line. Soon, being so expert, he had all six lines; the hexagram lay before him, and he did not need to identify it by the chart. He could recognize it as Hexagram Fifteen. Ch’ien. Modesty. Ah. The low will be raised up, the high brought down, powerful families humbled; he did not have to refer to the text—he knew it by heart. A good omen. The oracle was giving him favorable council.

And yet he was a bit disappointed. There was something fatuous about Hexagram Fifteen. Too goody-goody. Naturally he should be modest. Perhaps there was an idea in it, however. After all, he had no power over old W-M. He could not compel him to take him back. All he could do was adopt the point of view of Hexagram Fifteen; this was that sort of moment, when one had to petition, to hope, to await with faith. Heaven in its time would raise him up to his old job or perhaps even to something better.

He had no lines to read, no nines or sixes; it was static. So he was through. It did not move into a second hexagram.

A new question, then. Setting himself, he said aloud, “Will I ever see Juliana again?”

That was his wife. Or rather his ex-wife. Juliana had divorced him a year ago, and he had not seen her in months; in fact he did not even know where she lived. Evidently she had left San Francisco. Perhaps even the PSA. Either their mutual friends had not heard from her or they were not telling him.