

PEDAI



SHELLKO

P E D A I

"Bonds", "Fetters"

Kirk A. Shellko

BodenlosTwenty



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FOREWORD

Pedai is meant to be disturbing. It is violent and sometimes dispiriting. Not an ordinary narrative, it possesses aspects of ordinary narration. *Pedai's* narrative presents itself as an absurdity, locked in conflict with moments of joy and pleasure. *Pedai* stands with the others in the series of the Other and One as a phenomenological narration filled with peril and comfort, meant to disquiet, but mostly its best description is perhaps noir philosophy. Our lives are difficult and filled with suffering, even for the most fortunate of us. We are replete with errant thought and *lacunae*, as are our bonds.

Kirk Shellko

My home is the marsh where the iron rail meets heaven and the soot-seeped sky breathes black and gray the ash of Hamilton's *miasma*. I am friend, adversary,

companion, neighbor, co-conspirator and partner. I am a vigorous creature
whose morality is organic as my life.

ORANGE HUE

Mallory awoke with a start; he didn't know where he was, or who he was. Gradually, the creep of recognition seeped into his mind.

"Oh...yeah. That's right, Mallory."

He crafted a half-roll about his bed, and saw the clock beside at the number seven and thirty.

"Time to move," he thought.

Mallory didn't budge. He couldn't dislodge himself from his semi-fetal position. His back ached; his legs were stiff, and his head was not thus far clear, not yet alert enough to tell him that he felt no comfort. He opened his mouth, and felt his parched lips with his tongue, lifting his head--which was quite close to the ceiling of his small bedroom in his condominium--then let it fall back onto the pillow beneath. He remembered now: he was inebriated still, harddrunk. He had closed down a five o'clock bar, but he hadn't obtained what he wanted. Earlier that evening, he had meandered about the lake-side on his bicycle, watching the sun set, which gave him a restful feeling. Then he stopped by café *Taedium* and chatted with some friends--made some acquaintances--for a while, but the sun was no lasting comfort and his companions, while entertaining enough, only heaved burden upon him as he dragged himself about that day. He was a forty-five year old man who had lived in Chicago for seven years, the result of a failed attempt at marriage. He had moved to the Midwest, but *she* abandoned their plans--abandoned him--and he remained in the city. His siblings had children of their own, or had begun seemingly early the anticipated descent into oblivion. Mallory was not a depressed man, nor was he particularly excitable, but of late he was unable to shake a feeling of anxious discontent. While he had drank-been-drunk that night, he enjoyed the mint julep that was his favorite beverage; his taste for flat mint made him the butt of many jokes that came from the

regulars at *The Everyday Tavern Entautha*.

“You drink like a woman,” he’d heard.

“He doesn’t drink like a woman; he drinks women’s drinks.”

“He knows what I mean.”

Mallory chuckled goodnature-like, and the patrons laughed while his drink tasted not minty, but like paste. Mallory thought that his less-than-contentment with the night’s festivities had something to do with a minor altercation in which he had found himself earlier that day. He rode his bicycle everywhere, even to the bars on Thursdays and Fridays, and he had found himself waiting for a regular, whom he knew only slightly, to affix his bicycle to a bike-rack just outside *The Everyday Tavern Entautha*. Mallory had been frustrated that day, and he was aggravated all the more because he was unable to determine why he felt as he did. He supposed that he had possessed an angry mien, and when the man had at last affixed his cycle to the blackmetal arch firm-held in the cement, he discovered Mallory staring hard at it. The man walked a few feet; turned back.

“What’s goin’ on?” the man said in a banana-bread-beer aggravated tone.

Mallory turned to him, confused at his irritation.

“I’m trying to decide if my bike will fit.”

The man hurriedly walked over to his bicycle and moved its back end a bit to the right.

“Good enough?”

But when Mallory rolled his cycle toward the metal-black arch, the man smashed the palm of his hand into Mallory’s face and shoved him onto the ground. He then arose from his crouched position and indifferently sauntered into *The Everyday Tavern Entautha*. Bewildered and shaking, Mallory arose and locked his cycle to the black-metal arch. He was pensive for a moment, wondering if he ought to enter. In the end, he sat at his regular station. Surprisingly, the night was pleasant; as others had been during his time in

Midwest glad-hand land. He darted with Amity, his long-time confidant who had listened to his salt-teased rumblings concerning the death of his marriage plan--the ruin of hope--a destruction which lasted so long as it took Mallory to drink his fiancé out of his mind. She had found herself an urban lawyer who became an explosion of handy-cash, just ready. Amity listened to him repeatedly over the course of months and when at last she grew so tired of hearing how he claimed to be celibate for his love,

“Pathetic...you’re pathetic.”

“??”

“No, really Mal, just stop it with this shit. She’s gone. Forget about it.”

He had been surprised at her reaction; she had never before tired of his pathetic ramblings. Weary and long annoyed, she refused to speak to him for three weeks. When they finally, silently, reconciled, he returned a slightly older, diminished and paler man slumping in his own frame, as if some god had robbed him of vital breath. He drank a bit less, didn’t lament over the ruin of his plans; at least he didn’t mention them. He simply darted at the bar; became angry every so often and fought, though not regularly. Amity was his competent, and consistent, dart partner. She was part of a league that regularly won.

“She *is* good,” thought Mallory.

Thus their bond.

Still, she wasn’t enough that night. Nothing was wrong. Mallory had a good job, regular income. He purchased a “nice place” near the lake. Friends came to his condominium periodically, and he had money in the bank, which was somewhat rare. No, nothing bothered him, at least nothing he was able to discern, yet he was unable to drive away a feeling of anxious dejection. True, he was over-worked, and he felt as if his life would go no further than it already had. He was in the process of balding his red-orange hair, which had been thick throughout his thirties and early forties, but the slow steal of demise upon his frame troubled him no more. No, some thing in the back of his mind kept slipping upon him. It told him things, kept him from enjoying himself. It was a sinking, liquid slump of lead constantly dripping-down-along the back stem of his brain, filling the length of his spine out into his mouth; it made him nauseous and compelled him to say things.

“I need you,” he might blurt out to no-one while alone at home.

Mallory thought that possibly he still had residual feelings for his fiancé, but she was two women ago. There had been Narcissa, then Theodora who were older than she, compulsive and altogether too selfish for his taste. Then he had forgotten easily, had trouble remembering Theodora’s name. She was such a pain in the ass. No, it was *her* voice he heard when he said it, but that too was peculiar. Once in a great while, he saw *her*, walking along Michigan Avenue downtown, or at Water-Tower place. They would have a friendly conversation, almost as if they were able to retain goodwill. When he met her, an overwhelming feeling of relief flowed toward his eyes through her form and into his ears through her voice down along his vertebrae, draining the lead. He had no attachment to this woman at all. And, a week or so later, “I love you” crept out to no one.

And then, again, there was a sinking drip of slumping lead in his mouth and on his tongue up into the back of his head, which became heavier when he drank alcohol, or even when he sipped coffee. It remained his; it didn’t come from *her*. Though the alcohol made it worse, he was unable to keep himself from drinking his way into numbed comfort, short-run content. Mallory was friendly enough, but he wasn’t going out of his way to greet or meet anyone. In fact, he chatted most exclusively with Amity and “Punk-boy.” Mallory didn’t know his real name; he merely recognized him as the other cigarette-seeped beerbellies knew him.

“I don’t wanna hear anything,” he had said to Amity. “I don’t want to hear anyone bitch. I don’t want to hear about anyone’s good fortune. I don’t wanna hear about nothin’.”

And that is when a man, whom no-one recognized or knew, began a conversation.

“Have you ever considered your body?”

Mallory was about to tell him he didn’t care, that he disliked conversations such as his.

“Have you ever considered that your feelings, sexual preference, even your beliefs are all merely chemistry gurgling about in your body and brain? When

you die, if you've left nothing behind for others, their living will continue on as if you never existed. You will return to what you recall before your birth."

"I don't want to hear this crap right now," said Mallory.

"Back to the abyss."

A peculiar, sable fellow, making strange his words, he possessed deep, jet-black hair and pitchy eyes. He was clad in a soft, blackwoolen overcoat that appeared to have no buttons; it was seamless. His pants were silky cotton black; cheerlessness and severe was his manner. Doused heavily in nicotine rain, his odor was not unpleasant. He wore as well a pungent, virile cologne that mingled with the smoke and scotch that permeated his existence, was he. His skin thus appeared to seep nicotine, and he ate black and green sardines that he had purchased at a store nearby the bar.

"Hello, Friend."

And he smiled.

JADE COLLARS

A large woman dressed in a red suit, looking like a kind of uniform complete with flat golden buttons running down a long skirt that enclosed a plump and shapely body, accompanied this Newcomer who had begun a conversation with Mallory. Her hair black-and-blond streaked, she carried a bobby-pin dangling on the thick skin of her nose. The Newcomer drank scotch, Blackmark's own. His hair was long, but pinned back along his neck in a net, and the sides of his head above his ears were close-clipped. His chiseled features revealed a vigorous feminine masculinity, elongated and strong-lissome doe. He was polished, and witted-quick.

"He gave me new body," the woman slurred.

Heavy with stupor, she observed the patrons of *The Everyday Tavern Entautha* with aggravated suspicion; her eyebrows, youthfulthick, knitted when she looked at anyone, but when the Newcomer talked with her, she was calm and smiled--even laughed--which appeared to be rarities on a face chiseled from granite by keen discontent. The Newcomer pecked her on the cheek, and she giggled, while Mallory noticed a wilt in her eye. She seemed to him as though, smiling, she was poised to weep. She leaned forward into the bar while her eyes slowly shut, unable to push her huge frame back up. Amity wondered whether she ought to call the bouncer, but the Newcomer--his seat beside hers--leaned toward the woman in red, whispered something in her ear. He held her hand, and, his arm placed about her ample back, he soothed the liquored antagonism of the grand-sized belle. Frowned and perplexed, she arose with difficulty, and Mallory noticed that her face was comely, possessing high cheekbones and finely-wrought features--her eyes lined with deep orange-red hue. He disliked that "sort of thing." She perked herself up, she the supposed indifferent.

"Gave me a new body," she repeated.

The Newcomer ignored her while she said these things. Instead, he turned to Mallory. “She was a great deal larger.”

The Newcomer laughed.

“Yeah?”

“It’s her first day out.”

The large woman busied herself by chatting up a goateed morsel of less-than-manliness who sat opposite her.

“It costs plenty of money, if you have it done properly.”

“Oh really?” mock serious Mallory replied.

“Yes it’s true. And now, Brazil is prepared for her new life.”

The large and formerly obese woman abandoned her beverage while she half-staggered through a swingdoor exit nearby. A few moments later three concerned-looking women surrounded her mass of flesh, which was lying flat and stretched out on the floor. They picked her up, or rather assisted her while she rose, and escorted her into a rest-room. Amused and at ease, the Newcomer remained in his seat. Four television sets assaulted the particular spot where Mallory and the Newcomer sat, all of which sported the same sporting event. Mallory watched the Sox game with pretense of interest. He had made a bet, and he expected that the White Sox would win. He had always enjoyed playing and watching sporting events, but while he sat beneath the urban assault of televisions upon his weary head, he had felt unusual. Sipping his mint julep, he suffered a further weight upon his anxiety. Mallory resisted an urge to walk about the bar-floor, to plead his frustration to an inebriated arbiter. He worried how such quick-panicked urges plagued him of late, his mind in a sling. His beloved game tired him with its repetition, and the ball-players presented him with less than pleasure even disinterest, but he was unable to discern the cause of his discomfort. He recognized more clearly the absurd repetition of the darters and the inebriates who spouted the same opinions in virtually the same manner, sometimes on the same day. Pool-playing college students enjoying *Everyday Tavern Entautha* dive-bar status sank him deeper in discontent, and his comrades-in-drink appeared more pitiful and wretched than usual, frustrated and pleasantly numb. Even Amity, who was always strong as an iron gate, seemed to

Mallory to occupy the same drug-filled depression in a successful attempt to heap earth upon her woe. Mallory thought that his mind would explode or dissolve, but he managed--barely--to keep himself together, since he considered the sensation he was experiencing and its transitory nature. It would pass soon, but before it left him his sensation would compel Mallory to think, yet again, about his fiancé, his ex-best friend, who now thought as little of him as he did of strangers. Again, there was the leaden weight upon the back of his skull, and then there was this man, the Newcomer who seemed peculiarly out of place in a tavern where few patrons stood out.

“Why is it that fat girls always whine?” asked the Newcomer.

Mallory wanted to hear no more. He looked the opposite direction.

“They appear to be incapable of remaining quiet,” he continued.

The Newcomer lit a cigarette, took a swig from his scotch, winced at his drink for some reason. He motioned toward Brazil who had at that moment returned afresh from her quest for make-up and chat.

“The morning is greeted with a whine, perhaps a whimper. Breakfast is sad and lost, even their favorite morning candy becomes tasteless.”

Having just then sat down, the former obese Brazil flashed her eyes sad upon him, a quick glance. She was a whimper, as she remained the former obese woman, yet she gathered shards of dignity and suppressed her sob the better to deprive the Newcomer of the morsel of her psyche he needed to gnaw. She loved him brother-like for what he had done.

“The afternoon witnesses the only moment of the day that may beget hope, and so she is at least quiet during that time, but that period lasts only an hour or so.”

Noticing that Mallory was paying no attention, the Newcomer ceased his monologue. He walked quick-confidence outside the tavern into an awaiting auto, disappearing within.

“Why do you let him speak to you like that?” asked Mallory.

“You’ve no idea what you’re talking about,” Brazil garbled.

The swing-door opened the tavern for two leashless dogs. The first, an excited but seemingly nervous brazen-skinned canine, wandered into the tavern four or five steps, then anxiously looked back toward the door. The dog halted sharp, leaning precariously its head toward a woman who was reaching her hand out so that the animal might smell. He pulled back at first, then performed a kind of tap dance as his bronze form awaited master commands. He bowed his head tranquil while other patrons offered pats and hands that might give longed-for affection. The animal glanced back at the door, again and again, awaiting the advent of a companion. His nervous attention abated when another familiar form of canine trotted through the gate followed by the clad-black Newcomer. The brazen canine lifted his head and confidently joined the other dog at his side, both directing their master as a pair of confident, well-trained horses might lead an ancient hero into the theater of war--or perhaps a victory procession. The second of the two canines was larger, not by much, but noticeably more powerful and seemingly dominant. Both were hairless, except for a patch of short and rough fur on the head and face. Their ears folded over themselves, semi-flop, and their heads were alert, always glancing back at the Newcomer who appeared to direct them with nods and movements of his hands. These hounds stood straight while they moved cautiously round the well-worn bar. All attention paid was theirs to command as they entered, and most patrons seemed delighted at the prospect of tapping the chiseled and hairless bodies of perfectly brazed and black dogs. The Newcomer held two shiny, black-leather leashes in his right hand, smiling broadly while he walked slow-procession back to his seat. The former obese woman beamed while she spoke softly to the familiar two, brazed and black, who in turn returned a grinned dogsmile to her with their eyes.

“Hi babies.”

The one brazen she offered a broken pretzel-morsel, the other moved closer to the Newcomer. The Brazen took, and chewed slightly, the bit of hardened bread, then spat most of it onto the grubby floor of the tavern where he continued to lick up then crunch on the fragments. The sharp outline of the dogs’ frames gave the animals a stone-chiseled dignity, their durable features and their lean, healthy bodies hairless beauty manifest. The snout of the black Xolo possessed a graceful decline that glided proportionately along an alert, elegant face

completed by bright-brown eyes eager to act, and desirous to please the beloved master. A thin yet powerful neck held their dignity aloft, and gave hourglass the shape between the heads and muscular, well-exercised frames of these canines. Two of the ladies, who had helped the former obese woman become ambulatory, arrived with pats and supple words for the friendly, brazen animal while the black dog silent-lingered alongside the Newcomer.

“Better get those dogs out of here,” Mallory mentioned.

The former obese woman and one of her newfound friends ignored him consciously.

“Amity’s out back right now, but when she gets back...”

He didn’t finish his sentence for emphasis, and the interested patrons, fellow inebriates and college students disregarded him while the Newcomer drained another glass of scotch. The canines continued to glance tensely back to the Newcomer, seemingly uncertain what would come from him next, and unmoving they continued their bright dogsmile, which in turn charmed more inebriates. Once in a while the Newcomer would move his head slightly or flip his hand, and one or both dogs would turn to him, lick his hand in order to receive a kind of blessing or a concealed morsel from him. They were, in turn, adjuncts of a god who led Others. Mallory noticed that around their necks hung jade collars; the calm anxiety with which they greeted the Newcomer and his hefty womanfriend was evident. Mallory decided that he hated this man.

The Newcomer cup-clapped his hands, and both animals came to attention. He treated the bronze with red-meat jerky and clicked his fingers, then motioned a half-circle around and along the length of space between the former obese girl and himself. Charcoal Xolo perked his head up and jerked forward, wondering if he had interpreted his master correctly and, overcast, the Other nodded. The dog began its journey down the length of the bar toward the end of the space that occupied the dimlit-haze, liquor-scent and inebriates. Eyes and heads turned to gather in the obedient canine who trotted the length of the establishment, dogsmiling all the while. When the mid-sized animal came to a halt, it sat while its will waited, eyes fixed upon the Newcomer. He paused, until he knew that the patrons and the dog were attending him; he motioned to the animal and having lifted its head as high as it was able,

“AAAaaaaaaahhhhhhhhoowwoowwoowwoowowwooooo.”

And then silence draped its sodden form over the patrons until,

“AAAaaaaaaahhhhhhhhoowwoowwoowwoowowwooooo” once again.

Laughter, surprise and merriment appeared and abounded, with the usual exception of too inebriated patrons, or distracted enjoyers, fixed upon playing-card video-screens. Again, and this time much louder, was the silence. One inebriate mischievously clapped his hands and in mimicry did the tavern erupt in roaring applause, shouts and curses intermingled. The Newcomer smiled while he toasted, mockingly, with his formerly obese friend who beamed with delight at the beam that delightedly fed nourishment to her famished psyche.

“Who the *fuck* let this dog in here?!” shouted a woman who was walking quickstep to the bar proper.

She led a worried-looking Xoloitzcuintli by the green of his neckband. Mallory nodded to the Newcomer, and Amity furiously addressed him.

“I don’t know who the hell you think you are, but get out of my bar, and take your fucking dog with you!”

“Dogs,” corrected Mallory.

He pointed grinnedly to the brazen canine sitting beside the formerly obese woman. Amity angrily took in the second Xoloitzcuintli, then at Mallory.

“You saw all this going on?”

Mallory blankly.

“And your lazy ass sat there doin’ nothin’.”

Amity tended to the Newcomer again.

“I don’t want no Health Department comin’ in here, and takin’ away my liquor license. Go!”

She pointed.

“You mean you don’t want any Health...”

Amity glared at him about to speak. He smiled.

“These dogs benefit your tavern...”

The Newcomer looked toward his formerly obese friend, Brazil, for support.

“...like business partners.”

A laugh arose within him, interrupted his revel.

“If I could have a dog in my bar, I’d have a dog in my bar.
You see any dogs in here when you came in? Go, buddy, and don’t come back with no god-dam dogs.”

After he had finished his scotch, the Newcomer, serene and calm, leashed the brazen and the charcoal-black who were both excited to return back comfortable-with-him the joy, their jade collars beaming canine affection.

“Anyone who would like to come with us, me my tail-waggers and my formerly obese friend, is welcome to a night out...on me.”

And with that he and his three companions waved and walked out of *The Everyday Tavern Entautha*, attracting more than a few inebriates. The departing crowd was large enough that more than a few moments passed before they had all exited. Amity and Mallory found themselves alone with their closest associates who regularly drank with them, and the noise and commotion of the place appeared to have departed. Mallory had spent the remainder of his evening drinking his sweetmints, and listening to the aggrieved grunts of Amity when another customer arrived and asked why the place seemed dead. He had been mildly satisfied with his night out, but now he need awaken to being Mallory once more.

WINNOWING THE HUES

“What is this penchant you have for dive-bars?” Brazil asked.

“Drunken indolence is the Midwestern way, no?” the Newcomer asked his formerly obese friend as they slid into his waiting sedan.

“No.”

Brazil waited for affect.

“And why have we picked up another group of tiresome drunks?”

The two headed to the Newcomer’s home with yet another group of inebriates where, his formerly obese friend realized, they would feast and entertain strangers until the last person fell drunk down there before and for them on the plush-carpeted floor, was forcibly removed from there from them because of aggravated inebriation, or until they simply departed in order to return wherever home might come to be. The Newcomer and Brazil had become sudden friends when she met him at one of her art exhibits entitled “Hard Bronze Organics” and another entitled “The Authentic Ideal of the Human Creature.” The exhibit had depicted bronze statuary in caring, intimate, and sometimes joyous situations, but the hard material and the coarse skin of the figures gave the impression of distorted bestiality. The Newcomer had enjoyed the exhibit enormously, and Brazil was the artist drunk with his interest in art that was she. At that time, she had been a rotund woman who was able only to move about with a cane or sometimes an electric chair, so massive was her frame. She had left her home when she was young, ran away only to return a few months later. Her family was large and able, the sort of upper-middle-class gathering of *homotheria* that was entirely certain of their correctness in the scheme of the emerging universe.

They attended church regularly and lived in an area of Illinois that was known for its evangelical bent. The strictures of their community were rigid and exacting to the point of stifling whatever spontaneity or creativity might have the misfortune of arising there. Brazil had been a willful kind, one whose free spirit was unable to conform to the guidelines of Wheaton. She did attempt to act as her parents and siblings wished, but her especially spirited nature and the particularly incapacitating role in the community given to her provided a volatile mixture of social forces. She had encountered the delightful escapism of alcohol as early as thirteen, then a slender *homotherion*. As she progressed from one form of inebriant to another, her form gathered more and more mass. Her particular delight was liquor and sweet cornsyrup-juice cranberry and blackberry. Her upbringing compelled her to passive acceptance of the dominion of an other over her, but occasionally her temper burst out in white-hot conflagration, seemingly *ex nihilo*. The source of her volatility was simply hidden, unrevealed by this extraordinarily visual and sensual lady. While coming of age, she continued to defy her parent. Her father had departed the responsibility of family life during her tenth year of living, leaving an embittered mother to care for Brazil and her four siblings. Her mother knew precisely how and why things are as they are, one who strangely encountered difficulty taming her troublesome daughter. The two argued often and because Brazil would not conform completely to her mother's wishes; she received ineffective discipline. At first, there were admonitions gentle and seemingly loving. She was not to consort with boys whose character was questionable, but Brazil continued to chat with her friends who happened to be male. Most often, her associations with them were innocent enough, but there were a few who might have corrupted her with their bad habits; she had already taken up drinking and it was impossible that such sin arise in her family. Later, there were more stern admonitions of similar character. She was not to consort with boys whose questionable character interfered with her successful deliverance from all things risky and potent in the world. If she should do so, her rights would be revoked.

Brazil was careful about this warning initially, since she wanted all her privileges to remain, like Others do. Still, she was unable to keep herself from the occasional drink, and her new friends offered her the drink of comfort that did not arise in a family growing increasingly impatient with her insolence. She provided a poor example to the other children; it was imperative that she provide a good one, somehow or other. Brazil's drinking continued and escalated and continued to escalate and she found herself "grounded." She would be unable to leave her room and she was limited to the reading of her bible only. Her art

supplies unavailable, Brazil languished there incarcerated until she decided upon an escape plan. Her mother checked on her regularly and so only an hour had passed when her adolescent escape became obvious.

“I knew she would cause more trouble,” commented her older sister.

Brazil was, being merely thirteen years old at the time, unable to remain outside her family’s home for long, and she found herself returning to a house filled with activity and words--none of which were directed at her. Having enjoyed the respite from the love that entered her life in the form of discipline, she ate leftovers and found her way back to her room. It was not long before her mother arrived.

“You are a little demon, aren’t you?” her mother commented more than asked.

Brazil intended a reply, but before she was able to say a word she had found herself flat on the floor of her room. She did not, at first, recognize what had happened, but as she came to sensibility, she felt a repeated thumping atop her head and around her body. She recognized that Rage had arrived, but she held firm to her decision and her dignity and all the more did Rage visit her. She continued to do as she pleased and laughed when able, yet more did Rage pummel and flail against her, beating blue her white skin and tearing hair from her head. She continued her drinking and fell mostly silent to her family, all of whom supported her mother while suffering her loving hands. Further complicating matters, Brazil was declared unteachable by more than one of her instructors in high school. That she developed such a reputation only convinced her family all the more that further love was in order. They were, they knew, saving her from damnation and peccant living. She turned further to drink and once

when she was seventeen, she found all of her belongings placed outside the family house with a note attached:

“You are welcome to
stay elsewhere.”

Unable to conform to the rigid demands, Brazil continued her attempt to live within the directives of the family, and she remained there as she had been. Often she found herself, bound by necessity, living and spending holidays at the home of a friend, one of those male friends whose influence had been evil.

Birthdays were ignored by her mother and so her siblings as well, and she many times celebrated her birth elsewhere. As she continued to imbibe, she continued to gain weight, her habit making her more contemptible still. Her mother continued the love until at last Brazil became an adult.

At times she lived in airports and youth hostels and at other times she slept with men she met, let them put her up, volatile and angry *homotheria*. When she reached the obese state, there were no longer any men interested in sleeping with, or caring for, her. Scared and almost to the point of breaking, she met a community of artists who took her in and helped her find her way in the labyrinthine city where her aesthetic flourished. Her fear lasted a few years, she believing that her mother would find her. Brazil lived in many different places; refused to make her life conventional. The artist companions who had been her support slowly became tired of her continuing indulgence and she gradually wore out the good will that had kept her safe and sheltered, well-fed. She had become too large to move herself about easily, and her physical state burdened her associations further. She had ninety days to vacate her apartment because the landlord had sold the building to a developer. She thought "What is the worst that can happen?"

And, of course, perhaps the worst that might have happened was that she would be driven onto the street and her art and life would be endangered or deleted from the earth. It was at that time that the Newcomer met a Brazil who meandered about in her chair, absurdly inebriated. He seemed poisonous to her in the beginning, but some element of his personality kept her there with him, she for him. Seemingly, he needed her as much as she might need him. So she thought. Now, safe and sheltered as well as intermittently inebriated, she and he continued their search for someone, Brazil did not understand who, whom her dominant friend appeared to need--someone the Newcomer had met years ago.

The two stopped their driver at a tawny building in the middle of downtown Chicago. Two taxi-buses halted behind them, and animated and spry by wine their passengers emerged. Brazil had a vision of a large and pleasant, wine-blushed and androgynous, man leading them into the penthouse of her friend. She thought that she might enbrazen her vision in a few days; she stopped in order to sketch her idea and jot down a few explanatory notes in case the image ran away from her. Such lingering over a garbage can, near a lavatory, or perhaps in mid stride crossing the street were regular occurrences for her, she being alongside her as art. Her dear companion had managed to gather a host of

varied inebriates into his home on this occasion. As usual, many were crashers or veteran drunkards who were unable to let pass an opportunity to consume large amounts of alcohol *gratis*, and her friend did not disappoint them. If they had a delicate palette, able to choose for themselves any desired kind of grape, they would have enjoyed the supply of wines that were part of the Newcomer's life. Most imbibers situated themselves in his comfortable abode with graceless crudeness, signifying their rabidity. Some lay down on the delicate white carpet, and others placed their feet on tables, or draped their legs over arms of chairs as they popped open the best wine Chicago offered. Others were curious about the intentions and habits of a man such as him who had brought outsiders into his home. They were the few with whom the Newcomer chatted. He talked with a graduate student from the University of Chicago and an undergraduate philosophy major. He met a quite drunken accountant who was part of a network of employees of a real estate project that the Newcomer himself owned.

"I have oversight for an entire division of the Parkwood Project. I can tell you their expenditures, assets and the amount of money they take in...everything."

"Are you able to manipulate any of it?" the Newcomer inquired.

"You mean can I hide it? Or can I skim some of it?"

"I do."

The accountant hesitated.

"There are ways," the man made clever.

The Newcomer picked up a slip of note-paper and quickly marked down the man's name, thanked him for coming, and suggested that they might meet another time. He chatted with the graduate student, a quick-witted law student, and he briefly held conversation with the undergraduate philosophy student who seemed to believe that everyone and everything thought by everyone in the room was influenced by the German Idealist Immanuel Kant.

The night's harvest had not been as fruitful as the Newcomer had hoped. Besides those with whom he had already engaged, the other inebriates in his home were

either too intoxicated to talk intelligently, or they possessed only the ability to complain about their own inner circle of friends and associates. One woman became engaged in a heated argument with an intimate about how he had behaved at Paul and Amity's barbecue a month prior. Apparently, he had brought wine to the gathering, but his hosts had never opened the bottle. He first asked for, then demanded, the return of the wine. It was his after all.

"He does that all the time," the woman said to no-one. "He hosts a party, asks you to bring alcohol, doesn't open it, and then keeps it for himself. I hate that cheap bastard."

"Don't swear. You know I don't it when you swear," said her cheap friend.

Her associate continued to insist he had not brought the alcohol to the gathering in order to drink it, but to be sociable and to contribute to the merriment. She insisted that he was selfish, and the heated conversation rapidly escalated into a wildly gesticulated debate about the man's character. Once or twice the woman fell over, and recovered herself only with difficulty, slowly, from the floor of the Newcomer's penthouse. The two at last decided to cease talking with one another, at least for the night, and the man skulked silently in the front room with the mutual bottle of wine that he now refused to share, while the woman meandered about searching for more revelry. Uninterested in chatting with these inebriates, the Newcomer watched their irritated interaction with amused detachment. When the two ceased talking with, and so berating, one another, he in turn lost interest in them altogether. Most of the other revelers interacted in similar ways, brandishing insignificant and petty chat, seeming to the Newcomer to be teary-eyed children. The evening wore on slowly for the Newcomer and Brazil. The two retiring to one of the master rooms, he sat on a reclining chair and she lay her form atop the satinsweet sofa.

"What are we doing with these people?" asked Brazil defiantly. "Why do you insist on bringing strangers into your home?"

"...", he began to reply

"You know, one day one of them will steal something, or hurt themselves, and you will be stuck with a lawsuit or worse, and they hardly ever give you anything in return for your hospitality. You gather together a host of bums and

oddities when you have connections to far better social circles,” she interrupted.

“Do you believe that I am stupid?”

“I think *this* is stupid.” She pointed towards the closed door.

“I bring them here, and I chat with the ones that appear interesting or in some way compatible with one of my interests. When I see that they have little or nothing to add, they go. When they show that they have some value, I find ways to contact them again.”

Brazil tossed her head back slightly in semi-objection, then she arose and walked toward the wall, which was constructed of windows such that one was able to watch practically the entire city alight and stirring. She brushed off her dress, and straightened her hair in the window-mirror.

“You’re weeding out the masses for potential friends.”

“Tonight’s crop is admittedly meager.”

“Fraternalizing randomly with degenerates is asinine.”

Thus their bond.

YELLOW OCHRE

Leon Ochrowskovich was unable to find a proper tailor. His shirts were untidy, since he had dismissed his personal servant, and now he was wearing the last of his proper-white, crisp formal shirts; he did not know what to do. He regularly smiled at each passing pedestrian, and there were times when the smile returned to him in kind and others when a grin beamed deep return, but more often he received no reaction at all. He had rented a comfortable and respectable apartment near Water Tower, and he often strolled along Michigan avenue when he was not working in order to absorb all of the well-dressed *homotheria* who in turn possessed clean and sociable smiles, at least as far as he understood their reactions. Leon was not overly concerned about his appearance, though he was unable to emerge from his apartment until he achieved the proper configuration. He had a reputation to maintain. As he strolled along Michigan during his lunch-time recess, he fussed with his cuff-links and he made certain his tie was wedged close to his neck.

“There mustn’t be a gap between tie and neck,” he more felt to himself than thought.

Leon had shaved three times each morning in order to achieve the correct smoothness of chin, one that demonstrated he was a citizen in excellent health, possessed of status and a man of responsibility. Leon was simply careful and friendly, unconcerned with appearances.

“It certainly is a joy to see you.”

He heard himself say it.

“That’s what he will say to me.”

Leon felt an authentic connection between himself and his coworkers. He

wanted very much to please his superior, and to delight all of those around him in the office. In fact, if Leon were able, he would embrace the whole peoples of the earth.

“I’d tell them that everything will be fine, just fine. And I’d reassure them that all of their disagreements are mere wind and smoke. Yes, wind and smoke, that’s all they are.”

He pulled the ends of his crisp-white shirt out from within his coat. Leon became a delighted man when the tips of his shirts extended outside of his coat, providing an aesthetic contrast that demonstrated his tact and suavity, but these minutiae were no concern to him really. Not really. When he stopped at a traffic light in order to wait for the green man to permit his crossing, he instinctively removed a comb from his coat pocket, upper left-hand corner, and ensured that his thick, tawny hair behaved as it ought, even in rough and ungainly wind. He knew what motion to make of his hand, and he knew just how to sculpt his hair with his palms in order to achieve the perfect aesthetic, even lacking a looking-glass. He had practiced such a maneuver many times before the mirror in order to make this, his second primary aesthetic gesture, instinctual. Heavyside and robust, Leon the gregarious body was well-distributed so that he seemed to be more a large man than an obese one. He was blond to an extreme, his hair a deep, dark bronze. Not the kind that turns platinum on the tips, but a brazen blond that even shone when he mixed gel into it in order to obtain a perfect extended twist. His hair was naturally wavy, but Leon liked to straighten the natural curl, just enough. Still, his hair wave was little concern to him, mere facade. His skin was pale and he regularly wore dark yellow colors, oxides and tawny browns. His overcoat was rust colored with black lapels. He combined his crispwhite shirts with corduroy-yellow pants and golden sports jackets so that if one should see him contentedly meandering about the city, one would perceive the gilded approach of a great mass of fulvous gregariousness.

“How are you today?”

“Let me get that for you.”

And even his nod beseeemed buttered xanthus. Leon was tall, which was fortunate since his burden of flesh accompanied him wherever he went. He cut not an arrogant, nor an imposing, figure. He entered, as always, his office with a smile and an inside joke for every person in the office.

“Don’t say anything, but...,” he would say to practically everyone such that if only every person in the office should compare notes, they would find a secret meeting in every encounter with everyone. Thus-like did Leon produce inside jokes with all members of the staff, and accordingly did he win the trust of all around him. And, in general, everyone with whom he worked liked him, enjoyed his jocular and his intimacy. He was to them almost comical in demeanor, but it was as if all of the staff might say “Yes, he’s silly, but that’s Leon.” And then they would smile.

“Felina the Great.”

“Hi Leon,” Felina returned, lengthening both words.

Glad to see him, she was unable to hold back a grin, though she had seen him just thirteen hours earlier. Felina and Leon had been together at the same company almost a decade. They were practically the only two remaining employees from the early days. Initially, they were part of a software company that developed virus protection programs only, which was Leon’s specialty. Now, the company had been appropriated by a multi-national conglomerate that imposed its will upon everyone and everything. The merger was quick, and forceful. The owners had been given the least time possible to decide, while a veiled threat dangled over them. In the end, though they had promised that they would continue to own and run the company, they chose to sell. No dry eyes were present during the company “farewell” gathering. Leon had been especially obliging that night, toasting his superiors and reminiscing with entertaining anecdotes. Leon was, in fact, better at charming others than he was at writing cutting edge viral software, though his prowess at writing software was no paltry ability. He was a natural, sunny disposition that hardly anyone was able to resist, and Leon possessed a unique, unusual even for Leon, relationship with Felina. He had saved her job once when someone in the office had been charging online purchases to a company account. Since the company was a software company, almost anyone was able to trace from what computer station the purchases were made, perhaps a not-so-intelligent mistake. The trail led quickly, and without doubt, to Felina’s station, but Leon intervened. He claimed that he had made the purchases, foolishly thinking that he would simply replace the funds that had been depleted. His excuse was that he had financial difficulties, but that he wanted to purchase some pleasant baubles for his fiancé: the items were obviously feminine accoutrements that amuse felines. Unbelievably, Leon was

able to talk his then supervisor into not merely retaining Felina, but even retaining Leon himself. He replaced the pilfered funds with money that Felina gave him, and the furor of the “internet thief” dissipated, was replaced later by the larger threat of layoffs and pay cuts. Not convinced that he was the culprit, some disliked, or distrusted, Felina from that point onward, since they liked Leon so much, but those employees drifted away--finding new employment, moving to another state or going back to school. Now the only two employees from that period were Felina and Leon, and the incident was barely recalled by both. Why Leon had acted in such a manner baffled Felina for some time. She suspected that he had an ulterior motive for assisting her, perhaps he wanted a more personal relationship, but Leon was simply the Leon that everyone knew and enjoyed. He wanted no conflict, and he was willing to make personal sacrifices in order to maintain peace. He genuinely made joy and harmony present to those who were around and for him. In fact, that he had saved someone who would not have saved him, that he had successfully preserved the dignity of all, with the possible exception of himself, only endeared him the more to Felina and to others, a present-permanent joy. When a new employee laughed at Leon’s manner

“You had better watch what you say,” Felina declared.

And as the office attrition turned the two of them further toward one another in camaraderie, the more unified they became, the more loved became the tawny lion of a man.

“Hey, Cassius.”

“Leon.”

“Good morning, Chara.”

Leon continued his greetings, always, as he sauntered into the large, open and common office area. His cubicle was three rows down along the metal dividers that separated each employee, just barely, from one another. He was discontented at first, since his area was located far and away from the others. He lacked communication and connection, which he so desperately craved, but he soon used the disadvantage toward his general purpose. He would greet everyone in the office as he walked toward his distant cubicle, and he might spend three or four minutes--sometimes more--with each one, chatting up or

discussing anything that might interest the present person. During the first few and the last two hours of the day, he always found an excuse to meander back and forth, obtaining the drinking water that he had suggested be placed at the front of the office, finding a pencil, making photo-copies. Leon had made the suggestion to place the water cooler at the front of the office-area ostensibly in order to give access to all employees at the beginning of the day. If someone wanted water, they were able to obtain it when they first arrived. Leon claimed less time would be wasted. A non-sequitur, he knew. Leon found himself near the cooler regularly, and when the water needed changing, he always assisted Felina by changing the container himself. He regularly volunteered to perform menial tasks, like computer maintenance at each station. He was assigned the task of remotely disposing deleted items and defragmentation and the like, but for some reason Leon was unable to use remote access when he needed to defragment someone's computer. He deemed it necessary to go to each employee's cubicle personally in order to tend to their computer needs. Everyone in the office knew how to perform the maintenance, but Leon insisted that they needed to keep a clear mind in order to perform their appointed task.

“Efficiency takes priority.”

He repeated this statement to Charles Brigade who kept his men in the most sufficient shape.

“How many points are the Giants favored?” he chatted up the Brigade, the name everyone called Charles.

“Don't know, Leon.”

Perceiving that he ought not waste the Brigade's time today, Leon scurried away toward another, currently more amicable, part of the office-common. He was also fond of Hal Joystick who wanted to create a video-game division of the company. Upper management frowned upon the idea.

“I hate to remind you that there's no guaranteed market for that stuff now,” Leon had explained to Joystick more than once. “Still, keep trying. We'll pry some funds from the upper-ups soon enough.”

Joystick said little to Leon, but his silence was not out of the ordinary, nor was it a sign of disdain. Hal was not a very demonstrative person who had been

known to defend Leon in his absence, but then almost everyone defended Leon. Strange that.

“I hear there’s been an influx of green from outside,”
Hal commented to Leon.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean someone, or some corporation, has bought
Corpu-tech.”

“Again?”

Joystickner nodded. Leon scratched his head and adjusted his crisp-white shirt around his neck. He had not heard such a thing, and his sudden ignorance was a dilemma, since well-chatted office-persons were the most knowledgeable. Most informed. Everyone knows that. He frowned a moment, then he leaned closer to Hal who smiled at Leon’s surprise and consternation.

“When did this happen?” he whispered.

“I have no idea, but the Brigade is looking into it now,”
Hal whispered sarcastically.

Hal noted Leon’s ignorance and shrugged his shoulders. The situation was intolerable. Leon would not be left out of the loop on anything transpiring in Corpu-tech. He was, after all, in every loop in the office. That he should be left out was unpardonable, simply not tolerable. Leon arrived at work in perfect form every day. Nails trimmed and hair perfect, he performed his assigned tasks not merely well--no sir--but rather excellently.

“Yes, I set a new, high standard for this company. I do, and the others are good, indeed fine and good at what they do, but Corpu-tech relies on more than mere technical skill,” Leon thought.

Leon had created what loops existed at Corpu-tech. He *was* the loop, and his left-outed-ness must be remedied at once. Otherwise, all would crumble. Perhaps Leon might stay away while the present crisis unfolded. They will then see just how valuable he is. No, no. Leon believed that such thoughts were unworthy of

him. He would do what he could and assist where he was able.

“Well, perhaps we might get our little project started,” Leon commented to Hal in his confidential tone.

He lifted himself up from his “classified” stance. He brought about a broad smile, and then he grasped Joystick by the tops of his shoulders and shook him as if he were toying with a cat or a small dog. Had he been in another time and place, he might have given his dear comrade a kiss on both cheeks--held him tight to his chest--but the grin and shake were sufficient, and Joystick seemed to have had enough affection for the time being.

“Soon enough!” Leon claimed loudly as Hal who loved the game shook his head.

Leon finally released Joystick, and Hal threw his open palm at him and threw it again, as if warding off an affable lion. Leon laughed quietly as he departed, but a grim countenance soon became him as he moved quickly toward the Brigade. Charles remained fixated upon his computer. Knowing that look, Leon determined that the precise time to chat with the Brigade had not yet arrived. Instead, Leon sat back in his own chair, and he hurriedly put together a presentation for the software he was supposed to have been crafting. Leon was fortunate that he was talented enough in his field to finish an assignment quickly, and he was shrewd enough to refrain from giving away the quickness with which he finished projects. Perhaps he would be deemed a bit too efficient. Regardless, he had his current presentation completed in a few hours, and Leon had the good fortune enough that, as usual, the Brigade had calmed down a bit. No longer was he fixed upon his computer screen, and Charles seemed his usual, approachable self. Leon saw him laughing at something Felina was telling him.

“Good, good. I need a warm Brigade.”

Leon entered the Brigade’s office with a quiet knock and an ostensible need to discuss serious matters. He dawdled about the entrance to the main office, visibly nervous. The Brigade recognized when Leon was about to deliver some finished project, or give him some serious information, because Leon always beamed yellow joy, except at these times. Leon was easy to read.

“I have the presentation for the 6.7 series.”

“Fine, fine. Leave it.”

The Brigade nodded towards the “in” plastic tray on his desk. Leon complied while the Brigade concentrated on a file the heading of which was hidden to Leon. He attempted to read the cover, but was unable to do so. Almost at the door of the Brigade’s office, Leon became annoyed.

“I’d like to chat with you about it before you read it.”

The Brigade looked up from his paper.

“I really have no time right now, Leon, not even for you.”

“What’s wrong?”

The Brigade recognized that he was able to trust Leon. Besieged by fears and concerned over providing for his family and caring for his “people” at work, he had not been able to talk with anyone else as yet. The Brigade was reluctant to discuss anything with anyone until he knew certainly what he was talking about, but he knew that he was able to trust Leon. He and Leon had a unique bond that no other two employees at Corpu-tech possessed.

“Close the door.”

Leon carefully, inaudibly, closed the door of the Brigade’s office. He had been curious until now, but he was as intimate with the Brigade as he was with everyone in the office. Charles’ discretion concerned him.

“You remember that this company exchanged hands some time ago?”

“Yes.”

“Well, we haven’t heard from any new master.”

“You mean we’ve been sold again?” Leon wondered aloud.

“No, no. Corpu-tech is in the same hands that it has been for the last few years. I just can’t figure out whose. I’ve done inquiries on different companies, corporations and I can only find that I can find out nothing about who really makes decisions for us.”

“But nothing has changed significantly, right?”

“That’s the thing. We’re not exactly pulling an enormous profit. Every new project that might bring us new revenue seems to be canceled...or postponed. Money given to undertake these projects seems to disappear. The last time this kind of thing happened there was serious downsizing.”

“Oh, but you don’t know that.”

“I know this business, and I know the kind of person who runs it.”

Leon was about to interject.

“...and I know when something is about to happen,” the Brigade finished.

“Charles, Charles. Everything will be fine, just fine. You exaggerate the consequences. We’ve been through tough times before, yes?”

Before the Brigade was able to answer...

“...of course we have. And you and I have done well, and survived well together. What with the two of us here, assisting one another, nothing bad can happen. Besides, if you look at what you’re saying logically, you have no justifiable reason to be concerned.”

“Leon, I don’t jump to conclusions.”

“No, of course you don’t. I’m just saying that there may be less reason to be concerned than you think. You work too hard.”

The Brigade paused, absorbing the information given to him. He was in a bad mood, and someone else he might tell off, but

“You might be right, but it seems as though no-one owns this company anymore,” he said reluctantly.

“Of course I’m right. All of this concern is just wind and smoke.”

Thus their bond.

Felina was startled at the sight. Never before had anyone the nerve to bring an animal into Corpu-tech, not even Leon. Yet, while she was sitting at her desk, typing the multi-various replies to the many inquiries she received every day, a brazen dog trotted up to her. He seemed excited about something or another, and he performed a frantic tap dance for her on the tile floor as if auditioning for an absurd vaudeville act. Tick-tak, click-clack went nails on hard-floored linoleum. He was hairless, excepting a rough but comely layer of fur on his head and odd in appearance, but a later glance demonstrated that he had a delightful kind of feral beauty. He appeared to be an eager, sociable animal. Still, what startled Felina the more was the manner of his greeting. He first approached her with wagged tale and thorough dogsmile, and she knew the rules. Felina held out her hand in order to permit the animal to sniff, and he did so. He approached cautiously, but then performed a thorough inspection of the scent on her hand. He licked her fingers once, then twice, and Felina smiled. Suddenly, the animal backed away from her, as if she had made an aggressive gesture. He growled kindly and then

“AAaaaaaaahhhhhhhhoowwoowwoowwoowowwooooo.”

Felina did not know what to do. She shrank back a bit and carefully lifted the phone from its cradle.

“It’s alright. It’s alright. He will not harm you,” came a reassuring voice from a man whose long black mane was caught in a net in the rear, the sides of his head clipped close near the ears. He had an olivegray complexion, and Felina was unable to determine his ethnicity.

“I think he is put off by certain perfumes, and his reactions are usually delayed.”

She was silent.

“You *are* wearing perfume, aren’t you?”

Felina nodded to the Newcomer as she noticed another, similar, dog approach. She thought it quaint that they had matching jade collars.

VIVID CARMINE ICHOR

Brazil's inspiration for the Dionysian flautist leading his band of rapture-smiths along a rural path would not become a reality any time soon; she needed to begin a project as soon as it occurred to her or the concept would burst, the image dissipate in her mind until the motivation departed and the muse refused to return--perhaps for several months. She had a vision in her head of an inebriated, longhaired leader who guided a group of malcontents, professionals, narcissists, pretenders and political aristocrats along a slender strip of forest, urban expansion and industry surrounding them on all sides. She knew a Dionysian troupe was not the most novel of themes, but its traditional nature pleased her. She envisioned modern dress for the characters and rustic, but dilapidated, accoutrements for the slender strip of forest. Brazil imagined the urban backdrop would consist of lanky, enormous buildings--edifices exuding terrible power--distorted by their own dynamism. The tops of the buildings would be larger than the bottoms, the peak of each flaring out in a shout at the blue expanse covering deep space.

"I am *homotheria*!"

Perhaps she would draw a backdrop, making it somewhat comic. Maybe she would use photography of some section of Chicago, rampant consumption. She was uncertain how she would complete the project, but she had ideas. Her friend, the Newcomer, had been especially fond of the aesthetic given it was done in the right way, whatever that meant.

"Strike while the iron is hot."

She, like him, hated that imperative but it was appropriate, especially for her who writes in bronze. Brazil liked to think that her sculptures were kinetic. She would explain that most, or all, of her subjects were in action, and yet they were rigid with universal value. The particulars of each brazen avatar were absolutely

unique, presenting a universal character. It was as if her art revealed the transitory in its universality. The Newcomer delighted in that idea as well, and his gladness at her expression made her grin. While she sketched the scene, beginning with the leader of the troupe, she continued to refine the concept in her head. She had not cleaned up this morning, simply thrown her overalls overtop of her long, white night-shirt, which lay atop her new body. Brazil possessed attractive features, yet her frame remained obstinately full-figured. She thus had few, if she admitted it no, romantic prospects. She had no need to appear comely, but she might enjoy the attention of a man every so often, so Brazil was pleased with her new body, kept it in reserve. She sat in her workshop, which was situated across the hall from her bedroom, doubled as a kitchen. Her's was a moderate-sized apartment for which she paid nothing. Brazil concentrated on her art while she kept the Newcomer distracted, which consumed more energy than she at first expected. She held her caffeinated, super-cornsyruped global coffee beverage in her hand as she sketched the figures who followed the Dionysian leader. She was unable to configure the body of one of the political nobles to her satisfaction because she demanded of herself the ideal posturing--one that, while immobile, represented vibrant and radically particular, living movement. The final result of her efforts was usually remarkable, but her ideal art consumed much time and considerable revision. The Dionysian figure was easy; she had his image in her mind from the beginning, but how to represent a political figure in an intoxicated, dynamic, yet novel, manner escaped her. Merely dressing them in a flag or a non-descript outfit, even a tattered suit, would not suffice. Brazil arose and found some of the gourmet flatbread she enjoyed so much, walked around a bit in order to summon this particular muse. Her cell-phone beeped, and she picked it up, observed its cover observing the caller. She read the screen and a frown blighted her presently glad face. She waited and chose to ignore the call, but Brazil realized she was unable to postpone the conversation long. She went to the refrigerator and removed two slices of pumpernickel bread and some cheese, making a dry sandwich. Ordinarily, she would simply turn on her torch and work with the metal itself, and such an effort would bring about an inspiration somehow, but now, though she was surrounded by scraps of bronze, she was unable to gather them up. Brazil grew angry at the figure on her sheet of paper. Sandwich in hand, she erased the torso of the politician, tried again to produce the ideal posture, but dissatisfaction abided. Should she be able to mould the figure in metal, she would possibly form the politician to her pleasure, but instead she continued with her drawing until a snarl twisted her features once again.

“Piece of shit!”

Brazil wrinkled the drawing that had the perfect posture of the Dionysian figure up into a ball and threw it onto the floor. Her head hurt, and she wanted to lie down for a moment or two, to finish her sandwich, and so she dozed off for a moment on her couch in the front room. Awakened by her cat, Bluebeard Jack, who stood on her chest, she arose and held her head in her hands one moment. Her thoughts were still hazy from the night prior. She walked steadily towards the crumpled ball of paper on the floor. Brazil reluctantly unrolled it, and she flattened the edges out as much as possible. She then placed it atop a light-box, and she sketched the Dionysian figure onto fresh paper that lay on top of the old, which took some time because of the wrinkles beneath. She wove her fingers together a moment and drew fresh her breath. She centered herself, attempted to will a calm into her, and after an interval she was successful; she had learned the art of relaxation after aggravation from her time with her family. Her face having carved a smile-charm, she began again to sketch the figure of the politician. She bent back his head and sketched the body of the figure as straight as she was able without it seeming rigid, or lifeless. His posture was coming to her satisfaction as her cell-phone bleeped once more. Brazil glanced at the screen on the back of the phone, read the number. She sighed, and then answered.

“Yes, mother.”

Brazil heard the words, but they didn’t register.

“I did, mother.”

She rolled her eyes while the drawing came to life, satisfied.

“Mother, I have to go. I need to see a friend...”

Brazil paused in mid-expression.

“No, not that kind, mother.”

She paused again, listened inattentively.

“Mother...”

Another break.

“No mother, he doesn’t...”

Brazil placed the phone on her draw-board without turning on the speaker, as she continued to sketch her ideal character. Her political male was coming to life nicely, she thought. She could hear her mother indecipherably chatting with the aether. She picked up the phone once more, as if she had never put it aside.

“...won’t be able to find...” she heard.

Brazil then tapped the phone, call ended. She smiled to herself while she continued to sketch the political male, which was fast becoming what pleased her most about her new project. The phone bleeped once more and she glanced at the identification screen.

“Mother of god” it read.

She beamed while she silenced it.

“That’s quite nice,” she mused.

Brazil was restless when she created, so she arose from the near perfect, incomplete figure of the politician. She looked about, fidgeted with some magazines that lay around her kitchen. She slid downstairs to her mailbox, nothing. She paused momentarily to look outside of her apartment: a soggy, but otherwise comfortable breath of earth she drew in, smiled inward. In the vestibule, she heard her phone inside her apartment and again she grinned, mostly to herself. Brazil knew that “Mother of god” would not let it ring for very long, two bleeps at most.

“Bleep”

“Bleep”

Brazil enjoyed maternal torment these days, a fitting circumstance. She casually began to scale the stairs as she thought again about her politician.

“Bleep”

Brazil stopped where she was, and a mad dread distorted her comely face. She listened again, mostly in order to reassure herself.

“Bleep”

The tone seemed insistent, not what had become of her mother’s pleading.

Suddenly, she burst into a fast-pace, a mad visage upon her, her features contorting into deep concern. She was unable to move quickly in comparison to more able bodies, and so her flight upwards lasted much longer than she wished. She attempted even to scale two stairs at once, while she moved as quickly as possible, and accordingly she slipped mid-stair and fell on her newly-shaped frame, her surgical wound aching.

“Bleep,” once again.

Brazil lifted her head after she heard the final tone. She knitted her brow, and was determined to arrive upstairs quickly. She arose with rapid dignity, and she continued her frenzied gait-visage fearful until she reached her door, which she shoved open forcibly, the phone on the counter in her kitchen-studio. She dashed, or what passed for Brazil’s dash, from her front door to the kitchen. The phone screen, on which the identity of her caller was displayed, read “X.”

“Shit!”

Hastily, Brazil tapped the call sector. What seemed like an eternity arose between the pressing of the key on her cell-pad and the recognition of a ringtone. Four, five and six times the phone alerted its owner to her plea for entry to his *oikos*. She paced back and forth down her front hall. When finally the phone ceased ringing, there was a brief silence at the other end of the line.

“Is the morning whine completed yet?”

“Fuck you.”

“I love you too. Is the morning whining a thing of the past?”

“I don’t need this shit.” Brazil was relieved and annoyed.

“I don’t need it myself.”

“What do you want?”

“Come downtown. I want you to see my latest acquisition. I purchased a grab-bag of naughts. Simply amazing specimens.”

Brazil knew what he meant.

“What is he doing calling anyone a ‘naught,’” she thought.

She was not certain why she believed that this cohort was worth the time and effort required, but something about him retained her interest and intimacy. He had, yes it was true, supported her now for a few years, and her art would, conceivably, have suffered without his assistance. She had nowhere to turn when he paid for her survival; she had driven even her intimates from Chicago away.

Still, another intangible quality engrossed and repulsed her. Well-versed in art, architecture and culture in general, conversations with him were stimulating, even inspiring at times, and at the same time he retained a feral spirit. Himself the solipsist, he believed everyone suffered such isolation. While behaving badly in a charming manner, he gave freely of his own, an essence that drained others. His was a physically fine, beautiful presence curiously pointed. A platinum vest made of barbs. Brazil never knew what would transpire next, nor did she have any reason to believe that his support would continue indefinitely. He was as though he might vanish from existence altogether one day without leaving the slightest trace--besides the carnage--that he had ever breathed. Brazil thought the vitality and unpredictability drew her to him, but she remained uncertain, as he was. Then again, she thought perhaps she was wrong. Any attempt, however long, to determine precisely why she remained at his side ended in more confusion, yet she better recognized the dim outlines of the man. Ordinarily, she was able to keep up with the best of the inebriates and the squanderers, but her friend was in a different category altogether. He drank scotch regularly, unless he was “winnowing the naughts” as he called it. And though one might develop a tolerance, his ability to process alcohol continued to astound her, since he was able to imbibe until early morning and then arise fresh at whatever time was required.

“I’m working on a new project right now.”

“Dionysus in urbana?”

“Yeah.”

“Your work can wait. I need company for an errand.”

“I thought you said you wanted me to see your ‘grab-bag.’”

“Well, of course I want you to see them; they are a pure treat, but I need to fly out to Orlando in order to pick up a part for the Talbot-Lago. There is someone who has an engine part or two that I need.”

“I’m staying here,” Brazil made this statement firmly.

“Be here in twenty minutes. I’ll text you directions.”

At that point, Brazil’s phone went silent. She observed that the call had ended. There was no contract that the two of them had signed, each party free to do as they pleased. In fact, each attended gatherings alone, or enjoyed the company of others, but mostly they were a unit, sort of combined social entity together present with each other as one. Brazil had, at first, believed in a more serious, lasting and romantic relationship, but her expectations were quickly doused by the cold, wet realization that her friend was able to pluck fresh nubile fruits from the urban tree almost at will. He was well-off, and that alone presented him with many opportunities, but he was attractive as well, though in a peculiar way. Brazil noticed that the Newcomer was seeking something else and, obviously, mercenary women were no replacement for genuine affection, but there existed another longing within him. He had explained to her that he continued to winnow through heaps of others in order to unearth something, though he was never clear about what it was. Brazil wasn’t certain what he sought, but he seemed to spend a great amount of time and money actively pursuing perhaps an illusion. He had taken her to New York many times and they traveled to Greece, Italy, Spain, and the Netherlands, and she discovered that he was looking for something or someone. As long as she had known him, he had not found it. He remained vibrant, his appearance quite vigorous. He was in his mid-twenties, appeared younger, but anyone was able to tell easily that he was experienced over and far from his age. Brazil sat once again at her work, and she continued to sketch the figure of the politician, which had pleased her a moment ago. As she attempted to draw, the figure would not emerge as it had prior. She remained pleased at what she had already drawn, but every new attempt brought frustration, a net at the back of her mind tangling her imagination. She pushed it away with music and another sandwich, but it merely

entangled those distractions with its fine, soft ropes and with its refined insistence. Brazil drew some details around the troupe of Dionysiacs in order to stimulate her creativity, but again the net. She continued to glance at her clock, which read that seven minutes had departed. She ceased her drawing, and stared blankly at a corner of her studio.

“Shit.”

Brazil dressed herself in a quick, desultory fashion, and quick-walked out her apartment entrance. A moment later, she returned and grabbed a carry-on bag, filled it with clothes for a few days trip, then she ran out the front door once more. She found a cab quickly, and she used the credit-card he had supplied in order to compel the driver to speed to the downtown area. She arrived at the Water-Tower area, and at first in her nervousness Brazil was unable to find the correct building. This company was a recent acquisition, about three years ago. Her friend hadn't yet found time to pay a visit. Brazil found her way to the eighth floor where he had directed her to come. She entered the front area where no-one was about. There appeared to be no-one at all in the office. Perhaps the employees were at lunch, but that did not make sense because someone ought to be present at all times.

“Isn't that standard practice?”

Brazil didn't know; gladly ignorant of its protocol, if one may call it that, she had not been a part of business culture at any time in her life. She looked over the front desk, and noticed no way to summon anyone. She called out, but no answer returned. Brazil began to suspect that she was in the wrong place; she was about to depart when a familiar face appeared. A black, tap-dancing canine pranced around the corner, a broad dogsmile returned her outstretched hand with a lick and “Strumph,” spake the dog. Clearly, he was pleased to see her. Just then a door in the rear of the office-space opened and Brazil heard muffled questions and comments mingled with nervous laughs, puerile murmurs. She noted her friend with the long hair and olive-grey skin. He wore a cotton black suit with soft, light white pin-stripes down its length. He had placed his jacket on the back of a chair and his long, slender musculature pressed the limits of his long-sleeved, silken-white shirt. He wore an earring in one ear, and his shoes were a light-brown tan with flat, snub-toes. He emerged from the meeting-room where he had recently introduced himself. Still, he remained distant from Brazil, though both acknowledged the other's existence with a glance.

“Can I help you?” A woman stood behind Brazil. She was short, somewhat chubby, dressed in polyester, which only made her colorless appearance drabber.

“I’m waiting for someone.”

The Newcomer, motioned her to come towards him, and Brazil quickly complied. He was still chatting with one of the employees of Corpu-tech.

“...no plans to downsize.”

He was talking with a stocky African-American man of about forty who was ostensibly more comfortable in a Brigade than in a computer company. The other fifty employees were eager to get away from their meeting, and they hastily dispersed back into their cubicles. Somewhat irritated at the persistence of the stout fellow, Brazil’s comrade, The Newcomer repeatedly attempted to remove himself from the man’s presence, but was drawn back by yet another concern gone unheeded.

“Charles, make a list of your concerns, and present them to me early next week. Keep in mind that I will, in all probability, assign you the task of tending to them.”

“You said that, but we need...”

The Newcomer raised his hands in the air in an attempt to mute his employee.

“...and I *said* that I will determine what you will receive.”

He took Brazil by the shoulder, and the two made a rapid drawback toward the largest office in the space, the only genuine office on the floor besides the Brigade’s possessing a proper door and a fragment of privacy. The Newcomer dropped his suit-jacket onto the floor, and then he reclined in a chair behind a great marble desk. The office was equipped with a large-screen monitor on the wall facing the guests, and there was a coffee table with a computerized top. Brazil sat in one of the deep-oxide colored chairs in the corner of the office. The Newcomer motioned to the two dogs to sit near the corner of the room beside him, they quickly curled up beside one another. He patted both on the tops of their heads, sat again in his chair and

“That Brigade guy is almost out of a job,” he began.

“Give the man a break. How long has it been you’ve owned the company without bothering with it?”

“Three years.”

Brazil raised her brows.

“I’m a busy man.”

“No, you’re not.”

She turned her head toward the crass “painting” that soiled his wall, but continued to talk as she scrutinized it.

“And you wonder why this guy grabs you the first chance he gets when you introduce yourself? Come on.”

“First, that thing...”

He motioned his hand toward the “painting.”

“...is not my doing. Second, I see the morning whine is not yet complete. Would you enjoy an afternoon treat to settle your grumbling spirit?”

“Fuck you.”

“Oh wait, I almost forgot. I have a treat for you before we’re off to Orlando.”

“This isn’t like the group of wretches you invited home the other night, is it?”

“That was a meager crop, admittedly.”

“Fucking moronic.”

The Newcomer tapped his computer, and a video screen appeared on his monitor. Felina sat at her desk as she turned toward him.

“Yes, sir.”

“Felina is it?”

“Yes.”

“Felina, tell Leon to bring us some chocolate ice cream from the refrigerator. I want to have a chat with him as well. Tell him I want to see the plans for the Up series.”

“I don’t need anything to eat. You know I am not supposed to go back to that,” Brazil interjected.

“We will just have another body-job done, yes? You *must* witness this guy in person.”

Brazil shook her head and sighed audibly. After about ten minutes, a large figure with wavy blond hair knocked quietly on the office door. His head bobbed back and forth from behind the hazy window on the door to the equally hazy window on the wall of the office. One was able to see immediately that he was anxious from the manner with which he fidgeted with his tie, and how he placed and replaced the spoon in the big dish of ice cream he held in his hand. Brazil and the Newcomer observed him fiddling about -- he ran a comb through his hair in what seemed a regular maneuver -- and they both glanced at each other, smiling.

“Come,” the Newcomer said amusedly.

When Leon entered, he presented the two of them with his broad smile. He was dressed in yellow-brown corduroy and he sported a brown shirt with a sand-colored tie. His appearance was dapper in a way, though the colors he wore made him appear larger than he was. He fumbled with the door for a moment, and then he placed the bowl of cream on the large black desk as though offering a sacrifice to a god who might grant him some material good in return. He laughed while he fidgeted, and the Newcomer permitted his anxiety to grow for moments. Leon swayed his torso back and forth as he turned his gaze from Brazil, then back to the Newcomer and again.

“This...”

The Newcomer pointed to Brazil.

“This is one of my *pupae*, Brazil.”

Brazil nodded eyelid-closing boredom toward Leon. She slipped the Newcomer a death-glance; he smiled in response.

“Well, it certainly is a joy to greet you.” Leon said.

He stood before the chair directly in front of the Newcomer’s desk. The Newcomer frowned, and Leon glanced back and forth again, a seeming effort to determine whether his maneuver was acceptable or not. Leon arose again and pulled the edges of his shirt tight up to his wrists. Again, he glanced back at Brazil while the Newcomer attempted, unsuccessfully, to make her laugh with a mischievous grin.

“We have been eager to meet our new leader, and any friend of his is welcome, welcome indeed.”

Leon laughed good-nature. He walked over to Brazil, grasped her hand and shook it while the ice cream melted on the edge of the desk. He turned again, ignorant, towards the Newcomer, and he wiped the palms of his hands along his thighs. The scoops that had been perfectly crafted, a perfect chocolate pyramid, went unattended. Leon observed them for a moment, wondering if his efforts at perfect balance and quantity would remain unheeded.

“There were some who were nervous...”

Leon turned back and forth from Brazil to the Newcomer again, since given the dimensions of the room, it was impossible to talk with both of them from one comfortable position. Yet he moved, as always, with discerning poise.

“...yes Nervous about what might happen. Job security and good wages and all that.”

Leon emphasized the beginning letter of each issue.

“But, I reassured them. I said to them that all they fear is mere wind and smoke.”

As Leon spoke, he clapped his hands together as if washing them, and he wrung them dry repetitively. Again, he beamed--now more at ease because of the lack of reaction to his words. Having taken the silence as an opening, he was pleased to be there with two new companions, and so he decided that he might relax.

“May I?”

He pointed to one of the chairs.

“By all means sit, Leon.”

The Newcomer flashed a glance at Brazil who repressed her grin. She was angry at his attempt to make her laugh. Leon then placed his massive form in the chair, tawny gladness all the way. He pulled the retractable footstool from under the chair, and then, deciding that he was not comfortable taking ease in front of these two, he retracted it again, then leaned forward in the chair.

“Leon, How long have you been with Corpu-tech?”

Leon leaped upon the question, as though upon prey.

“Oh, I believe I’ve been here around ten years or so. Practically since the beginning.”

He wrung his hands, and at that time Leon decided to concentrate his attention on the Newcomer. He wanted the good faith of Brazil, but the Newcomer, he was the most important one. He would see, He would see.

“Isaac Faustus was the original owner, and then Hector Uranus, I believe. I was assistant to them both, yes I was. Fine gentlemen they were...”

“Leon...”

“... and a fine company you have here as well. I don’t

know of a bad apple in the cart, if you know what I mean. No sir, no dead wood floating in this stream. Good people. Good people.”

Leon’s tone became louder as he spoke, gradually, but perceptibly.

“Leon, if I were to tell you that I wanted to make some changes around here, would you be able to keep it to yourself?”

Leon hesitated, but only a moment. His head shook, trembled a bit -- he frowned -- and then he arose from his chair. He walked around the desk where the Newcomer sat, placed his hand on the shoulder of the Newcomer who initially shrunk from his touch.

“I am your servant.”

Leon said these words in an unusual manner. One wasn’t able to determine whether he was being witty or wily. He appeared ridiculous, and one was able to see clearly that his words were only partially true. Still, he maintained the amusement of his hosts.

“You will find that I am the most trustworthy sort. I’m a part of this operation in a big way, big way that is. I keep the wheels greased, and I hope to continue what I believe, perceive in fact, is a tradition. I like to think of myself as that tradition that is. What I mean to say...”

“That’s fine, Leon. Just fine,” the Newcomer hinted with his tone that the interview was complete.

“Well, I do have work to do. I do intend to say, that is I’ll say it. No, I’ll not hold it back. I’ll say that it certainly is a joy to meet you, at last. It has been a fine meeting, a fine greeting, yes?”

The Newcomer nodded.

“Remember that all you need is everything I can do.

Any problems that we have here at Corpu-tech are mere wind and smoke, yes, I'll say it, mere wind and smoke, and I don't hold anything back, no nothing held back..."

Leon approached the door with each passing word while he noted, for future reference, that neither party had touched or acknowledged the ice cream that he brought with him. He clasped his hands together in a ball, held them close to his breast. He even bowed a bit as he departed. He opened the door without losing eye contact, back and forth, with both parties. When the door was open wide he ceased his exit and directed his massive, ochre frame behind the large desk next to the Newcomer who moved slightly away from the impending, imposing gregariousness. He grasped, more like seized, the hand of the Newcomer, while he grabbed his shoulder.

"I know we will make a great team. I like you already. I feel a certain bond with you. I know it seems trite and I know that it may appear disingenuous, but I assure you that you will find the best friend, the truest compatriot, in me."

And then Leon performed a gilded departure of his great mass of fulvous conviviality. There were a few moments of silence as Brazil took the ice cream from the desk, ate a mouthful, and then she threw the remainder in the trash can. The two sat exchanging knitted brows, and a smile emerged between them.

"So,...ah....tell me..." Brazil began. "...what the fuck was that?"

Somewhere emerged giggles and laughter at the expense of the warmest of men. The trip to Orlando went quickly for the Newcomer, but for Brazil it seemed an eternity. At first, the two had reviewed the visit of the tawny man moment by moment, as if they were wondering in incredulity at a film that they had taken.

"And what is this 'wind and smoke' business?"

After they had shared a mutual disdain of Leon's comity, the Newcomer turned to his friend, Brazil. She knew that it was coming, didn't know what form precisely it would take today, but soon.... He grasped her hand as Leon had done

to him, pulled on her shoulder, and he taunted her while he mocked Leon.

“You two might make a cute couple.”

“Fuck you.”

“No, seriously...”

He emphasized the “S” in seriously.

“...opposites attract. He is friendly and, while annoying, he’s also somehow charismatic. And you...well...”

“Fuck you one more time.”

“...you’re naturally pointed, and almost always irritable.”

“I wonder why.”

“And he might be able to improve your diction and vocabulary. You have such a foul mouth.”

“One more time...”

Some silence intervened in their conversations while the Newcomer read and Brazil sketched. He was perusing a parts-list for his Talbot-Lago, but he became bored, so he asked the flight attendant what kind of alcohol was available, all of it unsuitable. The two exchanged glances, Brazil attempted to avert her eyes in time, but he noticed her notice him. The attendant arrived with scotch. The Newcomer quickly downed the drink, winced, asked for another. Brazil shook her head back and forth when he gazed her way. He paused for a moment, and then he stared fixedly upon the floor. He looked back at her again, then smiled. He turned his head toward hers, staring at her eyes until hers stared back. He waited until her attention returned to her work, and then he obtained her stare once more. Brazil was again visibly annoyed enough to put down her sketch and observe him. Having obtained this state of affairs, the Newcomer turned his head toward Brazil, just enough that she realized he was still attending to her, but then returned his gaze to the back of the seat in front of him. He placed his chin in his hand and leaned his head forward a bit, as if he were in deep concentration. He

creased his forehead and blackened eyebrows slightly, then moreso. He then turned his head slightly towards Brazil once more, still concentrating on the seat before him. She continued to watch him as he concentrated.

“What are you doing?”

The Newcomer placed his forefingers on his temples, concentrated again more forcefully as if directing something.

“Did you get it?” he said.

“What are you talking about?”

“Did you get the message?”

Brazil merely looked at him placidly.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, and I don’t care.” She returned to her work.

He feigned incredulity while he leaned back, surprised and indignant.

“You mean you didn’t receive my thought?”

Brazil sighed, and the Newcomer was unable to suppress a grin.

“...but isn’t that the way women communicate?”

Again she sighed.

“How much longer is this plane ride?” she asked no-one.

“You believe others are able to read your mind, so shouldn’t you be able to read the minds of others?”

“Fuck you.”

“If I read your mind correctly, I’m a hero.”

She waved him off, looking out the window.

“And, if I read your mind incorrectly, I’m a villain.”

Brazil was disgusted, and the Newcomer smiled, and then he laughed to himself. Amused, he napped pleasant for the remainder of the flight. The man who owned the part for the Newcomer’s Talbot-Lago lived in a ranch-style house with a small “grandmother” positioned three hundred yards behind it. The property was old and dilapidated, and when the Newcomer questioned the small, scruffy, taciturn man about the engine parts that he possessed, he received little by way of answer. The man did indeed have a few rare parts from a 1938 automobile that were original. They had been part of the hand-crafted machine that the Newcomer owned. He recognized them immediately, but the Orlandan understood that he was contending with a man of means, and he held out for more money than the parts were worth. The two men haggled back and forth, irritating Brazil, until at last the Newcomer decided to return home without them. Brazil was especially annoyed that she had been taken away from her art in order to witness in silence the absurd and time-consuming non-purchase of car parts that her friend was able to afford easily. There was no principle involved in denying the diminutive Floridian the measly sixty extra dollars he desired. Brazil pointed out this absurdity to an unresponsive Newcomer as they sat in their plane, returning home. She was even more annoyed when, two days later, he contacted the “little thief” from Florida and paid for the parts with a debit-card. The little man sent them to Chicago through the mail. Her entire day, and inspiration, had been squandered.

“You are an inconsiderate jackass. I hate you.”

Thus their bond.

CRIMSON MARS IN A YELLOW ROBE

The property on which it stood was immense. A vast stretch of mown lawn broadened and gave way to patches of sycamore trees and manicured bushes. An elongated black strip of asphalt directed the chosen to their destination. On their way to the weekly ritual, the flock might see one of the two lakes complete with ducks and what few fish were able to survive a highly monitored, regularly pecked, piece of earth. The view was soothing: grassland and a few trees, a stray deer once in a while who promptly vanished once the groundskeepers were alerted to its presence. Still, the view was mostly mere grass and scattered trees with few small, unpopulated, even sterile, ponds. There were no rustic creatures watching from the distance the long serpentine pitch that guided the shiny vehicles to an enormous lake of asphalt where they stopped and then the autos stood in formation, waiting for the return of their owners when they would again cross the pleasantly barren serpentine path. All habitation for the living beings in the vicinity had been transformed to suit the vehicles that suited their masters, *homotheria*. The reception area of the first building was able to entertain six hundred attendees easily. It had sheltered more than that number when it held fundraisers who gave for the spread of the word, good news. Today, the first building is filled with the smell of pastries and coffee, tea with milk and sugar, fat with chocolate and corn-syrup candied drink. Everything must taste sugary for these worshipers, even their sermons. The day is Sunday, and as the number eleven approaches, the guests filter gradually into the largest building on the four-hundred acre property, a high-roofed cathedral. Together with the pool, the strip-mall, investments and the three taverns co-owned by the minister, the properties of Foedimmanis Fundamentalist are worth approximately fifty million dollars. The interior of the worship-space is plain, few stained-glass windows set high and distant from the attendees, individual synthetic-rubber chairs for each believer--so that each may have his or her own like relationship with the almighty--and a huge, plain altar where stand two candles atop kindlywhite

marble and more than a few golden crosses shine brilliant. The placement of space and brilliant objects enhance the cathedral where thousands of believers gather, set in a semi-circle around not so much the altar, but the podium where the reverend Jackdaw delivers his dulcious lectures and divine imperatives to comfortable members who have lived largely contented, unexciting, but sated lives. They learned the skill of obedience over decades of pleasant submission.

“As we gather today, it is proper to speak of friendship. Not friendship of the kind that is common...but the kind that is divine.”

The reverend Jackdaw begins.

“People today see the world in terms that are familiar: their occupation, their automobile, their computer entertainment center. And we ought to enjoy these things, my friends, we now need them.”

The reverend pauses as he smiles at his audience.

“...but what good are they without the presence of Christ? Is your wide-screen television divine? Does your Porsche deliver you rapture in the world? Why no, it doesn't. But you know these things already, friends. You know deep in your heart that there is no presence like Christ, no saving presence like Jesus.”

The reverend Jackdaw smiled once more.

“No other can save you from the world, save you from the devil, save you from yourself. You know, I had a friend once. He was the finest man who ever lived. He had a wife who was kind and sociable and he had three children: a little boy and two older girls. He had a fine career in law, and he lived in a house that provided more room than he needed. Now, you might suppose that I'm gonna tell you that he drank, or that he was an adulterer, that he used co-caine or some other drugs. But I'm not gonna lie to ya, my friends. I can't lie to ya. I have to tell ya that he did none of those things. He was kind and generous. He gave to charity, and he loved his dog.”

The reverend Jackdaw couldn't help but pause here in order to permit the chuckles and knowing smiles to subside.

“...Yes, he did. He loved that dog and treated it well. David, I think was its

name. And it lived some whole eleven years, it did. Fine animal. He loved that dog and treated it well. He doted over his children, provided for them good and proper. He went to little league. I believe he was a coach and he and his wife had a good relationship, good Christian relationship. Yes, my friends, he did everything good and proper. You might suppose I'm gonna tell ya that he had no friends. But I'm not. No sir, that man had as many friends as a man could want. He had all this and all that and all this that and that and the other..."

The reverend Jackdaw paused.

"...and the man was miserable. He didn't know it, didn't know why, what happened or wherefore..."

The reverend Jackdaw here bowed his head down.

"...but he was miserable. He was a good citizen, my friends. He knew what was happening around him, he was informed about the what and whereabouts of his children...he was. But that was not enough, my friends, and you know what I'm gonna tell ya. You know what was missing from that man's life because you know yourselves what you have in your lives. That man was missing Jesus. It didn't matter that he had comfort and security. It didn't matter that he had a loving wife, the three kids, the career, the good citizenship. His dog couldn't even help him."

Again, the reverend Jackdaw paused.

"It didn't even matter that he had an intimate group of friends, my loving family. No, that didn't matter at all. Because he didn't make Christ a part of that friendship. He didn't allow Christ to come into his home and give him the presence that is the only presence of true friendship. My friend was not a Christian, and I could see how unhappy he was, how he could easily have taken Christ as the center of his life...and been his friend. For that friendship in Christ connects you to the Holy Spirit. And, the spirit breathes life into you; it gives you what is essential to begin friendships with others. I gotta tell you, friends, that unless you bring Christ into your life, no friend can call you his brother and that is what true friendship is all about. Now, I'm not gonna lecture you anymore about it because you know what I'm tellin' you. You sit before me as a flock that has heard the word of the only shepherd. You've heard the word of Jesus and I want you to go out into the wide world today and spread th word of friendship

with Christ everywhere you can. And when you bring an other into the fold, you will have bonded with him in friendship with Christ, the only savior. Cause you know that no law can bond you with god unless it's connected to Jesus.”

And with these words again the reverend Jackdaw stopped. He met his eyes with all of those of the audience he was able and he beheld mostly nodding heads. Then, the reverend Jackdaw began again.

“There is one more matter I’d like to take up with you today, friends. A troubling matter. As you know, our good friend in Christ, Mr. Adder Dareios, has blessed our community with his friendship. He has given to our humble gathering until it hurt, my brothers, until it hurt. But he has not only given this church the funding it needs to spread the friendship of Christ to the world, he has given his own presence. There are some who believe that Mr. Adder Dareios has tried to use this community, tried to damage our communal bond. And so, I ask who has fooled you who think that Mr. Dareios has taken anything from our church? Who is it who has fooled you into believing that his generosity is anything less than friendship in Christ? You remember the man who had everthing he wanted, everthing he needed? You remember that he needed friendship in Christ and that is all he needed, friends. His life was wretched not because he didn’t follow the law, not because he didn’t love his children, but because he didn’t have friendship with Christ. Mr. Dareios provides us with the right tools we need to go out into the world and spread his friendship, everywhere on earth. So, don’t be fooled into thinking that accepting his generosity will bar you from the kingdom of heaven. No, be assured that when you accept assistance from a friend in Christ-Jesus you are helped along the path to Christ. No word, career, law of purity or friend can do anything for you until Christ’s presence is a part of it. Do not permit our flock to be led astray by false accusations and bright, fiery words. Stay only with Christ, and let his work in the world do its thing.”

The reverend Jackdaw there ceased his short sermon and began the praise of Christ in song. Church services continued until the number twelve. These services customarily begin at the number ten and the reverend Jackdaw is a stickler about punctuality. Still, a few years ago the time of the service was changed, the reverend surprisingly having insisted that the alteration occur. It is difficult to determine how and why changes transpire in such a large congregation as Foedimmanis Fundamentalist, since most members have little or

no access to the upper hierarchy. Any complaints from even prominent members of the congregation go unheeded, but the service now begins at the number eleven.

Adder Dareios was born wealthy, guaranteed a comfortable life, and he attended excellent schools, though his marks were mediocre. He never excelled at intellectual matters, but pressure from his family compelled him to perform some act, some display of superiority and Adder the fighter, proved, and determined to continue the proof of, his merit. He realized early that he had acumen for business. Not the kind of business that one learns in school where the concepts flitter annoyingly about one's head and a good ethic becomes a barrier, but the kind of business that "makes the world go round." If one tends to a simple rule, one will be successful. Give as little as possible, take as much as good reputation permits. This simple maxim Adder Dareios adhered to as others adhere to the golden rule. It was a mode of conduct seeped into his scruple, had bled abyss into his psyche. While other children were making fun on the playground, the little Adder was calculating. He had noted that while outside of the school grounds, almost all children had continual access to gum and sweet-drops, yet inside the school grounds almost no child possessed them. He purchased himself massive amounts of the most popular flavors of sweet-drops, watermelon, and the same of "Toxic Rubber-Trouble" bubble-gum, the most popular sweet-chew. He had sat himself near the end of the slide where many of the more popular children ended their enjoyment, and he gave out a few sticks of chewing gum initially. When others returned, and asked for some chew, he said that he had run low, that he was unable to give them up without compensation. When his contemporaries asked how much, he charged them ten times the price he had paid, but he was cleverer still. The price was barely noticeable since he sold one piece at a time. One would think that after a time Adder's contemporaries would learn the scam, themselves bring gum and sweets, but Adder knew enough about them. Idleness and ignorance would compel the majority of them to forget a supply of treats, and that desire would compel them to pay dearly for the luxury of a sweet chew during recess. Adder Dareios noted that when comfortable, most human beings question little and want change even less. When a larger, older and more powerful boy confronted Adder, demanding snacks *gratis*, he complied, but he made an agreement with the would-be assailant. Adder promised the boy free treats, if he would keep other thieves and attackers away. Thus began Adder's first commercial endeavor, and he was only to become more successful as he continued his schooling, earning average marks at best. When he attended high school, he was

“dealing” with janitors and some of the faculty. He might have access to supplies that had vanished from the school warehouse, or he might be able to correct, at enormous profit, a computer problem that plagued the staff ever since one of his friends shot a virus through the school network. Adder became the master of delivering others from difficulties, and providing them with scarce goods, if scarce only temporarily. He had a knack for recognizing needs and fulfilling them at precisely the right moment in order to profit most, spend the least. Yet, he had no need for more money for himself or for his family. Immediately after high school, Adder possessed enough assets to become a money broker. His father refused to assist him in his business venture because Adder was supposed to “make it on his own.” Dareios researched the usury laws of his state and locale, and maintained an upright, online profile and so his University experience was lively and lucrative. His father easily afforded tuition, and Adder would be able to lay claim to an excellent education, though his actual training was not given in the halls of that university. There, in Boston, he met many students who were in desperate need of funding, but who were unable to obtain requisite sums in the time allotted. Some were brilliant students who simply cared little for finances, and others were fresh out of options when one of Adder’s associates introduced Dareios to their state of desperation. Possessed of a mild quietude that aided his endeavor, he chatted with a new “client” and in a friendly manner he was able to reassure them. Few rivals existed and few criticized his success. Adder knew the concept of largesse and how to apply it when needed. His fraternity, for example, gave him charge of its finances, and once he had completed his stint as an undergraduate, the GHT treasury was triple what it once had been. They had underwritten more than twenty gatherings, some of which included the university president. But here Adder Dareios was not without his detractors. In his undergraduate junior year, he was accused of violating usury law in Massachusetts. The authorities proved nothing, but Adder received important insight into the politics of money-lending and its accompanying perils. He completed his education with two masters’ degrees, one in finance and another in Christian studies. He continued the expansion of his enterprises and formed Dareios Inc., which expanded his usury practices to real estate and bonds, but Adder continued the money-lending practice, since it was not only lucrative financially, but politically. He had acquired many associates during his years in Boston, and some few of those who continued to owe him money began careers in politics. One of his “clients” became governor with Dareios Inc. financial backing. It had been one of Adder Dareios’ more risky investments, but the return, as usual, was far greater than the initial investment. Adder appropriated the Washington crowd in pieces, and there he and his partners

expanded their associations. It was then that Adder learned of a blistering Jackdaw who at that time had only begun his rise as a divine leader. Five years later, Dareios Inc. had financed the flowering of the flock with the purchase, and protracted lease, of realty specifically designed for massive social gatherings. Most of the real estate was owned by Adder Dareios, and Adder's social connections as a permanent part of Washington politics attracted a steady flow of insiders to the church, whether to visit or to become a member. Now, Adder was forty-five years old and he moved about a bit more slowly than he had. He was unable to awaken himself at his usual 6:30 am. In fact, he enjoyed a regular sleep schedule.

"Long morning stretch," he used to tell his third wife was its name, and she enjoyed the relaxation, tolerated the infidelities, ignored the absence of authentic affection and attended the tiresome social gatherings with the requisite face.

Adder Dareios was content, but he had asked the reverend Jackdaw to alter the time of his sermon in order to give him and his wife that extra hour within which the long morning stretch might be had. The reverend Jackdaw agreed to the change directly, though with some reservation, and the praise of Jesus began a bit later in the morning.

"Gives me a chance to polish the sermon," the holy man explained to his flock.

The reverend Jackdaw regularly proclaimed the virtues of Dareios Inc., and there were pamphlets readily available at all the exits to the cathedral, explaining the low interest loan of large amounts of money procurable for a church-member or friend. Adder Dareios explained that the more powerful the church members, the more powerful the church itself, and the reverend Jackdaw agreed.

Thus their bond.

IRON BROWN INDUSTRIAL CAMARADERIE

Mallory delighted in his work. He enjoyed tinkering and fixing things, not that he was especially creative. He had purchased several clocks, an old desk and a wooden wheel with the intention of refurnishing them, but he never quite found the time or the appropriate moment to do so. It was a point of contention between Mallory and his fiancé, one which was the catalyst for finally rupturing their union. Still, he enjoyed constructing things out of other things, and when he and the crew had completed their task, he was able to observe objectively, to some degree, what he had completed. The finished product gave him satisfaction and some pride, and he enjoyed that much of his livelihood. He had begun as an apprentice to “Blown” whose nickname stemmed from his surname Blownowski.

“I’m Blown,” he had introduced himself.

Mallory thought it peculiar that a man would accept and even cooperate with a pejorative nickname, but there it was. Almost every crewmember called him “Blown,” and as time passed, the name took on a more dignified tone until it seemed natural to name the man absurdly. The other men in the crew were similar to Blown, possessing stocky builds, abusive senses of humor and pot bellies gathered unknowingly from beer and corn-syrup. Many of the younger men constantly smelled of inexpensive liquor, as if they drank alcohol on site, but one sensed that the liquid permeated their body, seeped into their existence to a profound level, as if their essence were liquored. Mallory wasn’t particularly fond of Blown, even at the beginning of their association, but he disliked his mentor less than he was averted to the other members of the crew. He had almost no tolerance for their chat, or their crude behavior, though he disliked pretense intensely. One of the younger crew members played practical jokes, which almost always elicited howls of laughter from the rest of the group, but his were

not good-natured jibes or easygoing teasings. He had told a new crewmember that it was permissible to enjoy a smoke-break at a time when the supervisor was particularly annoyed at too many breaks. The new employee was fired on the spot. A reprimand was expected, or, even better, an amusing public scolding would have sufficed, but no-one laughed when the young man sulked off the site. Still, the next day the crew found the incident humorous.

“I hated that guy,” said the man who had gotten him fired, though he had smiled to his face, joked with him.

Mallory disliked juvenile behavior of this kind, and he tolerated it only as much as he deemed absolutely necessary. He laughed at the jokes played upon him and those played upon hapless others, but the crew observed correctly that he did not believe in their humor with the same spirit they possessed. Mallory was annoyed when young men, around the age of seventeen or even younger, would arrive in order to learn the trade. One of them would be put to work cleaning up after the men, or he might be employed as gopher.

“Go-for”

These youths regularly learned little or nothing, and that was bad enough, but Mallory’s least favorite trick was the clever “left-handed screwdriver” deception. One member of the crew would tell the apprentice to ask another member for a left-handed screwdriver. Each successive member would say they didn’t have one, or that they lent it to someone else, directing him to the next accomplice. The victim meandered about the site, from crewmember to crewmember, asking for a non-existent tool, until they realized the ruse, or until someone told him outright that he had been duped. Some new crew members wandered about for hours or even days before they realized what was happening. Blown had even attempted the ruse on a middle-aged Mallory, but when asked to retrieve a left-handed hammer,

“Incredibly stupid,” Mallory had replied.

Perhaps his remark created a distance between him and his co-workers from the beginning, but Mallory cared nothing for them at the time. He was engaged to a future lawyer and would soon no longer need the monetarily rewarding, but at times wearisome, profession. He realized only later, when his fiancé sabotaged and tore apart their union from within, that he needed to remain occupied thusly

for several years--perhaps his lifetime. As a result of his lack of interest in jolly-making of this kind, Mallory was not a qualified crewmember equipped with a certification of adolescent assholitrty. He sat with them, and he joked with them in order to prevent a social assault on his person and reputation, which he had seen performed on more than one outcast crewmember. He laughed communally when one of them dripped paint-thinner on another's sandwich, the two men coming to fisticuffs. At times, he even socialized with one or two of them, but he never trusted them, never shared personal information or concerns. Having arrived in Chicago, he thought he would obtain a degree or find an office position somewhere, work his way up. And, once his wife began practicing, he would have had the leisure to return to school, or to select a lucrative position carefully. Mallory never imagined that he would become a plasterer whose main responsibility was to finish up with a coat of paint and to clean up a construction site after the job had been completed. The work was satisfying and admirable in a way and his remuneration was adequate, ample even, since he had relatively few needs, but he remained unsatisfied with his occupation and with the social context within which he labored. The crew to which he belonged was obligated to don red safety vests that were almost the ugliest articles of clothing ever produced. He detested wearing them, but their company believed firmly that each crew member ought to be not only safe, but recognizable. The vests were distinctive, and they did perform a worthwhile function. Equipped with a personal tracking sensor, they kept the employees visible under any circumstances, so that any supervisor or company executive would be able to determine what they were doing, when, and how they acted on the site. That the vests were the most inexpensive solution to a safety concern, that they permitted the company to claim it had satisfied safety regulations were fringe benefits.

"Mal, they need you on two," Blown said to him.

"They finished?"

"No, they're startin' up. What do you think?"

Mallory quietly gathered together his tools: paint bucket, hooks, and tool-box.

"Any word on Laggard?"

"His mother says he's doin' fine. Should be back already."

“He was hurt pretty bad.”

“That little pussy should be back at work.”

Blown waited for Mallory to respond, but he said nothing.

“If I find out he’s playin’, you know, sittin’ out for no reason, I’ll break his fuckin’ head for ‘im. I play too, but this is too much. I got this for him.”

Blown shook a ratchet back and forth vigorously, smiling. Blown was, of course, joking, but Mallory smelled a bit of rum, and he quickened the pace of his tool-gathering. Regretting his own question, he wanted desperately to depart before he heard any more of Blown’s comments.

“I hate that shit.”

Blown had explained his prejudice early. He told Mallory that he did not enjoy the company of educated persons. He disliked their hauteur, though Blown did not possess the words to explain it adequately. Blown knew that they possessed nothing except pretense. He gleefully explained to Mallory how he once created an altercation between himself and one of *those*. The man had wandered into a bar where an inebriated Blownowski was sinking three quarters at a time into a pinball machine. The man had been friendly toward the drunken construction worker, but Blown pretended as though he heard something he disliked.

“What did you say?” Blown asked.

“Nothing.”

“No, I heard somethin’,” he continued.

“No, really, I said nothing.”

“Oh, I see. You callin’ me a liar.”

The man moved away from Blown to the other side of the bar. There Blown followed and waited until he went outside in order to smoke a cigarette. Blown followed and hit the stranger in the face.

“Beat some sense into one of ‘em that day,” Blown laughed.

Mallory thought how lately Blown changed since he became a supervisor. Blown’s old friends and acquaintances were coming to be fewer and fewer, but he didn’t appear to care. Blown took a tone of apathetic superiority towards his former friends and colleagues much like successful academics take to adjuncts and to others in inferior disciplines. In fact, much like others to every other. He had even explained to Mallory that he cared nothing at all for anyone but his family, and Mallory ruminated that the earth would implode before Blown cared about anyone with whom he worked, or practically any other.

Thus their bond.

FURTHERING THE PURSUIT OF UNITY

One of his bar-time acquaintances had told Mallory in detail legends of penthouses and parties that ended only when the guests passed out, or departed at daylight. The alcohol *gratis*, the space open and indulgent. Mallory remembered the Newcomer and he wanted to see for himself how the he entertained his guests. He had heard that this odd man invited some of the guests for future visits, had entertained them with a live blues-band, and at times important personages from the Chicago community attended. Mallory thought that he might be able to network his way into the world that he had originally coveted. He attended every affordable bar, beerhouse and tavern that he knew at least once. He attempted, five months long, to find Brazil and her friend in order to talk with them again. Perhaps he may find a new occupation with new connections, may leave his old job for something more lucrative. At the very least, he should be able to entertain himself, seeing what there is in a Newcomer's world. Mallory had not been able to locate the Newcomer whose initial visit to *The Everyday Tavern Entautha* had apparently been his final one. Apparently, Amity's reaction to the dogs had not made the Newcomer feel welcome. In fact, Mallory had chatted with Amity about it.

"I see dogs in taverns all the time."

"Bullshit."

"No, really. No-one says nothin'. Nothing happens. I've seen it."

"Why do you want to see that guy again? You didn't like him when he was here."

"Just curious is all."

“You want to go to one of those all-nighters Brandy and Mead told you about.”

“I want to see for myself.”

“Free drinks,” Amity sputtered out.

Mallory searched again and again, but he had no luck finding the two putative socialites. He had spent a fair amount of money in the hunt, but nothing. Mallory mapped out the night-spots that he had already visited, and when he was at a specific place he asked if anyone had seen the two, seemingly unmistakable, friends with two green-collared dogs. Mallory explained that the dogs were unique, that they had no hair except on their heads. Perhaps half of the places he visited had seen the pair, and Mallory inferred the improbability of a return to a specific night-spot. Thus, he returned to those eateries and taverns who claimed no knowledge of the pair, and he didn't return to those where they had visited, but he grew weary of the time-consuming pursuit, and gradually over his five-month project Mallory ceased observing the crowds at public events in order to catch a glimpse of two strangers. He began to resume his ordinary routine, which included a resignation to his somewhat comfortable occupation and his tavern-minding regularity. He darted with, and argued with, his friend Amity, and Mallory became accustomed to “Punk-boy.” He even organized a holiday “get-together” at his home. He drank his sweetmints, and he tolerated the easygoing tease that came with them. These patrons he liked. Mallory recognized an aggravate commiseration that bonded them. He fought with them at times, but they usually reconciled quickly. And once in a great while, a new, friendly lady-form would wander hapless into *The Everyday Tavern Entautha*.

“My friend over there wants to buy you a drink, but he's too shy,” he said to one likely candidate.

Mallory pointed to the corner of the bar where no-one sat. The woman glanced over at the area where he pointed.

“No-one there,” she said.

Mallory turned his inebriated form toward the corner of the bar, his head moving

forward involuntary. “Must’ve run off,” He smiled at her. “’sppose I should buy you one.”

“Kinda ridiculous, but alright.”

Mallory motioned the tender towards him. He ordered two shots of “Jack” a Black-and-tan and a mint julep. The bartender obliged, but warned him that he was near his limit. Mallory attempted to straighten himself out, comport himself soberly. He managed to refrain from staggering and a trip to the bathroom provided him with much-needed water for righting himself. His thoughts were heavy and his hand not altogether unsteady. He had a great tolerance for alcohol. The woman chuckled to herself, seeming receptive. Mallory guessed that perhaps he might have some luck this evening, and he was tending to her needs, making her laugh, keeping lady-attention cornered. Rather inebriated, he had not the perception that he ordinarily commanded, and there were a few moments when he was confused, or rather, there was an imperception about him. Mallory had let down his guard and relaxed over the past few weeks and he had no need to pay much heed to his surroundings. Besides, the persons and the place around him were so familiar that they nearly disappeared before him. Still, he recognized that something was amiss, yet he was unable to determine what it was, too drunk. He realized that his hand felt warm and moist, and he didn’t understand why, nodded his head drunkenly. He smiled again at his acquaintance and decided to direct his attention to her, but when he looked at his hand, he at last comprehended the warm, clandestine presence of a green-collared dog who sat kissing his fingers dog-tongue. He tapped the friendly animal on its head while the canine beamed back at him verdant dogsmile eyes. Mallory observed the layout of the tavern, recognizing an orange-red fullformed-figure of a drunken woman with a new body. Delightedly abandoning his recent acquaintance, he casually wandered over where the Newcomer and his accomplice entertained many others who themselves welcomed new company.

Suddenly a bit more sober, Mallory meandered about the bar, observing the small gathering of drunkards that circled the Newcomer and Brazil. He sat as near to them as he was able, but he was not within speaking distance. It seemed as if the pair had particular success this evening, since Amity did not seem to tend bar, and the dogs who continued their trot about the tavern were able to remain. Knowing the man, Mallory suspected that the tender had been bribed, or that he did not care. Mallory remained for a time watching the persons who laughed with Brazil, who listened intently to the Newcomer as he talked. He was

fortunate that the next round of drinks included him; the Newcomer glanced at him once or twice, but within the few eye contacts Mallory was able to discern no recognition. He noticed that the green-collared dogs wandered back and forth around the bar-area, dogsmling. On one pass, he met the black with his hand, but the animal wouldn't remain in one place. The dog hurried toward the Newcomer as if he held some unceasing, unseen command over the canine. He hadn't called to the animal, but the dog appeared to need his attention, his approval, at every given time. The Newcomer beckoned the dog to leap onto his thighs, though the feat was impossible. The black yelped, and then he placed his forequarters onto the lap of the Newcomer in order to obey the command as much as possible. The black not remaining unrewarded, his master gave affection freely and in abundance, and every so often the black would receive a treat, gobbling a crunchy caricature bone. Mallory forced himself to obtain the attention of the Newcomer, but he was unable to muster sufficient will to wave, or smile. He was not the bashful kind, but something prevented him from acknowledging the odd and alluring man. His opportunity arrived when one of the green-collared dogs ate a pretzel-piece from the bar-floor. Mallory took a few long stems from the plastic cylinder, and broke small pieces off. He held one of the pieces in his hand, lowering it to the line of vision for the canine. Success greeted him quickly as the dog moved toward him, pressed its eyes up to him. He fed the animal and the green-collared dog willingly remained by his side for as long as the victuals lasted.

The Newcomer quickly noticed the absence of his animal; he looked about the bar in order to determine where it had gone. Mallory kept hold of the dog's collar, and

"Lookin' for your dog?"

"I am."

"He's here. He likes pretzels." Mallory didn't make apology, or ask if he had done wrong in feeding the animal.

"So long as he's alright."

"He's cool. No bother," Mallory returned, noting that the Newcomer paid scant attention to him, was mainly concerned for the animal. The Newcomer turned his attention back to Brazil and some others chatting busily, laughing easy while

the generosity continued.

“Mallory.”

Mallory reached out his hand. The Newcomer observed him within a moment of hesitation, which Mallory thought was strange, but after almost scoffing at him, the two hands clasped in a recognition of presence.

“‘Unfortunate.’”

“Pardon me?” Mallory asked.

“‘Unfortunate.’ Your name means ‘unfortunate one.’”

Mallory didn’t know if he liked the idea. Perceiving a distance, he managed a grin.

“That explains a few things.”

The two were unable to share more words, since the group was gathering, already prepared to hop. Eleven bar-tenders in all crowded the exit in order to pile together outside of the tavern. Someone waved a taxi-van down, and most of the inebriates shifted slippery inside. Mallory happened to be the last of the guests obliged to stuff himself inside the taxi-van, and, impatient and opportunist, he walked to the vehicle in front of the taxi where an orange-clad Brazil maneuvered her still ample frame into the waiting cabin. Once she was inside, he lowered his head and began the crawl into the car where he encountered two incredulous occupants. The dogs were seated opposite Brazil and the Newcomer in leather chairs, and while there was much more space in the vehicle, there were no more seats. The Newcomer said not one word, but he pointed, fiercely gesticulated, towards the taxi-van behind. A glare arose between Brazil and the Newcomer, and Mallory swiftly exited, almost unable to find space in the van behind. Nonetheless, he and they were on their way.

The penthouse was colossal. Mallory had never been inside a living-space so large with so very much space wasted. The Newcomer explained that he lived alone, but the space might house comfortably at least five, perhaps as much as ten, occupants. A large table was set for twenty guests, and each of the inebriates took a place. Mallory sat beside an older man of about sixty years and a woman

who appeared to have once been quite attractive, some substance having ravaged her over many years. She was comely of frame still, but her features, even her face, were becoming bloated by age and obvious consumption. She smelled heavily of liquor; it permeated her existence, was she. The hosts drew seats at the end of the table. They received napkins from one of the servants and, as if mock-proper, tucked them in to their collars, protected from the clumsy feastings of *hoi polloi*. Brazil chuckled, and the Newcomer suppressed a smirk.

“You don’t mind our guests tonight, yet you disliked them only a few months ago.” He talked quietly.

She shrugged. The three servants were dressed in canary-yellow suits. Yellow ties. Yellow shirts. Yellow shoes, but every so often, if one were to observe their feet, a flash of brown emerged because of the only dark color in their attire, brown socks. They served a dark brown soup comprised of what appeared to be dumplings.

“Our servers wear the color of joy in the spirit of our gathering,” offered the Newcomer.

Mallory moved the dumpling around in the deep porcelain bowl that sat before him. The liquid in the bowl had brown specs that mixed with the water if stirred, but they appeared to blend poorly with the water, as if the food disliked blending with life-giving water. He observed other guests who themselves were unsure of the potion, some smelling the concoction, others mixing and remixing it as Mallory had done. Leaning his head over the bowl, he drew a wellblended spoonful of the fluid into his utensil and slid it in to his mouth. The liquid tasted just as it appeared, like dirt mixed with a large amount of salt. Mallory thought he tasted brine, or salt-water, but, grimacing, he consumed the dish nonetheless. He looked at the Newcomer and his friend with a new body, and both of them beamed at him. The Newcomer nodded at Mallory. He recognized that it was best to nod in return, but he remained unable to do so. A mutual amusement seemed to arise between Brazil and the Newcomer. Mallory found that the dumpling was far less foul than the sauce had been, but still barely edible. It tasted more like a lump of soft, uncooked dough than anything else and it seemed quite greasy. He watched his hosts eat theirs with delight, and he mimicked them as best he was able. Oddly, the one serving of brine dumpling was the only food served that evening, yet it had been filling. The food having sobered him a bit, Mallory expected snacks of some kind, or even pizza, but

once the food had been served, the Newcomer directed a servant to bring into the dining-area a small platform on which a silver bell swung back and forth while the table beneath it moved. The Newcomer grasped a stick with a silver-colored ball on its end from the top of the platform. He struck the bell. “Clong! Clong! Clong!” Its sound was louder than expected, filling the room pleasantly, yet its resonance startled many of the guests. Some murmured, complaining that they had not been served anything alcoholic, and Mallory resisted the urge to roll his eyes when the bell rang.

“Now, the festivities! Here, the wine-chime!” said the Newcomer as he raised a bottle of wine in the air. Brazil giggled.

One of the Yellow-suited servants removed the bell from its platform, and inverted it. The top of the silver-signal was flat once a clip was removed, and having wiped the inside of the bell clean, the servant grasped one of dozens of wine bottles that he had rolled in on a cart. He began pouring entire the contents of each bottle of wine into the bell, stained from apparent use. When the bell was filled to the brim with white, red and rose, the Newcomer lifted it to his lips.

“Tu ne quaesieris – scire nefas – quem mihi, quem tibi finem di dederint,” he said.

None in the room understood him. Knowing his words were spoken to a void, the Newcomer turned up the bell slowly, without pause, and drained it to the final draught. He placed it back on its stand, and again. “Clong! Clong! Clong!” The servant removed the bell once again, and he inverted it once more, filling the wine-chime with another, yet different, concoction of varied wines. Swiftly were the guests more attentive, and smiles rode high on yellow visage of communal ease. The woman bloated by alcohol even laughed, nudged Mallory, and he could not help but chuckle. Again, the wine was mixed, and the servants poured glasses of water for all present, though only Mallory, Brazil and the Newcomer paid attention to the water.

“I can’t drink that whole bowl,” said one guest, the concoction given him.

“But please try. After all, we are all friends. Make merry with one another. Let’s leave nothing dry tonight, yes?”

"Let's agree shall we?" Brazil asked rhetorically, mocking the Newcomer. "The wine-chime is to be drained by each of us."

"We will be brothers and sisters, yes?" added the Newcomer. Brazil and the Newcomer mock-embraced, and some of the guests smiled and found another to hold near while others simply waited their turn at the wine-chime. The bloated beauty near Mallory turned to him.

"It's kind of weird, but what the hell?" she stated more than asked.

The woman laughed as the bell approached Mallory who noticed that the concoction was a deep burgundy brown as he poured it down his throat, circumventing his taste-buds as much as he was able. The bell took time going around the table, and as the last of the revelers drained the uneasy concoction, the affects of the sudden deluge of *vinum* revealed themselves in the wobbliness and disorientation of faces and words. Brazil was last to drain the bell. When she had done so, the table slipped into a round of applause that each one had survived a kind of rite.

"To the theater," said the Newcomer.

A glass of water in his hand, he arose steadily and directed his guests to another room of the penthouse. The theater-space possessed a stage and a podium from which one might recite poetry, or perform a drama intimately. While the Newcomer patted the backs of his new friends as they filed reluctantly into the theater, Mallory noticed that a few of them remained at the table. One young man having aged perhaps twenty years, appeared to have dropped off after he drained the wine-chime. The bloated beauty attempted to rouse him, but the youth, his mouth open wide, responded only in soft murmurs and a whistling snore. She became concerned, and she alerted the Newcomer who first directed her to the theater, and then turned his attention to the boy. He motioned to one of his yellow-clad servants, and they carried the young man to another room,

apparently where he might recuperate. The Newcomer joined his entourage in the theater soon enough and he stood at the podium.

“Your pleasure will be served,” he asserted as two servants began asking each guest what drink, or else, he or she might desire. “We will hear tonight some poetry written by the Other, a man of will and radical ability,” said the Newcomer. “It is, as you might imagine, a wanton gathering of words illappropriate to our minor fête,” he added.

What appeared to be an actor walked from behind the stage. He wore a warm, comfortable, yellow flannel shirt with blond jeans and soft, tawny suede slippers. He smiled warm a kind regard for all those in the audience, and after he had placed a few sheets of paper on the podium, he walked about the seats where inebriates waited, and he embraced kindly each drunken gatherer warm his plenty. A lengthier welcome he made to the Newcomer and his Brazil. When he returned to the podium:

Existence made
creates its cohesion
as warm happiness
light moves
our frenzied absolution
granted
by intimate overflowing of kindness
again made welcome
our vigorous marriage
driven
by the solipsist.

Mallory was uncertain when he ought to clap; he wanted very much to demonstrate his willingness to be willing, and at the point of the solipsist, he began. Fortunately for the unfortunate, he began correctly. The audience followed his lead, and the Newcomer turned smile toward him in a rare moment of unity. The eve wore thick with words embraced by intoxication, guitaring and dance-study. Mallory fought well the quiet drowse that crept upon him softly. Guests dropped steadily, while emergency medical technicians carried the twenty-year youth quietly out of the penthouse. The guest who remained until dawn was the unfortunate, at last perhaps auspicious.

Thus began their bond.

YELLOW JOY AND IRON RED IRE

Leon Ochrowskovich was shocked. He wasn't doing anything wrong. He stood properly in an acceptable stance with grace and respectability. He had done the same thing countless times. His waterdrink trembled in his hand as if he were an innocent child found stealing a negligible stick of gum.

"Leon, I don't know why you insist on standing by the watercooler all day long! Don't you have work to do?!"

Leon stood wordless in his yellow sweater and rusted corduroy uniform. His appearance was extraordinary, he recognized that himself, yet all was not well with the world, not well indeed. Ordinarily, he was able to return a comment or two, sing an aria of gregarious affability that charmed all present *homotheria*, but the pure distress of hearing angry words emerge from the Brigade...

"I...well...that is...I have...."

"*I...well..I..I..I...get...hell...out of my sight,*" grumbled the Brigade, mocking his workmate and ally.

Leon was unable, or refused to, move from his position beside the cooler, drink in hand. The Brigade leafed through mail that was intended for the head manager of Corpu-tech, peevish all the way. Felina occasionally glimpsed at him tearing open the envelopes forcefully, and she wisely decided that she would remain quiet for the duration of the Brigade's assault. Charles glanced twice at Leon, distressed and unsurprised that he had not moved from his watercooler vigil. He glared at the great gilded mass of fulvous gregariousness known to all who are able to receive joy as Leon Ochrowskovich.

"Yes, well Felina..., " Leon said bringing a reluctant Fe

lina into the fray.

“...if you find the 6.7 folder, I would be grateful...that is I would be quite happy for your assistance. Otherwise, all is fine and well, yes-yes, fine and well.”

Felina neither responded, nor did she acknowledge Leon’s words. Her eyes darted toward Leon once and twice, and she nodded her head ever so slightly in order to claim later that she assisted him, but she was familiar with the Brigade.

“You know, Leon, if I didn’t see the work you actually do, I’d think you’re some kind of dullard. It’s unbelievable, your nonsense. You’re like a sixth-grader on the playground,” said the Brigade derisively.

Leon tapped the front desk where Felina remained too busy to meet eyes with the Brigade, and then he nodded. He fumbled about inside his pockets, moving his keys and coins about and searching for an explanation. The situation was unusual indeed, yes-yes, indeed atypical.

“Go back to your office, Leon. Do some work. Something!” The Brigade waved his arm up and down in a disdainful manner.

Leon scurried away, still seeking an answer on his person.

The Brigade directed his attention to his mass of junk-mail once more only to find that, a few minutes later, Leon returned. He was clearly distressed, and he nodded to the Brigade a few times. He grasped his forgotten cup from atop the water-cooler, while the Brigade rolled his eyes and sighed. Leon bowed a shallow acknowledgment and scurried again away as far as he was able. The Brigade grumbled a bit more as he threw away most of the incoming mass of papared solicitation. He walked off slowly, his head shaking back and forth as he observed the workstations that he passed. He was meandering back to his office, clearly with some reluctance. Roughly five minutes passed as Felina once again buried herself in more work and detail that need not be completed at the moment.

“What is his problem today? I’d say that it’s just another day, yes, one like all the rest...” Leon gave bob to his head as he talked. “...but I fear he’d cut my head off.”

Leon startled Felina with his words for Brigade and with her. “He’s been like

that for a few days,” she said.

“Well, he can’t do Corpu-tech much good like that,” noted Leon.

“Everyone has problems, Leon.”

Leon took a final sip from his cup, and then he filled it with water once more.

“Those problems are not personal problems, Felina the Great. Trust me, believe me...I know.”

Leon gave tap to his temple then pointed his index finger at Felina playfully. She strained a smile.

“Those problems are our problems, let me just say.”

Leon was watching the Brigade in his office; careful to be able to dart away from the front desk should his superior emerge annoyed, or loud. Felina looked up from her work, pondering. “His home-life seems to be going well?”

“Indeed...Indeed,” Leon returned as he rocked back and forth his standing position. And Leon would know. During the remainder of the morning, Leon paid no attention to the reproof the Brigade had given him. He tended his duties as he always did, fulvous gladsmiling and office-visiting camaraderie. He made rounds about the office, asking what everyone knew of the Brigade and his recent behavior. Hal Joystick knew little about the matter, except that he acknowledged the Brigade’s mood change of late.

“He did the same to me last week. I wasn’t doin’ any thing out of the ordinary.”

“Interesting...interesting.” Leon stroked his well-shaven chin.

The remnants of the morning passed quickly, and the early afternoon was quiet, mostly because the Brigade barricaded himself in his office. No employee wanted to risk an encounter, and practically everyone remained at their station, not wanting to aggravate the martial man. Leon, true to form, was unable to resist a chat with his superior, but he recognized the needed delicacy. He waited

until the afternoon was ripe. He had perused magazines and some internet sites in order to find something that might interest the Brigade. He found an article on steroid use in basketball, and he printed it just for the occasion. When he knocked on the Brigade's door, he found it slightly ajar. Leon edged his way in without waiting for a response.

"What do you want Leon?" came a bothered voice.

The ochre-fellow discerned irritation.

"Oh well, yes, I have nothing official for you. No, I am unofficially here for an informal stop-by, just a visit mind you."

"Leon, why do you talk that way? I mean..."

"Yes, just my manner, just...well just how I was raised, sir."

"Stop that 'sir' shit."

"Yes...of course, by all means."

"Where do you come from?"

"As you know, the Midwest. Yes, as you know."

The Brigade shook his head, yet he was unable to suppress a good grin.

"I printed this for you," Leon interjected. He handed the article to the Brigade who observed it, noting to himself that Leon had spent the afternoon obtaining it instead of working as the Brigade had suggested.

"Read it already, but thanks Leon." He held out the article for Leon to retrieve.

"I read it during lunch break. Thought you might like it," Leon said without noticing that the Brigade was handing his effort back to him.

"Thoughtful of you, but that's not why you're here."

The Brigade placed the article in his “shred” file. Leon smiled, and then he wrung his hands. He pushed his fingers through his thick hair.

“It’s just that...I...well...that is to say. I’ll just say it. It’s of no real weight, no real weight at all. Yes I’ll just say it...”

“What in god’s name do you want, Leon?”

“I’m concerned. I know you’re my boss, superior in fact, but I consider us friends,...so to speak. Or...not so to speak, real friends...yes. Authentic, one might say. I mean,...I’ve been to your home for dinner and you mine...and I thought that perhaps you might enjoy a little chat.”

Leon stood leaning his torso back and forth slightly, irritating and amusing the Brigade. The two men stared at one another, Leon hoping the moment was ripe for plucking.

“Nothing serious. No, about nothing serious at all. Steroids even. Unless, of course, you wish to make it so.”

Leon paused and gave the Brigade an anxious look. He swayed back and forth again as was his habit. Leon glanced away from their eye contact two or three times, but returned, light in expression, his eyes to the Brigade. The Brigade laughed, since he recognized Leon’s manner now familiar to him for years. This silly man had always made him glad somehow, the mere presence of the tawny lion.

“You want to know what’s bothering me. I know you.”

“If you wish to share something with me, I would be honored indeed, but it is not needful. Feel free to talk as you please...but I am concerned. That’s all. And if you wish that I leave your office, I will do so gladly.”

Leon began to move away, but slowly.

“Sit down.”

“I will leave gladly.” Leon expressed his thought with a question while he motioned towards the door.

“Sit down.”

Leon complied, and he appeared more relaxed than when he entered the office, having sunk into his favorite chatting-chair in the Brigade’s office.

“You remember a conversation we had a while back about changes coming to this branch?”

“I do.”

“Well, I believe they have come...”

“But we met the new ownership. He said no changes. His word, yes he gave his word.”

“I don’t mean him.”

“??”

“We’ve gone public for some reason and that concerns me.”

“But who would want to acquire us? No, no, we have no fear here. Our little family will abide, I assure you.”

“I’ve seen it happen, Leon. The big fishes gobble up all of the little fishes. They grow fat that way. And, I’m tellin’ you, money keeps disappearing,” the Brigade said with a pained tone of voice.

“But we will not let that happen, my friend. If we stay together, if we abide with one another, there is nothing that can keep us apart. I’ll say it and I’ll say it because it is true: we will remain.”

Having leaned over the Brigades’ desk, Leon grabbed the Brigade by the shoulder and shook him once or twice. Though he was not a small man, the

Brigade did not possess the weight needed to keep the gregarious giant at bay and the two men began to laugh at their concerns, but a name kept appearing before the Brigade's mindseye: Dareios Inc.

FURTHERING THE PURSUIT OF CADMIUM ORANGE

Mallory awoke again with a parched mouth. He felt not bad, considering what he had forced himself to imbibe the previous evening. His flame kindled on a divan he perceived to be the most comfortable place he had slept in years. His eyes directed his gaze floor-ward initially, and Mallory perceived the long-haired face of a feline who sat before him, gracefully licking its paw. She was a fit tortoise-shell feline whose eyes beamed bright acumen. Every so often, she abruptly ceased her effort at grooming and her face would peer at Mallory; she would observe him cursorily, and then return to her grooming. Mallory reached his hand out to pet the animal on the head, but Dora immediately recoiled, and then she scurried off, as if a wild boar had threatened her very existence.

“Not the way to gain a cat’s attention.”

Mallory turned his head toward the voice. He noted the large, somewhat familiar frame of the lady with a new body. She was balanced upon a short stool, her long, orange-brown night-shirt draped about her body. Beside her was a tackle-box opened to reveal its three shelves of pencils and ink-pens. A rectangular board, possessing a clip at one end and an oblong hole obviously cut for the presence of four fingers, lay across her thighs. She was busily scratching the surface of a thick piece of paper she had placed on the board. She drank from a cup nearby.

“Don’t move.”

Mallory resisted the urge to defy her immediately. He didn’t take pleasure in her imperative, or her tone of voice, yet he remained still, not moving his head.

“Lay your head down again.”

He complied reluctantly, wondering how he would manifest in her imagination. Brazil scratched a few more times, hurrying to complete the preliminaries. She clutched the drink on the end-table, had another gulp. Mallory wanted to arise, was curious about the penthouse. He observed as much as he was able, looking about the white-carpeted living-room stained by wine the evening previous. All of the pieces of furniture were new, or refinished antiques. A roll-top desk associated with a civil-war rocking-chair nearby him. All the objects in the room were neatly arranged, tightly packed. Mallory noticed a painting, high-set, on the wall opposite him. The shadow of a man, or at least a dark figure whose features were difficult to ascertain, walked through a field of tall grass. The figure appeared to observe Mallory with its sable, deep-probing eyes. Its expression neither permitted humor, nor graced the beautiful field around it with slight mirth. Mallory thought the figure was unnecessarily imposing.

“Alright. You can get up now,” said Brazil.

Mallory waited a moment before he moved; he again didn’t like her tone, didn’t want to obey the woman with a new body.

“Where’s everyone?”

“You’re everyone,” returned Brazil.

Mallory lifted himself up with his elbows, and he took in the Newcomer’s home a bit more. More of the same. Everything was neatly arranged, expensive and tasteful. He watched Brazil gather her pencils and pens in her ample hand, place them in the multi-tiered box. He arose and walked behind Brazil in order to see the drawing that lay on her thighs. It depicted his torso and a close-up of his face, quite well rendered. He leaned forward and observed the sketch, and Brazil leaned away from him, as if proximity to him was threatening, or vexing. He thought well of the representation, except she had made his eyes more sunken than he thought they appeared, which gave his expression a dissipated tone. Mallory noticed what appeared to be the title “**Drunken Opportunist**”, which confused and took him aback for a moment, but he decided to ignore it.

“Where is the bathroom?”

“The restroom is down there.” Brazil pointed down one of the hallways. “To the

right.”

Mallory gave her a dirty look, which she was unable to see. Brazil appeared to be intent upon ignoring him for the most part, besides the attention given him for her drawing.

“Where is the master of the house?” he asked mock serious, just as he considered Brazil.

At first, Brazil didn’t reply. She was upset enough that one of the tavern-lovers had been able to remain as long as he did. Brazil didn’t trust him. She had met many of his kind, and her policy was to give them as little information as possible, to watch them closely. Still, he seemed to be friendly enough.

“He’s out fixing his Lago,” she said, expecting his ignorance.

“He owns a Talbot-Lago?”

“He obsesses over his roadster.”

“He owns a Talbot-Lago roadster?”

“Yes.” Brazil’s tone took on a tone of superiority.

“Those cars are not roadsters, as far as I know.”

“It’s a roadster.”

“How many seats?”

“Two.”

“Hardtop?”

“Yes.”

“That’s a sedan.”

Mallory noted that when Brazil talked, she appeared to possess some of the

defining features of the shadow figure in the painting. She seemed pleasant at times, but she appeared unfeeling as well--as though the facial features of the painting took life in her voice. Still, he guessed that perhaps her tone was not natural to her and these were first impressions that Mallory knew to distrust. He supposed that perhaps she wore a mask placed upon her by some other.

“My father used to work on one of those cars.”

Brazil produced a deep frown, so much that Mallory took note of it. He had grown a bit impatient with her, her seeming covetousness and exclusivity towards their mutual acquaintance.

“I’ll have to talk to him about it. I learned a few things about those cars. I even helped my old man work on that one.”

Again Brazil was annoyed, scowled even. Mallory recognized her vexation.

“Yeah, those things were few and far between.” He continued with some amusement. “They were prototypes, really. They never saw mass production. Hand-made. Jaguars, and other great cars were influenced by that design.”

“You mean the Talbot-Lago design influenced the designers of other cars, right?”

Mallory recognized her intention. He attempted to chat amicably.

“I mean that car is sensual.”

“It is curvy.”

“Hell, that thing is over the top, as they say,” Mallory said as he wandered towards the bathroom.

When he emerged from cleaning his face, and straightening up as much as he was able, he met a silent hallway. He walked back to the couch where he had slept, but there was present no large woman with a new body. Her art supplies

were gone, and Mallory heard not a sound arise from anywhere at hand. He found a note on the couch that read thus: It was a pleasure meeting you. Please see yourself out, and be sure to close the door behind you so that it locks.

The letter was unsigned.

“Hello.”

No answer.

“HELLO!”

No answer returned.

“Hello, fat girl!? Yo! Faaaaat giiiiirrrr!?”

Mallory recognized his solitude. There was not a sound in the penthouse, so he decided he would tour the layout of the living space. He wandered to the stage where he had seen the odd, yet sometimes good, performances the night before. He took twenty minutes to read some of the titles of the obviously well-used library, noting the many interests of the Newcomer. After that, he made his way to the kitchen where he observed food that lay packed inside two large refrigerators. He heated some leftovers, ate them. There were many bottles of wine, some with cork jutting up from within their necks like soldiers awaiting depletion of their substance in the war against sobriety. He grasped one out of the wooden bunk-net that embraced many bottles. He poured himself a glass and drank it hastily. The taste was exquisite, unlike the wine-chime Bacchanalian conglomeration he had been compelled to imbibe the night before. He discovered that he enjoyed red wine, and when he once again felt the slow, easing comfort of alcoholic affect, “That is a French vintage” came from beside him.

Brazil’s comrade stood beside him. Apparently unaffected by his drinking bout, he was fresh and pristine. His chin was clean-shaven and his long hair was tied back tight, but his mane still covered his ears. He stood elevated and fiercely beautiful. There was another peculiar thing about this strange man. Mallory was unable to determine what it was at first, but he realized after a moment that the Newcomer smiled at him, a fleeting but natural grace. The moment appeared peculiar on his face, one of recognition and acknowledgment. The Newcomer

poured himself a glass of wine, sipped.

“Did you enjoy yourself last night?”

Mallory nodded.

“Thanks for the hospitality.”

The Newcomer seemed to laugh quietly to himself. Mallory ignored his grin, though it irked him.

“You are a man of good taste, I’d say.”

Mallory had no idea what was meant, and so the Newcomer, having noticed, pointed to Mallory’s glass.

“Oh, yeah, yeah. You too.”

“Really? What do you mean?”

“I hear that you have an interest in automobiles.”

“Oh, well, yes I have an interest in one automobile...”

“...Talbot-Lago.” Mallory nodded his head as he chatted, as he ate. He drew in a large gulp of wine, which amused the Newcomer.

Mallory then noticed something that he had suspected was impossible. The eyes of the Newcomer changed briefly. A foreign crease and a turning of his expression upward occurred and the order of things seemed to change. His face beamed a bright, balmy day upon the pitch of the poisoned city. A moment of green sprouted organic upon the desolate, melancholy Other. Mallory recognized the moment, and he lit up bright himself.

“Yeah, I’d love to see one again.”

“Again?”

“My father worked for a guy who owned one once a long time ago. Let me poke around with it once or twice.”

“I own one myself. You might enjoy seeing it.”

“I’d like that.”

The two men chatted about the car that interested them. Actually, Mallory knew little about Lagos, but he had learned enough from his father to interest his new friend. The Newcomer showed him a piece of one of the autos that he had purchased recently from a “little creature” in Florida. The Newcomer narrated the story about the excursin, and Mallory genuinely laughed at the correct moments. Their chat made livelier the flash of life upon the stony face of the Newcomer.

“Becchia redesigned an existing model. He made hemi spherical combustion chambers and overhead valves that operate from a single valve that itself operated from a single camshaft with pushrods and rocket arms,” Mallory explained.

“You ought to see the car.”

“Beautiful sedans.”

“It’s a coupe.”

The two men continued their chat about the Talbot-Lago for a long while, the Newcomer showing Mallory photos of his auto and explaining how he intended to restore it. Great attention to detail was in order. The Newcomer wanted only authentic parts and colors. It was to be a complete restoration, and Mallory decided the project would be a union of the two men. At about the time Mallory was to depart, one of the nearby doors to the penthouse hallway opened. Out stepped a large, orange-clad woman whose body was new. She was wide awake, having claimed that she had been sleeping. A bit concerned when he departed, Mallory wondered if she had heard him call out to her. Later the same week on a Thursday afternoon, Mallory received a phone call from the Newcomer. Mallory was at work, busy laboring over a minor project.

“Come visit the Talbot-Lago.”

“Alright. When?”

“Now.”

“I’m at work.”

There was silence on the other end of the phone, and that lack of contact spoke clearly to Mallory.

“Where do we meet?”

“I’ll send someone.”

The Newcomer ended abruptly the conversation there. Mallory phoned his superior, and he told him that he needed to go home because of an emergency.

“My mother’s in the hospital.”

Mallory had never left work before, and so there was no suspicion. Preoccupied with the upcoming excursion, he gathered up his tools, and he did not think about how his new friend was aware of his location until he sat in front of an eyeglass factory outside the building where he was working, waiting for the “Budget Citybus” cab to arrive. A yellow cab arrived, and Mallory was unaware of its destination, but the driver was prepared.

“Don’t worry,” said the balding cabbie. “I do regular for him.”

Mallory sat back and relaxed. He now wondered at how odd it was that his whereabouts were known, and it disturbed him a bit, but he let the concern sink within his mind. The cabbie took him to the downtown Chicago area where there were several buildings specifically built for storage. Mallory walked up a wide cement incline, complete with a loading dock. The building was dusty and Mallory had no idea where he was to go. He waited a moment, and an enormous freight elevator screamed its way down to the first floor where Mallory stood. The Newcomer emerged from the elevator, wearing a black and tan suit. He shook Mallory’s hand, unusual, and the two men chatted while the elevator again

screamed service. They emerged on the third floor.

“I make use of this floor.”

There were tools sufficient for every kind of work on practically any automobile here. The Lago was raised upon a typical platform with two of its wheels positioned flat on the floor, a coupe two-door black in color. Mallory looked over the belly of the auto.

“Not bad shape, considering.”

“I found it in Germany. Its home was a shed, complete with a dog housed in the chassis.”

“You do the work yourself?”

“I watch.”

“Who repairs it?”

“You.”

Mallory was surprised by the implied offer; he was unable to refrain from feeling grateful. He had hoped for something different, but he was able to relieve himself of the tiresome labor that plagued him, and he would be able to talk regularly with the Newcomer, which might lead to other connections or opportunities. His new friend offered to pay him more than what he presently earned, and Mallory would have a budget from which to purchase parts, tools and supplies. Most of the implements he needed were already there. He was out of practice, but Mallory supposed that he would be unsupervised. He began work on the Talbot-Lago immediately, possessing access to computer technology that diagnosed certain problems, but the Talbot-Lago was a vintage car, and it was necessary that Mallory research the automobile. He received instructions from the Newcomer that he ought to complete the mechanical work first, and then he would be informed of the particular interior design and color.

Thus their bond grows, present for neither.

YELLOW JOY TO COME

Amity hurried past her husband, carrying a large, clear bowl filled with cut vegetables. Guests were due to arrive any minute, and Mallory had not brought the Blackmark's liquor he had promised. He had been absent from his ordinary haunt for a lengthy period, and his associates, what might be called friends, were concerned. Amity knew that he was on the hunt for that useless pseudo-aristocrat, but she never believed that he would find him. When Mallory found him, Amity was troubled about what might transpire. She had been a friend of Mallory's since Mallory arrived in the city, seemed a lifetime. Mallory was a decent man who had taken many body-blows in his life, she thought. He deserved to find some happiness, at least to become relatively content for a time, but Amity suspected that such elusive gains may never come to pass for her bar-time associate. Mallory had been a unusual man who managed to charm not only Amity, but her husband Gruntle, which was no mean feat. Perhaps this special ability was his personality, which was similar to Gruntle's. She was happily married, or there were content moments in her marriage while she may have been happier elsewhere, and Mallory had never encroached upon their contentment. He appeared to recognize limits, the limits of their friendship and the limits he was able to set for himself, but now Amity began to concern herself that Mallory may have broken his limitations with another. The Newcomer was an odd but apparently influential man, powerful in many senses. All of these thoughts ran through Amity's mind in a mere moment.

"Where is he anyway?"

The meal was tasty and filling, moreso because of the company. Amity and Gruntle enjoyed the company of their friends, except when Gruntle became irritated. Amity was always annoyed that he had so little tolerance for others.

"Why can't you just relax, and let them be," she thought to herself regularly.

Her guests ate, and Gruntle played his guitar, which annoyed Amity because he

was unable to complete any one song, neither remembering all the words, nor completing the melody. And sometimes he would deliberately cease playing his guitar when a guest remembered the words to the song. She was unable to understand why he did such things, but Mallory would always listen to her rants about her husband, her frustration and anger would settle just enough to calm her once again, and then almost precisely the same cycle repeated itself.

“Where is he?”

Amity’s guests took their fill of feast, and they retired to the back porch of her condominium, which was ample for intimate gatherings. Already the eighth hour of their night had passed, the meal was eaten, and Mallory had not yet arrived. Jay and “Punk-boy” asked for their usual drink, which happened to require scotch.

“You’ll have to settle for beer,” Amity explained.

The guests were upset that the real reason for their presence--at her home and in the world--was not at hand, but Amity made the most of the situation.

“Blame Mallory. He’s supposed to buy the scotch.”

An hour and a bit passed while Amity’s guests grumbled about the possibility of having to run for alcohol, never mind that the expenditure of money and physical movement was negligible; no-one was willing to purchase the alcohol. Just then, a tired, but relaxed, Mallory at length arrived scotch in hand.

“Sorry I’m late,” he explained.

“Where in hell have you been?”

“I was working late.”

“Give me the damn scotch.”

Having snatched the bottle from Mallory’s hand, Amity quickly opened it and poured four drinks in her usual quick manner.

“Working? On what? You don’t work at night.”

“I do now.”

"Yeah?"

“I took a job as a private mechanic.”

“A what?”

“A private mechanic. This guy wants me to restore his Talbot-Lago.”

“Talbot-what?”

“It’s a vintage car that he wants to restore.”

Amity let out a laugh, and then she shook her head.

“You don’t know anything about cars.”

“I worked on cars with my old man.”

“You?” She laughed again.

“You carried wrenches, shined flashlights and held the metal bowl to catch oil. You hated it, you said so yourself.”

“I didn’t hate it.”

Amity ceased fixing the last drink, and stared at him hard.

“Alright, but you don’t know anything about cars,” she said, all the while shaking her head with a smile.

“I do.”

“Gruntle is a mechanic. He knows cars. Hell, I know more about cars than you do.”

Mallory disliked Amity's tone, so he said few words to her for the remainder of the evening. He was unusually uninterested in the conversation taking place that night as well. Though some of his compatriots attempted to bring him into the conversation, he limited his interactions with them. Mallory was not even interested in his favorite drink, or any banter with "Punk-boy" who noticed that Mallory was off-center. Amity thought he appeared to be distant, but since he was relaxed and apparently content, she decided she was happy for him. During the next few months, Mallory associated less and less with his bar-time friends. His new employer, the Newcomer, chatted with him at least twice per week about the progress of the Talbot-Lago. The restoration proceeded slowly, since Mallory was not yet skilled enough to proceed. He consulted the ordinary sources of information about the Talbot-Lago, but he required a basic understanding of its kind of design. Amity's husband Gruntle was of some assistance in the matter, but Mallory limited his questions, having detected in him a bit of resistance to sharing information about the auto, and he wanted to share his association with the Newcomer with as few persons as possible. When the Newcomer visited Mallory at the storage-unit, the two men chatted about a number of topics, growing ever more personal. Mallory had been able to glean some information about the man's life, which appeared to have been chaotic. Mostly, the two men complained about women, or talked about the procurement of a specific part. Mallory noted what he was able about the car, and he shared everything with the Newcomer, qualifying the information.

"That's the reader's digest version."

Mallory was fortunate that he possessed some understanding of the particular engine in this 1938 model. It had been the only authentic information and skill he had appropriated from his association with his father. As the two men became more familiar with one another, Mallory felt the steal of comfort slow upon him yellowmanner with the result that he possessed the confidence to ask more probing questions. As the Newcomer watched him remove a part of the Talbot,

"What do you do for a living?" Mallory asked.

"I am involved in a little of this and a lot of that."

"You don't have to tell me, if you don't want."

“I have no qualms about sharing information, but information about my business interests is sensitive. You might say that they are all-encompassing.”

“So, what? Real estate? Computer technology? Natural resources? Arms dealing?”

The final category Mallory added as a joke.

“Yes.”

Mallory ceased twisting his ratchet, and he came from under the car in order to see the face of the Newcomer who was lifting a glass of Blackmark's own to his mouth, the expression on his face serious.

“I see,” claimed Mallory though he understood not much.

Mallory continued to labor over the removal of a particularly rusted nut, and the conversation continued with the Newcomer asking him about his family, friends, his place of origin. Mallory explained his origins in Pennsylvania and his subsequent relocation to Chicago where his fiancé abandoned him.

“I have been drifting off in a way.”

“You mean you have lost direction?”

“I guess so.”

“Perhaps you are not the person I at first believed you to be.”

“What do you mean?”

Mallory listened from under the auto.

“I have met a peculiar person two times now in my life. He, she...it continues to elude me who or what this person is, where I am able to find them.”

“I don't understand.”

“I understand little myself.”

Mallory thought for a moment, unsure of his next words.

“I don’t understand.”

Mallory did not know what to say at this point, but he did not want to leave the topic where it stood.

“I’ll ask only one more question, then leave you be.”

“Yes?”

“What is the name of your company?”

“Corporation.”

“Corporation then.” Mallory rolled his eyes, annoyed beneath the car where the Newcomer was unable to detect their exasperation.

“The name of my conglomerate is Ousia Inc.”

Thus their bond.

YELLOW JOY AND A WISP OF SPITEFUL VERMILLION

The ballroom was imposing. Illumination stunned perception with vigilant flicker, driving away the livid acquaintance darkness and mating intimacy with her here and there where velvet sight makes pleasant blending. Several thick-stacked wicks drove capillary the oil-rich lamps that adorned the wood-paneled walls around an immense hall. The elegant, redwood tables surrounded a wide *orchestra*. The hall was natural-lit thus, and a massive fan gently melted the heat from the room, at once kissing light the frames of the participants who were well-pleased themselves for attending. The chandeliers that hung low enough to tap slightly the heads of the guests were themselves alight with vigilant confreres and associates. The habitués were smaller in number than the newcomers who appeared out of place. The most important and influential employees of *Ousia* Inc. had been compelled to attend not so much by force as by self-imposed obligation. Attendance was status and *kudos* made manifest for those who recognized the opportunity present. Most were taken aback by the magnitude of the gathering, and the quiet, subdued atmosphere made sight pleasant. Gowned and finely dressed, different kinds of *homotheria* mingled. Brazil perceived the presence of cultural residue.

“More dregs of society,” Brazil scoffed to the Newcomer.

There were, in fact, many classes in representation that night. All had had some contact with the Newcomer, and most suffered discomfort. They were bartenders, computer technicians and mechanics and professional alcoholics mixed with lawyers, local politicians and academics. The larger portion of guests were the poorer class who depended in one way or another upon the movement of material that remained in the hands of the Newcomer who himself hardly directed their economic vigor. A large, tawny-clad Leon Ochrowskovich meandered about the immense room, halting at every table within sight in order to gain access to so many persons. He was

accompanied by his long-time fiancé Katherine and their friends Felina and her husband Caleb, though his intimates remained at the table while Leon wandered. Almost all the employees from Corputech attended the event. The Brigade brought his wife Salma, and Hal Joystick arrived alone, but quickly found himself a seat near Leon around whom all of Corpu-tech gathered. Brazil was seated close to the Newcomer who wandered back and forth, greeting many with a warm-comfort palm in his vise-like grip. A great many of the tavern attendees arrived informally dressed, but the host had been prepared. When a guest arrived without the proper attire, they were asked to change into waiting suits or gowns. Thus, all the guests from every social and economic class were given a similar opportunity to engage one another, be engaged, or at least they were adorned similarly.

“I am proud to be at this splendid event, yes, marvelous I say.” Leon greeted his host.

“Good afternoon, Leon. How are you?”

“I wish to express my greatest thanks, oh sir, the principal thanks to you. I have not been to such an event in my life.” The fulvous mass of tawny gregariousness made graceful his approach.

The Newcomer had wanted the gathering to be formal, and thus he provided dress, but he also offered his guests, whom he would enjoy calling his friends of a kind, a brief lesson in dance: the Mazurka.

“I don’t believe I have had the pleasure of formal introduction.”

Leon bowed slightly before Brazil.

“Brazil.” She extended her mock-giggling hand, which Leon shook.

“I am Leon,” he said to Amity and Gruntle who accompanied Mallory.

“Amity.” Amity smiled more at Leon’s joy-filled appearance than because of his friendliness.

Leon grinned, he swayed back and forth once, and then he darted to another part of the head table. Madly driven sociable, he came to rest near a man of obvious confidence, balding and wellgroomed. His spectacles completed a serious aesthetic.

“Have we been introduced?” Leon asked.

“Ülrich. Ülrich Geldsbaum,” he returned, nodding his head and looking towards other affairs.

The Newcomer was occupied for most of the first hour greeting his guests. He recalled the names of each as they entered, and he gave good temper to them as much as he was able. The guests were seated neither by social rank nor association with the host, but by preference given of chance, a random mixture of present and contingent classes and educations -- individuals who ordinarily would not associate with one another, which perhaps might cause conflict, but the event had been meticulously planned in its randomness. Mallory and Amity sat at the table with the Newcomer and Brazil, the woman with a new body seated beside her caretaker. Brazil was ordinarily disdainful of events such as these; she stood bored. Amity stood beside her, and though the two had little in common, they conversed about things feminine, and began an animated, intimate conversation that no male wanted to hear. Leon continued to glide about in his yellow-bronze gregariousness, sharing his pleasure with each person upon which he came.

“I am happy, glad indeed, to meet you. I am the one named Leon.”

Leon extended his hand and Mallory frowned slightly. He had not been able to talk in depth with the Newcomer since he arrived, and he knew no other guests besides Amity and Gruntle. He was dressed in a suit that while fitting comfortably, gave no comfort to him. Mallory fidgeted with his keys while he drained mint juleps one after another. His tolerance for alcohol had grown lately; still he was as yet unable to equal the intake-level of his new friend. The two had, it seemed to Mallory, become inseparable, which delighted him no end. Leon’s golden dementia stood before Mallory who extended his hand to shake distractedly mechanically, while he gazed at one of the females who graced past.

“A healthy girl, yes? Well, we all want them, don’t we?” Leon noted.

Mallory continued to observe the glorious, elegant female.

“Yes, they are the bane and the balm of our lives, indeed, ...yet more hopefully balm than bane, yes?”

Leon let out a bright-smiling laugh. Mallory watched, again unable to chat with Leon. If he had been honest, he would have been forced to admit that he knew almost nothing about how to comport himself here, and the giant blond jovialist was not making matters better.

“Most of them are a pain in the ass.”

Again, Leon let out a glad-laugh followed by a quick-slap on Mallory’s back. He grinned and one was able to observe in his sentiment a genuine contentment and authentic social joy.

“So true, my friend. So true, but where would we be? Yes, where would we be?” Leon returned.

Mallory was uncertain what precisely Leon meant, but he knew one thing certainly: he was annoyed. He again observed the crowd. He noted the ostensibly wealthy attendees, observing that some of them appeared vexed at others.

“I believe you are a friend of my boss.” Leon interrupted Mallory’s distraction.

“Oh, a, I am a friend of his, yeah. We work on cars together.”

“He has an interest in automobiles, does he? That is a fine thing, a fine thing true,” Leon continued.

Pulling up a chair, Leon sat now next to the uninterested Mallory. He set his orange juice down near Mallory’s plate, and nodded another smile to the nearby Amity and Brazil who were occupied with whispering things.

“What sort of automobiles interest you? I am not so much an enthusiast, but I have great admiration for technology and for talented mechanics. I am a mechanic of sorts myself, I’d like to say.”

The nearby Brazil giggled with Amity. Mallory frowned and again sought out someone in the crowd.

“We work on a Talbot-Lago," he said.

Leon lifted a brow over the word “we.”

“How long have you been laboring on your fine auto? It takes time, it does take time for these things to come out right,...oh how correct that is. I know, my friend. I may not be mechanically inclined like you, but I know these things take time and I can see by your face that you are a man of skill and precision, like I wish to be, though I am a bit of a theoretician, one might say.”

“Oh Mallory isn’t mechanically inclined,” Amity interjected.

Mallory glared at his friend, and Brazil seemed interested at last in Mallory.

“Why sure he is. Can’t you see, it’s on his face. In the eyes. One can see it in the eyes, a specific intensity,” Leon returned, defending his new acquaintance.

Mallory continued his glare at Amity.

“Well, how long have you been laboring over your Talbot?”

Mallory was relieved at Leon’s unexpected support.

“For a few months now. I don’t know. I don’t count the days.”

“How has the work come along?”

“The car ought to be up and running in a few months, I suppose.”

“How marvelous, how absolutely marvelous, my friend. So soon! It is a testament to your skills and your expertise, I know it, I just know it. I assume you have restored it faithfully, yes? I know that enthusiasts take authenticity

seriously, serious authenticity indeed.”

Leon grasped a nearby wine bottle by its neck, certain to take an open bottle. One does not drink un-aired wine, no indeed. He sampled the wine with a sniff and a taste of its blood-red richness.

“Oh my,” he thought as he glanced at the bottle, its brand and year. “Fine drink.”

Again unable to resist the insistent meandering urge, Leon poured a glass for each of the resident guests. He was certain to pour the correct--the moderate and respectable--amount for each, each drinking no more than others, of course, of course. He nodded to every guest as he poured their glass, sometimes motioning--the guest uncomprehending--that they pass an empty one to him. Once all had seen his hand and witnessed his fair-haired joy, Leon stood before the table. All but the Newcomer were in their appointed seats.

“I propose a toast, yes, a toast. To our companion Mallory whose craftsmanship and mechanical skill have brought him to high places. It is not simply anyone who has privilege enough to labor over vintage automobiles and to associate with superb company.”

Mallory said nothing. He deliberately refused to turn his gaze to Amity who was by then snickering. He thought that Leon was a fool who belonged nowhere near anyone who possesses sense. Now he had dragged Mallory into his fatuity, and Mallory perceived no clear exit. Most of the guests lifted glasses, uncomprehending the reason. A few who had not heard Leon hesitated, but picked up glasses after a moment. They waited only for Mallory to follow suit.

“Mallory, come now. Drink with friends. We are, after all, yes all of us are glad to witness success. We enjoy seeing another perform, why, do what it is that he does best.”

“Yes, yes, let us all drink to Mallory’s mechanical skills,”
Amity added with a wry smile.

Mallory turned his eyes towards Amity again, perceiving a grin almost bursting into laughter at him in his predicament. He noticed that Brazil was, alongside Amity, stuffed with amusement. Mallory possessed no words to extract himself from such situations. Incensed, instead of speaking to the crowd, he turned away

from them as they glanced at one another, awaiting his approval.

“Come, my friend. Let’s celebrate you.”

“Yes?” Leon addressed the waiting guests who nodded amused approval.

Mallory grasped his glass, arose and as he turned his gaze to the floor, he raised his glass, and at his cheerlessness all sipped the one tense moment that made merry their acquaintance. Amity and Brazil giggled, while Leon wound his arm round Mallory, chuckling all the while. The tawny gregarious giant shook Mallory with his laugh, and in spite of himself Mallory was unable to suppress a grin at first, then a laugh.

“How stupid,” he thought as he made light.

Though Leon had established contact with much of the present company, he did not pause. He continued to meander about from table to table, while he glad-handed guests, treated them with dignity they thought deserved, and in general praised even the slights and faults of all present. Felina watched in amazement that a man was able to greet and attract so many others who had never before seen or wanted to be near him, an astounding xanthic juggernaut of extroversion. Through the night, he continued to stamp his conviviality unceasingly upon others, and when they rejected him, or more often, when they laughed at his antics, Leon simply endured, as if a pure will possessed him, tawny and everlasting. His continued presence coupled with his laugh, and that appeal arisen from his silly nature, always prevailed. Leon spread a blond and brazening thread back and forth, place woven to place in the immense hall where others gathered in order to please themselves and impress others. Leon, the weaver of fine thread about the dance-floor and tables, tying the groups together without their knowledge or will, made joy manifest joy, and while they chuckled at his nature, they became more social, further welcoming each towards each. Nevertheless, Leon was little content with merely joyful-making the heterogeneous crowd. Having attracted their attention with treats of various kinds and amounts, he patted the xolo-dogs, and stirred tail-wagging pleased-eyes from each with a tap on their sides and a stroke for each rib. In fact, the dogs naturally gravitated towards Leon, and more than twice the Newcomer was compelled to find them who had sought out the xanthin colossus in order to receive more the due kind attention. Yellow completed the moment as well when Leon--still unsatisfied--talked to security guards and servants, bringing guards

food and servers potables that they were not permitted to imbibe.

“A splendid feast you’ve given us, yes, delicious peace of mind.”

He cornered two of the security guards while he related to them an earlier part of his life when he performed the same function.

“I was proud to impose, yes impose I say, the kind of peace of mind and security upon fine persons who possessed interesting lives, more of interest than mine, and they were fond of me to no end, indeed. Indeed.”

Servants and security alike first glanced at one another, then laughed and ultimately spread light stultifyingly, and when the moment arrived that told the Newcomer the dance was come, the tawny joy spread about the hall made gather the guests in pleasant moment. All attempted the dance from obligation, and some grew pleased that they had attended, glad more the ones that had encountered the tawny giant. During the time of the Mazurka, if only once during that night, the crowd brought a gathering, present to itself. The guests had learned their steps proper, but what made light and gratifying the step was the elegant lift and simple, light down of the music. Rapid now, and slow then, what middle become the quick present and the impending notes pulled forward the legs and the hands whose arms moved slight back and around the *orchestra*. At once heavy and imposing dread, Chopin--sad then mirthful--moved present bodies. The black and white of the attire and the elegant sequins moved through the tawny weave of pleasant camaraderie made possible by the brazen giant, and Leon was unable to resist the urge to visit the Newcomer’s table repeatedly. He needed no excuse to do so, not the love-present giant. Greater gregariousness requires no excuse for spreading its joy, and Leon simply invited himself, sat beside his new companion Mallory.

“Greetings. May I sit? I realize that I am a bit out of place, yes, simply a bit, but I must say, and I’ll be honest with you here, completely honest. I am unable to resist the friendly charm, and sociability of the head table. I feel an authenticity that, pardon my saying, is lacking elsewhere.”

Mallory waited for a reaction, hoping that others, just as Mallory himself, would refuse to move their chairs. Let him go off somewhere else.

“By all means, join us,” responded Brazil and Amity smiled as she winked at

Mallory. The Newcomer appeared confused as Brazil invited Leon.

“There is a seat beside Mallory. Pull up, yes, pull up, a seat. Mallory will fill your glass. After all, we’re all friends here, yes friends,” she continued.

Mallory arose in ire, but he was unable to muster the will needed to refuse. He recognized his vulnerability, and his was less than yellow joy at the moment. He moved his chair slightly to his left, assisted Leon drawing his to the table. He smiled strained pretense as Leon sat down with a broad grin on his over-joyous face. He straightened his black jacket atop his bronze shirt and rust-colored pants, not believing that anyone noticed his refusal to wear the common attire.

“Miss Brazil,” Leon began.

“Yes, mister Leon,” Brazil returned.

“Am I to understand that you are an artist?”

“I am indeed, dear sir.”

“May I enquire what kind of art you create?”

Brazil was about to answer...

“A fine thing to be an artist.” Leon met the eyes of all who would return the sentiment. “I have a cousin whose ability to draw human figures is so well developed that the images appear lifelike, yes, as if they would jump out at you!”

Leon moved his hands forward as if to simulate a figure jumping out of a sketch. All those listening laughed.

.

“He spends all of this time with pens and pencils, ink-pens and markers. Colored markers even.”

Leon ceased speaking for a moment. He glanced at Brazil, as if expecting her to continue where she left off. The Newcomer playfully nudged an annoyed Brazil who glared at him.

“Brazil, please tell everyone a bit about your sculptures,” insisted the Newcomer. Brazil opened her mouth to speak.

“Yes, I am so curious about artists, how they survive and all. It was, at one time, that artists needed patrons. Few were able to survive without the financial support of the upper classes. Now it is quite different, I believe, and constantly changing. But, Brazil, who has the mien of a genuine creator, might tell us. I would be honored to learn from one so obviously, so profoundly I might say, an artist,” Leon added.

Again Brazil intended to speak.

“Because you do impress me as someone with a deep aesthetic sense.”

Leon used his two fingers to point towards his eyes as he turned them towards each guest.

“I'm curious myself,” interjected Mallory. “You seem to be busy most of the time, but I've never seen anything you've done.”

“You would see some of my work if you attended one of my shows. My work is sculpture, which captures a piece of motion. The characters are archetypal.”

“You mean, of course, that they are representations of universal values.”

“I do mean that, Leon, but the medium is bronze, which I fashion roughly, so that the texture of the work takes on a wild appearance and an artist is never able to capture all of a universal.”

“It is the feral tone of her work that marks it out.” The Newcomer nodded to Brazil a confirmation for which she was regularly desperate. Brazil nodded, sipped her wine.

“So, the idea behind the rough fashioning?”

“Outlines of cultured beasts.”

And her Newcomer grinned.

“Like characters in literature,” she added.

“I propose another toast to Brazil and her work. It shall be a joy to witness, when I am able. Such things, cultured things, interest me greatly. They bring out the best in us.”

“They do indeed,” returned the Newcomer.

Mallory managed to force an unnatural smile upon his face, and everyone drank once again to another, at Leon’s behest. And again, though they thought the matter fatuous, they laughed more at Leon than because of his friendliness, but that mattered little, since they were there together joy for them. When all had drank, there imposed upon them a silence that Leon was unable to endure. Again, he intended to speak to his captive audience, but the Newcomer spoke first.

“A few of you may be interested in a fact that I heard not long ago,” he said. “You recall the Dead-sea scripts?”

Most at the table knew.

“Well, there was a boy who, while playing in around the same area, found more writings.”

This topic peaked the interest of Leon; Brazil smiled.

“Yes, they found what appears to be a lost gospel.”

“Really?” Leon trembled with interest.

“Scholars have only begun to analyze it, but it seems to have in it an eyewitness, or the orally transmitted eyewitness account of Christ’s crucifixion.”

“Oh my!” Leon moved his ample frame back and forth, adjusting his jacket and flattening his palms on the table before him. He turned to the guest on his

left and then the guest on his right, his eyes wide.

“Yes, apparently it claims that Christ did not perish on the cross, that the Romans left him for dead on the ground around the execution site as was the custom, and he was carried away by terrified women.”

“This is enormous! What will it mean for Christendom
I am unable to imagine.”

Leon took his head in his hands, and he glanced around the table from guest to guest once more. “You know this means our world will change. Nothing will be the same. What more does it say? Who is the author?”, he asked.

“I know no more about the content, but I do know the name of the author of this good news.”

“Yes, yes. Don’t leave us in suspense,” Leon interjected,
relieving the Newcomer of the opportunity to release
them.

The Newcomer turned to Brazil who herself turned her face away from him.
And, in a calm and quite serious manner...

“It is the Gospel of Freddie, or, rather, the gospel according to Freddie,” said the Newcomer.

The group at first reacted little to the Newcomer’s remark, and Amity and her husband exchanged perplexed glances. Leon paused, amazingly ceased speaking for the moment, and Brazil first observed the blank expression on Amity’s face, then burst out laughing uncontrollably. Her Newcomer was unable to suppress a grin, and then cackle once or twice. Leon did not remain silent...

“Oh, yes, humor is refreshing for the soul, my friend.”

He let out a hearty, but forced, chuckle.

“Everyone enjoys some ribbing now and then, and if we
are unable to make light of serious matters, then what
do we have?”

No-one said a word.

“Yes, what do we have if we take it all so seriously? I’ll tell you, I’ll tell you true. We have nothing and we might all go ‘round with grimaces and scowls in our minds. Yes, humor is the handmaid of maturity.”

Leon grinned and again demonstrated his ability to force a believable laugh. It was the only moment at that moment that he was unable to entertain the entire company. Amity and her husband exhibited a frigid silence set upon stoic faces. Mallory noticed the humor on the features of his friend, and so he chuckled, without a second thought. Again Leon was unable to maintain silence, though he found the subject-matter distressing, distressing indeed. He cleared his throat audibly.

“Well...so...I understand that you have an interest in Talbots.” Leon addressed the Newcomer.

“Talbot-Lago,” the Newcomer corrected still smiling.

“But we call it the ‘Lago,’” said Mallory, asserting his possession.

“Let me interrupt, Leon, for just one moment. I would like to propose a toast myself,” said the Newcomer.

“By all means.”

All at the table raised glasses, though this time warily. The Newcomer stood, and with a glass raised high, and a serious mien...

“Let’s toast the death of our mortal enemies whosoever they might be for each of us. Let’s call upon what god or gods we are able to strike down our foes, to lay low our adversaries and bring high our friends.”

Again, no-one reacted. Amity’s husband Gruntle almost excused himself; Mallory was confused, but the Newcomer and Brazil both burst to laughter. Mallory smiled and then joined them laughing.

“A little joke, a little joke, my friends. A Homeric joke, yes?”

Leon was visibly disdained but...

“Well, yes, the Lago is a fine automobile from what I hear, though I am no auto enthusiast. Still, I hear these good things from our mechanical expert, Mallory here. I sense he does fine work, our Mallory.”

Mallory nodded slightly, yet he was careful to avoid the eyes of Amity who had sat silently observing. Careful yet uncertain, he thought he was able to trust his comrade enough that she would not again spoil the opportunity for him. And, as he waited for a response from Amity...

“Oh he knows nothing about mechanics,” Brazil felt compelled to insert.

She turned to Amity, having pressed out half a vermillion giggle. Amity sat pungent silent, inexpressive.

“Oh yes, he does indeed. See now, he proved it, and I witnessed his expertise myself.”

“You did?”

Leon’s eyes sought assistance from Mallory; none arrived.

“He’s a paid private mechanic, and well for it I say.”

“Oh he’s paid, but he knows nothing about mechanics, or cars. He reads what little he can on the internet, and his father worked on Talbot-Lagos, but he’s no expert.”

Brazil glanced at Amity who refused to return her eyes, recognizing the hostile eyes of Mallory upon her. Instead, she leaned toward Gruntle, whispered something into him, and the pair arose; off they went. Brazil smiled malicious at the Newcomer who simply observed the intended chaos. At Brazil’s revelation, the table sat once again silent. Leon recognized in the Newcomer a bit of kindred spirit, since he had gathered together such a disparate group of human creatures,

but he acknowledged also something else in the Newcomer. Still, Leon thought well of him; he was talented obviously. The ravenhaired youth appeared to know how to use his wealth to the greatest advantage, yet not taking seriously, or too seriously, what he ought not. The silence loomed over them, until

“It seems that the final Mazurka is about to begin. I propose that those who enjoy the dance, and the agreeable company, benefit from the music while it lasts and accept the humor,” the Newcomer suggested.

Having adjourned to the *orchestra*, the Newcomer with a young auburn-haired beauty and perhaps one-hundred guests, stepped through the woven yellow strands that remained of a joy-filled occasion. The Newcomer brought out his canines and at the right moment, he retrieved a whistle from his pocket and with treat in hand compelled the two jade-collared Xolos to stand, hind-legged, and swirl about with front legs extended, as if to dance with the others. Though they neither recognized nor acknowledged it, they and their companions rested a cool evening grace because a giant had woven for them soft ochre comfort, made present companionship possible. The few vermillion barbs that arose and some nihilistic humor were unable to tear, or rend, their bliss, and as nearly all the guests made last the dance that occupied them, the tawny giant seduced his remaining acquaintances, the jade-collared dogs-joyful-calm who loved best their master, the Other by a turn with each of them. And the crowd made pleasant their amity, suddenly and temporarily with no thought of annoyance or aggravation for anyone. Still, more was to come, but for now, thus their bond.

CATHARSIS FOR THE OTHER

“She’s an amazing bitch, isn’t she?” the Newcomer said.

The two had been working for most of a Tuesday evening on the Lago. The Newcomer found an original engine in Germany, and he paid for its shipment to his storage-building where Mallory feverishly scrambled to fill in the *lacunas* of his understanding about the motor. Mainly, the block was in good repair, but Mallory was forced to make use of parts from one engine in order to fasten the other onto the carframe. The current motor ran properly, well even, but the Newcomer insisted that his recent purchase, strange that it was the same type of motor, be a part of the Lago’s restoration. The two men, or more precisely Mallory alone with the Newcomer watching, had been laboring over the automobile for five months, searching here and there while researching the vehicle’s history. Companions in the search for authenticity, they had taken more than a few flights to various parts of the United States, and especially to Germany, in order to appropriate suitable parts for an acceptable restoration. Usually disinterested, Brazil attended one of their automotive excursions, but Mallory suggested that she pursue her artistic interests. The Newcomer, Mallory had correctly observed, had a habit of suggesting emphatically and no-one wanted to object to his demands, especially when he was so generous. Brazil gave no objection to remaining behind, relieved even.

Attuned now to these relationships, Mallory had discovered his new friend was difficult to endure on a personal level, yet socially capable. In fact, the Newcomer was quite capable at almost everything and Mallory noted that the things the Newcomer knew only modestly were things that interested him little. The Newcomer was an erudite fellow, with an element of hauteur, yet he was possessed of an inexpressible, enduringly engaging character. Mallory pondered that perhaps the risk of association with the Newcomer was itself the embrace the Other continued on others, Brazil in particular. Yet, he did not have the words to express these thoughts in his head, only become them. The Newcomer was openhanded in a manner of speaking, and yet he expected enormous returns

for his favor, as though he were investing in an inanimate, or merely conceptual, object. Mallory guessed initially that his friend had always been entrepreneurial until he realized that the Newcomer disliked business affairs. In fact, to say that the Newcomer disliked business matters was a mild assertion. He had an interest in almost everything else, possessed a great deal of knowledge about history, and currently studied logic--though Mallory thought that his new friend went through stages where he pursued this and then now that. The Newcomer was fond of genuine inquiry. Thus, just alongside his decadence existed the Newcomer's element of charm and amiability. One had to become accustomed to his manner.

"I'm not sure what you mean," replied Mallory.

"Brazil. She's an amazing bitch."

Mallory was careful here.

"I suppose. I really don't pay attention to her."

"Oh, come one. She's a corpulent witch. She tried to humiliate you at least once, I recall."

Smoking a cigarette, the Newcomer was sitting in an office-chair that had long outlived its business service. The fumes annoyed Mallory. The Newcomer dragged and then sipped scotch, dragged and sipped, sipped and dragged. He was dressed well this afternoon, and his person bore none of the stains of physical labor.

"I don't remember anything like that," Mallory returned.

Mallory recalled precisely the moment when Brazil tried to make fool of him.

"She wanted to embarrass you in front of my guests. She's treacherous in that way."

"Well, yeah, I guess."

"She almost succeeded as well." The Newcomer leaned back his chair.

Mallory concentrated on his present mechanical difficulty, a rustfrozen nut.

“What do you mean?”

“I thought about firing you.”

Mallory paused, and continued prying at the nut.

“But I recognized early that you had little formal training, only marginal acquaintance with this car.”

Mallory turned to him and this once he thought quick.

“Why employ me then?”

“We had already made acquaintance. You learn quickly enough. You have average mechanical aptitude.”

The Newcomer arose from his chair while he examined the underbelly of the automobile, which had been raised by a mechanical lift.

“I was a bit lazy as well. I didn’t want to search again.”

Mallory disliked the frank manner with which his friend addressed him, but his anxiety drove away the words needed to resist the Newcomer manner.

“So, you’re satisfied with the work?”

“It’s adequate.”

“Glad to hear it.”

Mallory hoped that his sarcastic tone would produce some reaction, but, as usual, his efforts failed.

“I wanted to ask you a question.”

“Yes.”

“What compelled you to purchase orange monkey-suits?”

“You don’t like the color of your uniform?”

“No, its not that, but they’re very, very ugly.”

A moment passed.

“You got them on the cheap,” Mallory said, interrupting before any response emerged.

“No, I spent a fair amount of money. I had them made specifically.”

“So…”

Mallory was apprehensive of the answer.

“I think the color matches you. You seem to me to be rather orange.”

Mallory had no idea what this statement meant.

“You are orange-anguish, a bit impoverished, certainly an unhappy fellow.”

The Newcomer put his hand on Mallory’s shoulder, let out a counterfeit laugh, as if he were a mock-Leon.

“Some woman abandoned you, yes? And, you have been meandering about a desolate part of the Chicago landscape ever since. Or maybe you dropped out of school and didn’t want to leave Chicago. Maybe you wanted to reacquaint with a former love.”

Mallory was perceptibly bewildered.

“All of that seems to be ‘orange’ to me.”

At last Mallory freed the rust-frozen metal. Glad at it, he carefully removed the offender, remaining angry at the nut.

“And, of course, it matches your hair color.”

The Newcomer chuckled at his own statement, and Mallory wondered angrily whether he ought to make-like a laugh as well, but he decided he would laugh when he thought something humorous, and not otherwise. He was inept at pretense, he concluded. He did despise the orange jump-suits, and he was especially irritated that the Newcomer, with his raven good-looks, pointed out the similarity of color between Mallory’s almost non-existent hair and these ugly carnival costumes.

“How do you cope with balding?” the Newcomer asked playfully.

Mallory refused to answer the question, but rather he busied himself with the new engine-block, it having dangled on an engine hoist until now. The Newcomer, amused at the words given to Mallory, wanted to examine the interior of the Lago. He recognized that Mallory refused to respond, so, careful to refrain from scuffing his immaculate clothing, he busied himself kicking tools and pieces of car-frame and cardboard out from under the car. The Newcomer then pressed the button that lowered the Lago to the floor. After a jerk, the auto gracefully descended, the restoration coming along nicely, the Newcomer inspected the chassis. As he examined the auto, he discontinued its descent twice in order to observe the car from different angles. The lift on which the Lago stood jerked at each pause in descent, and as it did on this occasion, the rear fender grazed the engine that hovered beside Mallory who was inspecting it. The engine hoist gave way for some reason and the heavy lump of metal fell whole-bound to the floor, demanding some Mallory-flesh for its fall. The Newcomer felt at last the affect of his drink, and, un-realizing...

“Gospel of Freddie!” he joked, thinking that Mallory had not been hurt badly.

Mallory did not respond, and when the Newcomer heard the silence, he dashed toward the unfortunate.

“Mallory?”

“Mallory?”

“Oh, for Fuck’s sake!”

The Newcomer had always been uncomfortable in hospitals. He was bored in the first place and the televisions and reading material there only made him more uncomfortable, while trying to pacify him. He was unable to concentrate enough to think about serious issues because of the weight of the matter before him. He meandered about the place, amazed that anyone might stay very long, eating highpriced and tasteless food offered. He wanted badly to leave and he wished to get back to work on the Lago immediately; the power of the scotch was wearing off and he required another drink as well, but he thought it better not to leave the emergency room. He sat near one of the televisions that blared at him and his thoughts began to wander randomly, or so he thought. He recalled his roommate from college and how he had been so ill at ease visiting Kasper there years ago after he had been beaten. He recalled Kasper’s annoying antics, how he had mugged delivery-boys and how Kasper had been an inconsiderate slob, how he had done almost nothing but irritate the Newcomer, and, surprisingly, he felt a bit of nostalgia for the dead fool.

“Stocky, thick intellect,” he thought. “Or was it thick, stocky intellect?”

Remembering, he laughed, and unexpectedly he felt a pang of sadness drop itself lead-like behind his eyes and around his head. He attempted to read the “Persons” magazine near his seat, but none of the entities there interested him. He watched a moment or two of television, a vacuous man and woman babbling to a vacuous audience. He was unable to keep Kasper from his mind, though he beat the image to its outer limits. He remembered another as well, but the very moment that he recalled the name he brought himself back from his reverie sharply in order to tend to the present matters. Mallory had been pinned beneath the pitilessly oppressive weight of the engine, had lost consciousness a bit too quickly for comfort. The Newcomer arrived at Ravencrest Median hospital promptly, but he received little more information than that Mallory was alive. The Newcomer sat attempting to read in the emergency wait-room once more, but he remained unable to concentrate. He arose and paced the length of the wait-room until some tender-souled fellow-pacer asked him if he needed anything.

“No, no. Nothing at all. It’s nothing.”

He was unable to shake his dread mood. The Newcomer did not feel as if he were on exceedingly familiar terms with Mallory, but then Mallory had accompanied him on several excursions. The Newcomer trusted few others whom he had met, and when he had at least made some bond with another, he was gratified, though impenetrable. A continued image of Kasper, his former roommate, plagued the Newcomer as he wandered about the wait-room, and when he recognized his peculiarity, he meandered about the hospital. Not recognizing where he was going, the only time he came back to himself was when he was on the verge of entering a restricted area of the hospital.

“Sir, pardon me sir. Sir! Who are you visiting?” they asked before they directed him back where he came.

He meandered about in such a state for an unknown time until his cell-phone beeped.

“Are you contact for Mallory Harper?”

The haste that possessed him pressed him unrecognized, and the Newcomer hurried back to the wait-room. When he returned, another wait awaited him, this time not so lengthy. A balding man in a white coat with a satisfied, but serious, expression greeted him.

“Mallory is stable. We examined him, but the results are not all back yet. We are concerned that some organs might have been crushed, and we don’t know the extent of the internal damage. From what we can tell, he will recover. When we find anything, we will contact you. Are you family?”

“I am.”

“Alright then...”

The man reached out his hand, which the Other shook.

“...he’s asleep right now, but you can see him if you like.”

The Newcomer opted to visit his friend, though consciousness would return to

the unfortunate on the following day. Mallory appeared the same as ever, his head tilted to his right and his mouth open. He was expressionless, and the IV in his arm pumped painkiller into his system. Mallory sound-asleep.

“Mallory?”

Mallory’s only response was a calm, light snore. The Newcomer observed the recumbent form. Not knowing what to do, he sat beside his associate and waited. The room smelled of rubbing alcohol and another unidentifiable scent, not overly pleasant, and his inability to smoke grated at him. The small window looked out onto a park where a racetrack permitted dogs to exercise. Waiting for more time to wait, the Newcomer became especially bored. The only abiding entertainment was television, which was intolerable. He preferred to be engaged, if only to tease a companion or a rival, to observe the city’s frivolities. Time spent with an enemy was preferable to lifeless entertainment. The Newcomer hoped that Mallory had been able to understand his humor and his manner, that Mallory recognized him, but then again he did not want to be understood or recognized. He recalled again his childhood when he had befriended Clara, a being closer to him than any other. On this occasion, he was able to think her name without immediately suppressing it. When she died, he had felt almost nothing, and now at the risk of losing Mallory who meant far less....

The Newcomer looked at Mallory asleep and safely unresponsive, stared away at the open hospital door and the empty bed beside him, an intimate picture. The countenance of the Other darkened. Again, he made certain Mallory was asleep.

“Have you heard the story of the man who confessed to his wife?”

Silence.

“I see you have not. A man once called his wife, his daughter and his granddaughter to him. He there and then confessed his incest with the daughter, admitted his offense, and expressed a desire to rectify what he had done. He explained to his wife that he loved her and that he was unable to control himself. He was ashamed before them. His daughter and granddaughter wept and embraced him, angrily began to

forgive him, and his wife said that she forgave him, that she was proud of him, and proceeded to punish him with abuse and deprive him of all possible joy for the remainder of his days.”

The Newcomer observed the large bandage that hugged the side of Mallory’s body.

“At his deathbed, his wife explained to him that she did forgive him the incest, felt little anger for him now, was proud of him for his confession and for his efforts to heal his daughter and for his ability to refrain from an ugly desire, which he had done successfully. He asked her why she punished and tortured him so, if she forgave the offense and if all of what she said was fact. His wife remained silent about his question for some time. After moments that seemed like hours to the deservedly-punished man, she let out a sigh, and she explained that she punished him for revealing the truth.”

Snoring lightly, the bruised man gave no response.

“I don’t suppose that is a great revelation to you, Mallory.”

Again, the Newcomer was plagued by a craving for nicotine. He considered lighting up in the hospital room, but the thought that Mallory’s doctor would not permit him to return prevented it. He massaged his mouth with his hand nervously, while he reminisced again about Kasper and Clara, smiled without realizing he did so. He had not possessed many authentic friends in his life and he had been taken to and removed from place to place by distant authority figures, his grandmother being the most powerful and the least present. He had no awareness of his father or his mother besides what few anecdotes he had heard from his grandmother during the few times he saw her. It was true, he had read some news articles about Bella’s, his father, and his mother’s disappearance, but that was the only contact he possessed, forlorn. He possessed social skills adequate enough to abide the wave of well-wishers and grasping desperates who regularly assaulted him, but he sought genuine friendship, or at least some satisfying bond. These seemingly ordinary bonds were surprisingly

difficult to create or to discover. He found that they were much more difficult to maintain as well. He had searched for one acquaintance again and again, hadn't seen them in years now. He had met this person twice now, and under circumstances that were peculiar. He had been curious about these encounters.

"I had been looking for him, or her, or whatever, when I met Mallory," he thought.

Mallory was not the person, or entity, he was seeking, or so the Newcomer thought. He recalled again his life at *Lumen Novum* where he and Clara had been close. He remembered play-acting, acting-out mythological characters, all for the pleasure, and at the behest of, Clara who alone was able to command him. He felt a discomfort about him welling up in his viscera, an unaccustomed sensation. The thought of Clara, and of *Lumen Novum*, brought with them other, distasteful memories, ones that had not visited him in some time. These memories no friends to him, he was unable to recall some of them clearly, as if they were buried deep and only the sensation, the feeling, associated with them abided upon his conscious mind. His present musings nauseated him.

"I've had other friends, you know," he said defensively to the soporetic man.

The Newcomer abruptly fell silent. His young, vigorous life drove him severe and he remained an unresponsive being. Now, another objectionable memory seemed suddenly to edge viselike upon him. He recalled how, when he was a mere boy, he had been beaten by a group of preppy thugs. At the time, they had faulted him for ugly circumstances that plagued *Lumen Novum*. They savaged him until he felt no longer, and since he no longer had the support of his friend Clara, he decided upon a course of action. He had determined who was the leader of the group: a young man. One fine, beautiful spring morning before mass he had exacted his own revenge upon the boy. Most of the children of *Lumen Novum* suspected correctly who had left Robert with a concussion, taken some of his teeth, but none were willing to say; all appeared to be afraid of that same severity present even in the child. Still, the Newcomer thought, as he sat beside Mallory, that Kessler was not his concern now. Some indistinct sensation accompanied him, something besides the memory was present. He did not know it. It was then that he heard a groan. The cry came from another room. The Newcomer walked out to the hallway, looked about, but while there were others' noises, and indeed cries, that arose from other patients, from visitors, he heard

nothing the likes of which he had heard inside Mallory's room. Curious, and more than slightly concerned, he quick-walked back to Mallory's bed. He observed his employee who returned only a mild snore as always, head tilted to one side--mouth open still. The Newcomer sat down once more, and his thoughts of *Lumen Novum* visited him, malicious fairies clad in barbed wire. He returned to his first encounter with Paulina, his now long-gone lover. She played soccer with her friends and teased him. He returned to Edmund, his rival for Paulina's attention. Interrupted again by the groan, he was startled, but on this occasion a lament accosted him. He felt as if he were about to weep. Angered, he again looked outside Mallory's bedroom, but there was no-one making that particular sound, as a beast might make, lamenting the death of prey. Now, the Newcomer believed that there was something amiss.

"Excuse me," he addressed a nurse. "I heard several cries from an animal."

The nurse, eye-cocked, looked back at him perplexed. She observed his face for a moment.

"No animals here," she returned.

She stared at the Newcomer.

"Are you alright, sir?" she asked.

"Yes."

The Newcomer returned again to Mallory's bedside, and there he remained for two more hours. The sound of the creature did not come.

"It could have been many things," he thought.

It was later, during early evening, that the sound returned, this time more appallingly severe than it had been, somehow unmistakably more intimate. It manifested a distinct and familiar voice, not yet full-formed and distant, but distinctly *homotherion*. The Newcomer was unable to discern precisely what it said, the words emerging from apparent sobs. He recognized, he did not realize how, that the voice emerging lamented an act long accomplished. Feeling peculiar, the Newcomer thought he appeared not himself, and he wondered at his

unusual sensation. He examined Mallory; observed nothing had changed. He listened intently as the voice grew louder, and stronger. He was able to determine that the voice addressed him directly, or perhaps it was simply familiar. Mallory made not one sound, and the Newcomer was disturbed at his lack of reaction. Surely Mallory heard it now, the words almost clear.

“Ahhehaahe Uhuurrruuut iiiiHHHmm,” he heard.

At once Kasper, his roommate from his undergraduate days leapt to mind, but the Newcomer was unable to comprehend, as yet, why Kasper was there with him at that moment.

“Kasper was a fool.”

Kasper was a mugger, and a clown. The Newcomer had been compelled to tolerate his muggery of delivery-boys and his drinkingbouts, idiocy. He was a lazy, moronic slob who lacked the maturity to communicate, especially with women. Kasper was contemptible to the Newcomer since he learned nothing from his mistakes, recognized the boundaries of no-one, except his own. Again, the Newcomer heard the sound, like the voice of a howling widow.

“Ahhehaahe Uhuurrruuut iiiiHHHmm” he heard coming to him.

Kasper was crass and his very name was foolishness. The Newcomer paced the hospital room, careful not to awaken Mallory.

“Ahhehaahe Uhuurrruuut iiiiHHHmm” he heard louder.

The Newcomer sat, twisted in his seat. That little boy Kasper grasped nothing of his own idiocy.

“Ahhehaahe Uhuurrruuut iiiiHHHmm” he heard once again.

The Newcomer was delighted at Kasper’s departure, the fool died a fool’s death...

“Ahhehaahe Uhuurrruuut iiiiHHHmm” he heard repeated.

And the amiable moron was better dead than alive. The Newcomer massaged his

head with his hands. He needed a cigarette.

“Ahhehaahe Uhuurrruuut iiiiHHHmm” he heard louder-coming to him.

The Newcomer again twisted in his seat. He arose and paced the hospital room and reassured himself that the door was closed. His head hurt him and he wanted to sleep for some reason. Again, he twisted down into his seat, holding his head in his hands. He repeated this scene four or five more times and in mid-pace about the room he stopped. Abruptly, his mind was clearer than it had been. He felt the weight of himself drop down onto him, and the world around him became more real, as if it had been illusory prior to the present moment. He felt alive and in pain, a kind of exquisitely invigorating suffering without which he did not wish to live again. And then the Newcomer was able to hear the voice that had eluded him.

“I am he, Mallory,” he claimed. “I hurt him and I harmed others. He was a fool, but not a bad person and...how is it I was capable? My friend Kasper,” the Newcomer asked the soporetic man.

The Newcomer spent more hours beside his wounded employee. He wept, repressed his weeping, and he acknowledged while he wondered, and his rage emerged and after some short sleep on the fold-out couch made bed, he emerged with his ordinary calm and his assured demeanor.

“Mallory? Mallory?”

The silence returned gave our Newcomer craved comfort.

Thus their bond.

WILINESS CLAD IN GOLDEN HABIT

Leon Ochrowskovich was able to find a proper tailor. He had searched for some time, what seemed like an inordinate time indeed, for a fitting fitter, but now his shirts and his jackets not only matched, no sir. Now they were cut to the perfect proportion, an outer layer that moved with his massive frame in precisely the same way that Leon did. The white clips of his shirt remained outside of his jacket when he reached his hand out to hail a taxi, and they remained visible when he seated himself in its backseat, replete with an alarming scent. His aesthetic was just right.

“I must carry a portable seat cover from now on,” thought Leon.

Leon commanded the driver to take him to work. He had been somewhat lazy recently, having developed the expensive habit of taxi-taking to which Leon felt entitled. He was important, after all. And Leon knew it, but he was crafty enough to recognize that he ought not flaunt his worth.

“Surely, a friendly and amicable office-mate is better loved, more well-needed, than an arrogant one,” he thought.

What was not immediately apparent about Leon was his particular brilliance. He was perceived as a bit of an oaf, it is true, but as a computer programmer, Leon was unparalleled. He and the Brigade had been working on a project for a long while now, one that had potential, and Leon knew it. He had followed the development of software programming since its infancy, and Leon knew when the time had come for more radical changes. Using an enhanced version of zip-filing, now vastly improved computer storage and memory capability, he had developed the beginnings of an operating system that was perpetually regenerative. On each occasion that a computer started up, and Leon calculated that he would be able to install this system on any computer properly

manufactured, the operating system would scan itself and it would be able to detect minor changes. If any alterations to the start-up were detected, the operating system had the ability and discretion to reinstall all or any part of the operating system in order to delete effectively a given virus planted therein. Such an operating system would inoculate virtually all computers, eliminating many of the computer maladies that plague the virtual age, or so he believed. Leon had kept the idea to himself at first, since he knew Corpu-tech would claim possession of it once the business knew of its existence, but Leon had run into some difficulties when he experimented. He needed equipment to which he had access only at Corpu-tech. He thought he was not devious in temperament, so Leon somewhat reluctantly informed the Brigade of his project and the two of them had labored over it for two years or so now. The two trusted one another and the Brigade had found ways to mask Leon's project along with its progress. Now the Brigade and Leon had encountered another difficulty altogether. Once they had completed work on the project, it needed testing and testing demanded the manufacture of an entirely new kind of computer hardware, the materials and labor of which were difficult to obtain quickly, unless they found outside assistance. Leon ruminated over these issues as he sat in his taxi, awaiting another wait at another light. He was scheduled to chat with the Brigade today, but Leon greeted everyone as he usually did.

“Felina the Great.”

And his longtime colleague smiled her return to him.

“Hal the Joystick.”

Hal was little amused.

The morning moved quickly for Leon, as usual. And when the number two arrived, Leon promptly carried his enormous form to the Brigade's office, knocked his ordinary rap.

“Leon...,” Charles whispered.

Cradling his office phone between his chin and shoulder, the Brigade motioned to Leon to come in to the office.

“Yes...yes...of course...alright then. Alright, I will talk with you in two weeks,”

with a jovial voice.

The Brigade hung up his phone and his eyes wandered over the door. He was certain that it was closed, but he ensured that the latch had fixed, then locked the door. Leon sat nourishing a serious expression on his face, one that rarely found itself planted there. The Brigade sat down again.

“So, where are we?”

Leon squirmed a bit.

“It's almost finished, but I need that equipment.”

“I’ve been thinking about that,” said the Brigade.

“Yes?”

“Do you know of Adder Dareios?”

“I do.”

“I contacted him about a month ago.”

“You what?”

“I contacted him.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Now, wait, Leon. Don’t get worried.”

“Don’t get worried?”

The Brigade paused a moment.

“I didn’t give him any details. I merely told him that we have a project that might interest him.”

“Why not go to the new owner?”

“That guy? With the dogs and the artists and the weirdoes that follow him? Him I don’t trust.”

“So, you trust Adder Dareios?”

The Brigade here paused.

“No, not really, but I trust the new guy less, and where else do we have to go?”

“I don’t know, Charles.”

Leon himself paused, and he adorned himself in the most serious of looks. He stood up, and then he looked out of the Brigade’s office window.

“I do know that we need more resources than we now have. Even if we risk spending the money on the equipment ourselves and wait, we still need financial backing.”

The next week housed a lull in their conversations. The Brigade recognized that their virus denial operating system was at a standstill. He had contact with someone at Dareios Inc., but he needed to chat with the man himself. He continued to lobby for some sort of meeting, but to no avail. Then, the Brigade had an idea. He thought that he might set up an appointment with Dareios and the Newcomer. If he were able to convince Dareios to meet in person, he might make his case there before he departed, and afterward he would inform Dareios that the Newcomer would never attend. The Brigade sent an e-mail to the Adder’s secretary informing her of the Newcomer’s wish to have a private meeting with Dareios, and he received no response for a week. When the secretary did respond, she claimed that Mr. Adder Dareios had a very tight schedule and that he was free in a few weeks, that the Newcomer ought to come to Dareios. The Brigade was caught here. He was unable to produce anyone who looked like the Newcomer and who might enter the building or assist. He needed Dareios to meet at a specific place. He sent a response to Dareios that his schedule was equally busy. Was Dareios able to meet at Bistro 212? Video meeting was unacceptable. They need only chat for a short time. Another few days slipped by and Leon and the Brigade received their answer in the affirmative. A date was set to meet at the number two.

Leon was especially excited to meet a man such as Adder Dareios. Ordinarily, he would ensure that he was well-dressed and proper, but this occasion demanded extra attention. He awoke early and shaved three times. His shower was long and steamy and he pressed and primped his attire until everything was seamless. The Brigade and he had agreed that Leon would do most of the talking, though the Brigade was nervous about it. The plan was to convince Dareios that the Newcomer was about to arrive and chat with him while they waited, eventually informing him of their ruse. They planned to explain their duplicity by saying that Leon had developed the program on his own, that they distrusted the Newcomer, and that they recognized Adder Dareios as a man of integrity and honesty. Dareios would supply the funding for their project and the two conspirators would be granted some percentage of the profits. Leon and the Brigade arrived early in order to examine the layout of the bistro; Leon wanting nothing to go wrong. When the appointed time neared, the Brigade chose to wait outside the restaurant while Leon occupied a table within. Dareios arrived unpretentiously, but with a marked air of influence. His driver pulled up to the building and Adder let himself out. When the Brigade saw him walking into the bistro, he phoned Leon from his cell.

“He’s on his way.”

“Yes, yes, I see him. Good then.”

Adder Dareios looked around the restaurant and Leon approached him straightaway.

“Mr. Dareios, how are you?”

Dareios seemed confused.

“I am Leon Ochrowskovich, an employee of Corpu-tech.”

Dareios pondered the tawny figure before him, that mass of human gregariousness. Leon’s frame and temperament was not showing him favor.

“I am to escort you to the table where you are to have your meeting.”

Dareios' eyes lit up a bit.

“Good. Good.”

The two men walked to the table and Leon did not control his mirth. He was meeting with a man of significant ability and resource. Anyone who was anyone indeed would know the face of an entrepreneur who consumed a significant percentage of the planet's resources. Leon smiled broadly as he touched the shoulder of the Adder here, and guided him with the large, corpulent hands of brazen care. He encountered difficulty keeping his hands off Dareios. When Dareios turned in the wrong direction, Leon almost grabbed him, a kind of affectionate hug, and directed him proper, which was not a welcome expression of affection. Thus did Leon hover over the man, and as he did so, Dareios first ignored and then slightly recoiled from Leon's imposing warmth. When the Adder sat at the table where Leon had already ordered bread and water, he was suspicious.

“Where is your boss?” he asked as he took his own seat, Leon hovering about him with his hands just near enough to Dareios' person to avoid impropriety, again proceeding to annoy the businessman.

“He will be present shortly, but sir, if I may, that is to say if you will allow me, I would like to establish here, yes here and now, just how much respect, no respect is not strong enough, no no, how much admiration you inspire in me.”

Leon paused, bated breath, as he drew in the sight of the Adder Dareios. He arose and took the man's hand from his side, shook it.

“I follow your work, well of course, everyone follows your work...”

And Leon let out a hearty laugh until he noticed that Dareios was not returning the sentiment; he abruptly cleared his throat, became serious, sat down once again.

“Well yes, sir, I mean to say that I would like to chat

with you myself before my superior arrives. I do have a proposition for you. You see my colleague and I have developed a program, that is an operating system, that may hold significant interest for you, yes.”

Dareios’ face darkened, and he looked about the bistro. When he had noted that no raven-haired youth appeared anywhere, he turned his suspicious eyes towards Leon.

“We have developed a system that will eliminate computer viruses. It is really a simple matter, simple indeed, but we need funds to develop...”

Dareios abruptly arose and with a gesture of his hand a plainclothes security guard whom Leon had not noticed appeared.

“Let’s go.”

While Dareios departed, Leon sat bewildered for one moment. Coming back to himself, Leon arose quick and quickened his gait after the entrepreneur, but was unable to overcome the man before he returned to his waiting auto, Leon’s face flush red.

“Sir, pardon me, sir, I say I never meant...”

Leon said as the car door closed and Dareios drove away, leaving Leon standing in brazen perplexity.

“How did it go?” asked the Brigade some minutes later.

During the next few days, Leon and the Brigade chatted little. Felina noticed that during that week, Leon was not his ordinary self. He appeared the same tawny giant, but his manner was different. Leon was unable or unwilling to make his ordinary rounds about the office, chatting up the employees and slapping his hand on backs. Felina was concerned because she recognized that Leon hardly ever quieted down. Even during the worst of times, Leon had an affirmative, even an annoyingly optimistic outlook. Now Leon sat at his desk, pondering something. Felina asked him about his mood, but Leon, again out of character, said

“There is nothing wrong. Please leave me be.”

The Brigade’s mood had not changed all that much. He was customarily distant and he saw his employees only when he needed to evaluate them or supervise the office in general. Now, Leon was concerned about the encounter he had with Adder Dareios. He recognized a shrewdness in the man, and he respected his cunning. Leon reasoned that a man like him must be cunning in order to create and maintain an empire. He had no idea how far he was able to trust Mr. Dareios, and the slightest whim on the part of the Dareios might bring the entire house of Corpu-tech down on Leon himself. Leon was, after all, the one who met with Dareios, and Leon’s personality and appearance were unique enough that there would be no mistake, if Dareios were to contact Leon’s superior. Making matters worse, the Brigade had said almost nothing to Leon since their failed attempt on Friday, and the week went by with Leon doing little but ruminating over his dilemma. Even Leon’s valued personal appearance carried less weight. On the one-week anniversary of the near-encounter with Dareios, the Brigade asked Leon to come in to his office.

“What are we going to do?” were the Brigade’s first words.

Leon was unsure what might be revealed, since Dareios might contact their superior at any time. Leon had been moody as late at home when he chatted with his mother; his attire was improperly made though no-one noticed, and he was reluctant to permit his colleagues to see his state. Leon forced a grin upon his face, then pressed a smile.

“Why, whatever are we concerned with?”

“Leon, the man saw through our plan and disappeared. He had to know what we were doing. He’s probably chatting with our boss at this very moment, if he hasn’t already.”

“I see nothing wrong with a chat. We are worried, yes, and we are legitimately concerned about what might happen, yes indeed, but we need not fear, no, no need for concern really...”

“IN CASE YOU DON’T REALIZE IT, OCHROWSKOVICH...”

The Brigade paused in order to calm himself down and prevent other employees from noticing them.

“...that man can destroy our careers with a mere phone call, he has the perfect excuse!” Charles said in a more calm voice.

Yet, the brigade’s voice became again louder with each passing word.

“Wind and smoke. Mere wind and smoke! We’ll pull through all of this somehow, Charles. I just know it. Trust me, Charles, just trust me.”

“We can’t just sit here, Leon. What do you suggest we do?”

The Brigade stood in front of Leon, leaning one hand on his desk. He pushed his face into Leon’s after turning the tawny man’s chair towards him.

“That crap that you feed everyone won’t help you now. I have a family, Leon. I have three kids and a wife who works. I have a mortgage and two and one-half cars and I intend to keep them. I don’t spend my money on manicures and velvet sports jackets. I can’t afford six months of job-searching unemployment because I live with my mother.”

The Brigade lifted one lapel of Leon’s jacket and threw it back upon Leon’s frame with force, a gesture that surprised and disdained the outsized mass of joy and sensitivity. Leon was flustered and a bit shaken by the force of the Brigade’s comments.

“Suede.”

“What?!”

“Suede. This jacket is suede.”

The Brigade threw his hands up in the air, and then placed his head in the palm of his right hand, seemingly about to weep.

“Charles, my friend.”

The Brigade was unresponsive.

“Charles, let me ask you a question or two, yes?”

Leon stood and placed his arm gently around the shoulders of his worried friend.

“Dareios met with me, yes?”

At first the Brigade said nothing.

“Isn’t that right?”

“Yes, Leon...he met with you.”

“Alone, yes?”

“Yes, Leon. Alone.”

“Well, then, he didn’t see you at all, right?”

The Brigade glanced at Leon. He knew the tawny giant well, he thought. He was almost afraid to hear what Leon might say, but he was relieved as well. He was angered that he had gone along with Leon’s mad, two-year plan in the first place, and the Brigade knew that he was unlikely to retain his position at Corpu-tech even if their meeting appeared innocent.

“I sent the man e-mails and made phone calls.”

Here Leon was stumped for a moment and then “I did all of that without your knowledge, yes, yes I used my own knowledge of Corpu-tech to manipulate your mail and I phoned him myself, or I asked someone to impersonate you.”

“That’s one crappy plan, Leon.”

“It will work, it will work, my friend. I have seen more paltry ruses succeed, trust me. Just trust me, my friend.”

The Brigade plopped himself lifelessly into his chair, seemingly resigned to an unsavory fate.

“Whatever you say, Leon.”

And Leon smiled, though he was concerned for his friend.

“Well, now, we need some wind and smoke of our own, I say,” Leon added.

“What are you talking about?”

“We shall tell Mr. Dareios and our illustrious leader that the meeting was all my doing, yes?”

The Brigade was quiet again. Leon was still the Leon that he had known for years now. The Brigade was relieved, and for an exceedingly brief moment, he felt guilty that he was prepared to allow Leon to do what he intended. He thought of his family, that he wanted his son to attend college. He thought of the trouble his wife would give him for the risk he took, calling him stupid and reckless. The Brigade swallowed his guilt and destroyed the pride he possessed before his friend Leon.

“That way, all the blame falls on me, and I will come up with a bit more of wind and smoke for them, Charles. You will see. Everything will be fine, just fine, and one day we will both laugh at how nervous we were at this critical point.”

“It’s a crappy plan, Leon,” the Brigade repeated.

And Leon took his friend by the hand, pulled him close with his arm, and hugged the Brigade who rolled his eyes relieved. Charles felt childish, and he acknowledged that Leon was taking all of the risk and he again felt guilt that he was willing, but that moment lasted only a short time. He buried it deep somewhere never to return.

“Alright, Leon, if that’s what you want.”

The tawny giant nodded.

Thus, their bond.

Another month departed, and the Brigade and Leon, though tense and increasingly sleepless, returned to their ordinary routine. The office was its customary pleasant place, and Leon again returned to making his rounds from desk to desk, cubicle to cubicle. The Brigade now afforded Leon wide discretion in his interactions with the other employees. No-one yet noticed, but Leon was able to do almost anything, without even any occasional repercussion. The Brigade would permit him to sleep on the floor in the hallway, if Leon desired. And though Leon recognized that he was able to take liberties, he took only those that he ordinarily enjoyed. It was only proper after all.

While affairs of the office had returned to normal, the two men alone knew that something was bound to happen. Either the Newcomer or Dareios would do something. The question remained how bad the consequences would be and the plan that Leon had did not inspire any confidence in the Brigade; Leon himself began to doubt its efficacy. After all, it possessed so many holes that even Leon might not be able to pass it off as reality. The sixth week after their encounter with Adder Dareios, Leon saw the familiar form of a mostly hairless dog enter Corpu-tech. Knowing what the animal signified, Leon immediately began to seek out the Newcomer who appeared at Corpu-tech only intermittently. Leon was visibly nervous as he meandered about each station gaining information about the whereabouts of his superior. Noticing that the friendly dog had the run of the office, he followed the animal, gave him a treat of office candy, and took hold of the jadecollared black Xolo, hoping the dog would provide him with an excuse for chatting. The animal recognized him, licked his hand and gave Leon a worried dogsmile with his eyes. Leon patted the animal and again fed him with some of the meat that Leon's mother had packed for him in his lunch, salami. The animal gobbled the morsel down quickly, rapidly pleaded with more-excited, wide eyes and slobber.

Leon guided the dog about the space only briefly; the office of the Newcomer was not difficult to find, it being the only unoccupied office on the floor most of the time. The door was open, and the Newcomer sat in his chair comfortable, but his head was in his hands. Leon knocked lightly, then permitted the animal to enter. The Xolo trotted over to the Newcomer who patted the dog on the head, massaged its head and ears.

“I found him wandering about the office, sir,” Leon began.

The Newcomer lifted his head quickly and a strange look of disquietude and what seemed like shame flashed across the face of Leon’s superior.

“You might leave my animal be,” he snapped.

Leon thought perhaps his visit had been a mistake, but he also recognized that he would not have been able to resist the urge to chat with the Newcomer.

“I...I only wished that your animal be safe, sir, please know no harm was intended, yes, no harm indeed.”

The Newcomer glared at the large, tawny giant.

“You are Leon, are you not?” asked the bewildered Newcomer.

“That is my given name, yes sir.”

Leon was unable to draw toward the Newcomer’s desk as he usually would.

“Leon, sit down here,” said the Newcomer.

Unexpectedly and with a sudden unease, Leon wanted nothing of this encounter. He sensed something disturbed the Newcomer, and for all his strength of character, he refused to acknowledge his impropriety at the moment.

“Well, sir, I have much to do. I would not wish to waste your time.”

“It is no waste of time, Leon. Sit down a moment.”

Leon obeyed, and for the first time in a long while Leon felt as if he were being examined by his father, though the man before him was younger than he.

“How goes the operation of Corpu-tech, Leon?”

“You might ask Mr. Brigade. I am only a lowly programmer. Yes, I am of little

consequence, you see.”

“You know, Leon, I hardly believe what you say. In fact, I have good reason to believe that you are more than what you claim.”

“No, no, no sir. I am not much at all, and I am thankful for the position I occupy.”

The Newcomer’s expression was strained, Leon saw. Asudden, a fear crept upon Leon, and he asked himself why the Newcomer visited now. Why was he disconcerted at this time was foremost in Leon’s mind and while he remained calm without, Leon internally squirmed in his seat, sweated upon his figurative brow.

“LEON, DON’T FOOL WITH ME!” the Newcomer inexplicably raged.

Leon was startled at the outburst and he unconsciously nudged his chair away from the Newcomer.

“Let me explain, sir, that is, I am able to demonstrate that I am not in the wrong, sir. I am ever your humble servant, and I am satisfied with my position. I never wished to do any harm to our organization. I am glad to be here, and I hope to remain...”

“What on earth are you talking about, Leon?”

Leon’s face became still.

“Listen, I am out of sorts these days. You ought to know that I do watch over Corpu-tech, and what I see appears to be good. I want you to chat with me about Corpu-tech. I recognize that you understand more about this company than others do and I want your assistance.”

And Leon grinned, then smiled. He stood up and cupping the shoulder of his superior with his mammoth hand...

“I am ever at your service, sir. And I expect that we will have much to chat about. I do indeed know Corpu-tech and I will pass along what I know to you. Please accept my apologies as well. I spoke out of turn.”

“Yes, yes, Leon. Let me be for now, but I will expect a long conversation about your workplace.”

“If ever you need a shoulder, as they say, mine is available. You will find me a worthy companion and I might say that though you appear stressed, you look well, yes, I would say fine in fact.”

“Good then, we will chat soon and regularly then?”

“Yes, sir.”

And Leon, eager to meet with the Brigade, exited the Newcomer’s office with a near spring in his gait. The next days were fine moments of blissful jocundity for anyone who met with Leon. He dressed himself in his customary fashion, but he had a particular luminosity about him. He was, after all, as yet free from charges, and since Leon believed, and apparently correctly, that the probability of Dareios informing his superior after this much time had passed was small and dwindling, since that, Leon believed he was liberated from dread worry. He explained to a dubious Brigade that their meeting would not be given up and that more likely than not Dareios had forgotten about the incident himself.

“We are free, my friend, I assure you. Mr. Dareios will not tell our boss, no, no. And perhaps we ought to attempt to contact him again.”

The Brigade did not like the idea of another risk with Dareios very much. He was relieved that he need not fight another battle simply in order to retain his job, but the danger was far from abated. Many things might now happen.

“Don’t be crazy, Leon. Just leave it where it is.”

“Charles, I assure you...”

“Leave it where it is, Leon. We got lucky so far.”

So, the two men dropped the matter, and though Leon wanted to continue his

experiments, he ceased attempting to convince the Brigade that they contact Dareios. And office affairs continued as they had.

“How are you today?”
“Let me get that for you.”

His nod beseeemed buttered xanthus all the more.

And they smiled.

“Yes, he’s silly, but that’s Leon.”

“Felina the Great.”

“Hi Leon,” Felina returned, lengthening both words.

“Hey, Cassius.”

“Leon.”

“Good morning, Allsion.”

On a pleasant and rainy Tuesday morning, Leon received an email from an unexpected source: the central office of Dareios Inc. wished to meet with him. The connection between this missive and his brief encounter with Dareios was tenuous at best, yes, yes. Perhaps a low-level headhunter was contacting him. Leon decided that he would meet with Dareios without informing the Brigade. Possession of such knowledge would only create problems for his friend. And, if the affair went sour, the Brigade would be free from any blame, or knowledge. The golden giant took off a personal day, as honest as he was able, and he went to the Adder Dareios building. There he waited longer than he had anticipated, his manner perfect and his dress charming. He flirted with the secretary when the solitary wait became intolerable, and she, like the others, was charmed by his farcical presence. Leon had made another friend.

“Mr. Och..rossko..witch?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Hello.” A petite, young woman held out her hand for Leon to shake. “You must be an important man,” she continued.

“No, not really. Just fortunate.” Leon beamed.

“You must be, since Mr. Dareios only sees important people.”

Leon ceased smiling. It was highly improbable that Dareios himself would take the time to meet him, unless there was something amiss. Initially calm, he waited for the man to return to his own office, becoming increasingly agitated.

“Did Dareios inform my superior?” he thought. “What to say, given such an ugly encounter?” he thought again.

Leon paced before the utilitarian and humble desk that Adder Dareios himself used. And as he paced, he drove himself more mad each moment. After what seemed to Leon to be an eternity of suffering, the door to Dareios’ office opened with Leon midpace before the man’s desk.

“Oh, oh, pardon me, sir. I mean, I meant to wait peaceably here. That is, I, well, I must say that I am most glad, honored indeed to meet you.”

Adder Dareios entered with a manila folder in his hand. Accompanied by a balding, bespectacled man who remained silent, he observed Leon for a moment, and then

“...but we have met before, Mr. Ochrowskovich, haven't we?”

“Well, yes, I suppose we did, sir, and if you’ll permit me, that is if you will grant pardon to me just one moment, I will explain my intentions. Good ones, yes, fine and noble intentions.”

“I don’t think there is need for any explanations, Leon.
I believe I understand well what you're doing.”

And Leon suppressed the urge to pace the office once more.

“If you understand, sir, that the impropriety, that is to say, the perceived

impropriety is more damaging than the slight impropriety itself. I mean, I wish to say that it is mere appearance of impropriety that causes us distress.”

“Please, Mr. Ochrowskovich, stop jabbering. I hate lots of talk that says little. I am here to have a friendly chat with you. That’s all.”

Adder opened the manila folder set before him on his desk.

“I see that you graduated from MIT. Is that right?”

“Indeed, yes sir. That is my alma mater, so to speak.” Leon was reluctant to share personal information.

“You could be doing a whole lot better than Corpu-tech.”

“Well, yes and no. I have simple needs.”

Dareios nodded. He walked to a cabinet near his desk and poured himself a drink.

“Would you like a drink?”

“No, no sir. I enjoy a clear head.”

“Yes, I suppose you would, considering you were near the top of your class.”

“Yes, yes, ancient history, so to speak. A fine school and good instructors all around. I enjoyed my stay, that is...while it lasted...”

Leon laughed nervously as he caught the eye of the balding man whose gaze abided on the frame of the tawny colossus. Adder Dareios frowned and a perceptive Leon recognized the inferior position in which he sat.

“Well, Mr. Ochrowskovich, after our encounter, I thought you were a boob. Frankly, I didn’t give you a second thought...”

“Bistro 212.” Leon gazed nervously at the balding, bespectacled man.

“...yes, when we met there I was annoyed, but I have looked into your history, and I don’t believe that you are quite so humble.”

“I assure you, my fr., sir, that I am a most humble man.”

“Well, perhaps in one sense you are, but I suspect that your ambitions go much further than you pretend. You could be enjoying a rather large salary these days, and instead you are wasting away at Corpu-tech, enhancing virus protection programs.”

“It is a worthy craft and the people there like me.”

Dareios smiled.

“Let’s cut the bullshit, Ochrowskovich. You are developing something much larger than mere virus removal. You want to make viruses obsolete. That, my friend, will change things significantly.”

“I have a humble idea for a program.” Leon was not sure how Dareios had learned about the specifics of his idea.

“You have a simple idea for a complex event, and you don’t want most of the profits taken from you by a company that claims you created the program on their time.”

Dareios provided Leon with a comforting smile all the while he chatted. Adder Dareios looked at the tawny giant directly.

“That way they own your ideas.”

Adder Dareios waited for affect.

“They would own you, though you might profit enormously.”

“That is not all...”

Dareios interrupted Leon.

“I could give this information to your employer, Leon, but that wouldn’t suit both of us.”

Dareios again sat down.

“I want to fund your research, my friend. I want to see what you have developed.”

“I would be most grateful, sir. I am so very glad to have your approval.”

“I haven’t given my approval. Who else knows about your plans?”

“No-one, sir. No-one at all.”

“You set up that meeting all by yourself?”

“I did.”

“Charles ...Brigade did not participate?”

“I, well, sir, that is I used his account, but he was not part of the contact.”

Leon appeared before the man like a child who has been caught stealing cookies before dinner.

“You are lying, obviously. But we will assume that you will contact no-one further. I want you to return to Corpu-tech and pretend you never came here. Meanwhile, we will work together during your free time. You will tell no-one at all about this project. Are we agreed?”

“We are, sir. You may count on my discretion.”

Thus their bond.

THE CHANGING OF THE HUES

Brazil had not seen much of Mallory or the Newcomer for weeks. Though she enjoyed the company of her acerbic friend, she had to admit that she enjoyed the time alone. She had not only completed another series of bronze pieces, but she arranged an art-show. Her old friends from downtown were glad to see her, though there had been a split between them. Brazil was large both in body and in mind, and she was certain that she knew what was art and what was “Crap,” she would say. Her colleague, whose artistic expression consisted of burnt, spray-painted G.I. Joes nailed to wood and the like, considered Brazil’s work to be trite and overly ambitious. Fuscus would dumpster-dive for items left behind by college students. When an interesting enough combination of items emerged, he would glue them--nail them or somehow affix--them to a strong, flat surface and perhaps pour acid on the mixture in order to see what would come of it. Brazil considered his art to be nothing more than less than its parts.

“Literally, that stuff is Fuscus,” she would joke.

Now that she had temporarily returned to the downtown scene, Brazil found herself arguing with Fuscus just as much as she always did, but at present the two disagreed, and then left matters where they were, instead of angrily throwing each others art at one another, or smashing bottles and screaming insults during each others’ show. Fuscus was a typical cad, clad in fatigues, bald, and properly tattooed over almost all of his body. He considered himself to live his art every moment.

“Are you still feeding off the human Satyr?” he asked flip.

Brazil was silent, not wanting to begin an argument.

“So, you’re still living with him then.” Fuscus tapped her on the shoulder.

“I don’t live with him.”

“He just pays your bills.”

Fuscus peered over his eyeglasses at one of his entourage who giggled.

“That man...I don’t know...”

Brazil had no comment to make.

“Well, I wish I could get me some of that. I need someone to pay for me.”

“A patron.”

“Yeah, ‘patron’ ‘sugar-daddy’ ‘Pappy’ whatever you want to call him.”

Brazil had much to accomplish in a short time. She had agreed to show her sculpture a few days ago and she was busy determining where each piece belonged. The space was a large, open room, so it was possible for Brazil to line the walls with her current display, but she wanted to conceal each piece so that as the interpreter wandered through the room, which would be set up like a maze, each bronze sculpture would emerge without giving away the next. Thus, Brazil wanted to determine what piece to display first, and what second and the rest. She had unwrapped many new works and she observed each one in relation to another. She considered using each piece as a part of a narrative, telling a story with the whole collection of them, but she was unsure that there was a coherent narrative to create. Each bronze statuette was a small, frozen moment of time. Each was supposed to be an archetype of experience, but as they were, they did not manifest the plot of a story. One was a large woman accosted by a group of boys, as if being pelted by rocks, while another was the same group of diminutive thugs following a politician or businessman who followed a piper. Yet another was a laughing giant of a fellow who patted others on the back. A balding man was alone with his drink, seemingly abandoned by a loved one seen walking away with another man. The same corpulent, well-dressed giant laughed mirthfully beside a stocky older gentlemen whose expression was rather serious. And, a very attractive young man lamented over perished experiences now resurrected in the form of furies. Other, more fantastic and brash characters walked and danced about, and Brazil was unable to arrange them in a traditional, coherent narrative. Perhaps tomorrow she would be able to do so. She was observing the figure of the piper, which she thought might begin the show. She

imagined that he might lead the interpreters as they arrived, as if he were the master. Brazil knelt down and removed some plastic packaging that clung to the face of the piper. She smiled, and she thought that she ought to contact the Newcomer, see what he was doing tonight.

“Probably out with the drunken opportunist.”

The day was ending for the gainfully employed and Brazil noticed that fewer and fewer observers came into the storefront, peering about curiously. The time for hectic business activity was dying out slowly, and then lies an interval of time when pedestrians and vehicularists busy themselves racing homeward. None too many walk along the sidewalk, and only the few workers who began their shifts at the number three or four are present to witness what little transpires. The time presses not quickly, nor slowly, but seems to move in quiet, hegemonic shifts. Brazil enjoys this time of day, since she recognizes that it is no concern to her. She continues to observe the piper whose pose and active figure she is acutely proud to have created. Her work brings a grin to her face.

“That’s a lonely man you’ve depicted there” comes a hoary voice.

The man who stood beside Brazil was aged, short and pudgy. He was pluck bald on the top of his head, and he apparently cared little or nothing for his appearance, since he had not combed his hair in an estimated four weeks. Still, clad in a well-kept and well-worn deep green suit he was clean, sharkskin jade. He sneezed and pulled a yellow handkerchief out of his breast pocket, then blew his nose. He smiled at Brazil and she was unable to suppress a grin. He was a peculiar man with a huge, wide-nostriled pug nose and his back was arched hunch-like, a vulture’s posture. Though his suit was clean and attractive, he was out of style, and he wore old, threadbare tennis shoes with frayed laces and no stockings. Brazil noted that he gave off an odor that while pleasant, she was unable to place. Something between patchouli-lavender incense and split peas mixed with urine made way into her olfactory. He was vigorous in his gait and his arched back did not refuse him a squat on the floor in order to inspect the face and motion of the piper.

“On whom is he modeled?” The old man talked more to the piper than to Brazil.

“A friend.”

“Does this friend have a name?”

“You know, I don’t believe he likes personal information given out.”

“He looks to me like a lively character.”

“Lively is one way to put it.”

“You mean the statuette, or the Dionysian friend?”

“He *is* Dionysian.” Brazil trailed off a bit.

The old man gave Brazil an inquisitive look.

“The friend, the friend is Dionysian.”

“I’ve had those sorts of intimates before,” he reflected.

“Really? I don’t think you’ve had a friend like this one before.”

“Trust me, my dear. Trust me.”

The old man brushed his fingertips onto the face of the brazen piper. Brazil did not like his words, but the manner with which he used them gave her comfort somehow. She smiled unwilling, and then she became a bit irate that the man was handling her artwork.

“I know a bit about friendship, and this one is not common,” she gave out without realizing it.

Brazil began to move her sculptures about, rearranging them again and again in order to establish the perfect brazen narrative.

“Can you tell me about it?”

“Well, he’s tall and very intelligent, but he’s a free spirit,

...a bit too free..."

"No, no, dear, I meant friendship. What do you know about friendship?"

Brazil really didn't have time for witty banter or conversation.

"You want me to say what?"

"I am interested in your opinion about friendship, yes."

"Why?"

"I'm a professor. I enjoy learning."

Brazil was not certain that she wished to discuss the topic with the old man. He was charming, but he probed too deeply too rapidly. She supposed that his was the liberty of old age.

"I believe that it arises from nature," she said again unwilling.

"You mean nature herself brings it about, or..."

"No, no. Common natures become friends. It's a similarity of spirit, I guess."

"So, you've never been a friend to someone who had a nature different from your own?"

"Well...I guess I have, but friendship requires some thing in common."

Now Brazil was certain that she did not wish to continue the conversation, but she was too polite to cut off the old man, or she was just that impolite when she desired to be so, but she was unable to explain to him that she was unwilling to hear any more. Then again

"I'd love to chat, but I am very busy right now. You can stay and watch if you want," she explained.

She was relieved that she had gotten the words out. The old man arose from his squatting position and watched Brazil as she lifted each figure, set it down in one place and then replaced it in another, slowly finding each character its best position. She paid little attention to him, nodding and affirming what he said.

“You know, the study of friendship goes back not just centuries, but millennia. The first epic friendship that I recall was Gilgamesh and Enkidu. There, enemies become friends and each is willing to die for the other. Gilgamesh is a powerful and so dangerous entity until he enjoys the company of an equal. And I suppose the author or authors of that epic had something there. There is an element of equality that assists a friendship, though equality is not necessary.”

“Mmmm hmmm.”

“Ancient philosophers wrote of friendship as a matter of course. Aristotle thought it should be limited, and Plato wrote of equality, inequality, similarity and dissimilarity of friends among other things. In fact, Seneca picks up on one of Plato’s themes: that the wise man is entirely self-sufficient. So, the wise don’t need friends, but they possess them anyways. Or they want to possess them.”

“I know someone who is self-sufficient and seems to be looking for a friend.”

She said this as she moved the Dionysian figure back to its original place in front.

“Yet, there are other issues. Epictetus claimed that needs will destroy even the most powerful of bonds, and so friendship becomes victim to feral need, or perhaps even desire. Cicero believed that only good men are capable of friendship, but then Cicero is not original or ground-breaking and many of the ancient writings that remain follow Platonic perspective.”

He thought he was talking to himself.

“Which one is that?” Brazil asked as she moved another statue.

“Oh,...that only good men are capable of friendship. It has a ring of truth to it,

but perhaps friendship makes men good, and so goodness becomes of friendship rather than only good men are capable of that bond. Augustine claimed that wretched men are they whose friendship is mortal, and I am not certain of that. There is something of the immortal in friendship, like a bond coming to be and perishing. Then there were thinkers like Montaigne who believed that friendship is more powerful than the state, even more powerful than the self. And there have been horrid things done in the name of friendship, you know. I suppose friendship to be for Montaigne like desire is for Epictetus, and perhaps friendship is a kind of desire. Yes, love in a way. Don't you think?"

"I suppose it is."

Brazil was wiping her brow with a moist rag.

"And then there was Bacon who wrote about how a prince must raise another up to his level in order to become their friend, and I suppose this may be necessary, you know?, to raise another up to a certain level in order to be able to converse with them. Still, raising one another doesn't seem to be entirely necessary, since equality isn't absolutely necessary. Presently, I am fond of Malbranche who thought that friendship adds substance to our selves, like glory or conquests."

"But friends add something at great expense some times."

"Ah, I see you have a friend who perhaps is not your equal. Someone takes from you and gives little or nothing in return?"

"Not nothing. But he sure takes a lot."

"You mean that he adds substance to you, but takes more than his share perhaps?"

"Well...yeah."

"I have known others like your friend. Kant speaks of friends as those who retain a distance while at the same time maintaining intimacy. I suppose it is because of that apparent paradox that equal friendship is impossible according to him: *temeritas amicitiae*. I like to think something of the kind is possible."

“What?”

“That an intimacy exists even where distance is apparent.”

“You don’t have intimacy?”

And Brazil regretted having asked the question immediately.

“Forgive me if I pry.”

“Oh, no no, dear girl.”

He tapped her lightly on the shoulder.

“Don’t be afraid to ask anything. I am nothing if not intimate, I do not lack it. Quite the opposite. Quite the opposite.”

“I see.”

“It is others that worry me.”

“Me too.”

“Well, Nietzsche claimed that as a man changes, so must his friends, and that must be true, I agree. The ever-changing man must change everything, yes. Still, that doesn’t mean that a man cannot possess a variety of friends. Indeed, the broadest of personalities must have a broad range of friends. I think that may be true.”

Now Brazil was tiring of his talk and she wanted it to end soon, but she wanted also to be kind to the stranger.

“It seems as though you’ve covered the entire history of friendship in philosophy.”

“Oh by no means. Not at all, I only touched upon a few of the highlights, or at least the conclusions that interest me most. I’ve learned a few things in my life, I have. I wish to learn even more.”

Brazil remained particularly uninterested. She wished the man would go away, or at least be quiet and permit her to work in peace.

“And what have you learned?” she asked, immediately regretting the question again.

“Well, it seems that common experience helps bring about friendship...which seems to be a kind of accident that abides despite differences, and in conjunction with complements. It must be fallible in order to demonstrate that the intimacy is not misplaced. If I know you will never do anything that displeases me, then the friendship may be pretence. So, it seems to be an accidental intimacy, like Kant seems to suggest. The ancients hoped that friendship exists the way they described it: a stiff and artificial bond between good persons. But, it is not always the meeting of good persons or the good itself, but the generation of goodness between persons. That bond of goodness coheres friendship.”

He stopped talking and simply stared blankly. He had stood up and was looking out at the window, neither observing nor perceiving it. He stared out simply blank and Brazil waited and then she began to feel uncomfortable. She was uncertain what he might do though her instincts told her that he was harmless. And suddenly he came to life, stopped staring and gesticulated another thought.

“Yes, yes. All of those concepts refer to friendship, and they may have a share in it, but what is it? We’re not talking about a static entity, but a dynamic one in motion. It’s...”

The old man paused, again stared. He rubbed his chin a moment.

“I heard poetry about it once. How does it go?

Bonds binding vigilantly
intimate captives impede
the ruin of destruction
as fetters gird beasts to fecund joy.
Calm prisoners band joyful conflict
as captives unbounded
leave free the braces of release.
Yet cords break, straps
unbar and binds bond again ever renewal.”

“Okay,” Brazil returned slowly pressing out her words.

The old man laughed, at himself and at Brazil.

“You think that I am mad.”

“I think no such thing.” Brazil lied to her new friend.

“You work with images,” he more asked than stated, but stated all the same.

“Yeah.”

“Perhaps an image will assist.”

The old man became more professorial. He laughed again, and Brazil thought more madness about him.

“Friendship is the world of the cultured beast, like many worlds of such a creature. It is not the physical universe of material substance, but it is. It is not *geist*, but it is. It isn’t the moral world of the philosopher, or the factual world of the scientist, but it is. Friendship is a vivacity, a kind of array.”

The old man thought a moment further. His eyes brightened, and he lifted his form a bit, a brief jump and as a result his back arched a little less.

“A Kaleidoscope substance.”

He picked up some chalk that lay around Brazil’s exhibit, and then drew three interlocking circles. The old one then used Brazil’s yellow, blue and red chalk to fill in the spaces with color so that the circles represented the intersections of primary colors. After that, he blended the three colors in order to create secondary colors from the primary. His hands were filthy like a child’s. He giggled a bit as he drew the circles. He was clearly enjoying himself and as he giggled, his hoary beard juttled up and down, giving him a mad Santa appearance. He placed his hat backwards on his head and three or four times it fell to the ground, interrupting his work until he simply left it rest where it lay. He giggled again, but this time he was looking directly at Brazil.

“Now, think of the different colors as states of the substance friendship.”

He pointed to the yellow section of the diagram.

“Isn’t yellow a beautiful color?”

Brazil stood in mute silence, not knowing what to return.

“...yeah...yes, sure.”

“Yellow is bright and pure jocundity. Yellow is a confiding bond, the connection to which brings joy. Yes? Yes?”

“...yeah...alright.”

He pointed to the blue.

“Blue is calm, an established bond. Blue is easy, full confidence where one let’s one’s guard down, yes? Yes?”

“I always thought so.”

He pointed to the green.

“Green is a combination of blue and yellow. It is a joyful calm, not so much joy as comfort, or perhaps not so much comfort as joy, yes?”

“Well, of course.”

Brazil was mildly interested now.

“What about red?”

“It is right you ask about red, my friend. Red is conflicting, a contradicting difficulty and a lack of trust. Red is dangerous, but lifegiving. Friendships die and are resurrected here.”

He shook his head, lowering his face sadly.

“But, you see orange is red and yellow, so it is both joyful and conflicting.”

“So, orange is joy giving way to conflict?”

“Yes, or...or conflict giving way to joy with accompanying suspicion. The movement works both ways.”

“So, blue gives way to purple, which is...what?”

“Oh, purple is full confidence giving way to conflict, or conflict giving way to full confidence. Very powerful. Very powerful. Dynamic indeed.”

“But, these are not the only colors, or shades of colors possible.”

“Well, this is only representative of our substance friendship. There are, of course, many shades that speak to all possible color, including those the human eye cannot see, yes?”

“I don’t know.”

She waited, pondering.

“What about brown?” she asked playfully.

“Oh, brown...”

The old one looked pitifully up at Brazil, wide-eyed visage concerned.

“Brown is, of course, the combination of all of these colors. In it there is conflict, but joy, calm, but suspicion, confidence, but unease. No bond remains brown for long.”

“They gravitate towards one primary color or another?”

“Well, I don’t know, but I suspect that in brown there is too much uncertainty, and so the bond tends to gravitate towards the more acceptable colors, like green, or purple, or even orange.”

“Why not yellow or blue?”

“Blue and yellow are excellent, but they are not easily retained. They happen, but how often does the great calm or the exquisite joy continue from a bond unless we are departed for long. Red-faced contempt arrives.”

“What happens when colors change?”

“What do you mean?”

“What happens when there is a transition and so one color is not, say, yellow any more, but orange, or yellow changes to green? Know what I mean?”

“Well, I suppose there is constant transition, and so the colors are never pure, but always changing. That is a good point.”

He glanced down at the circles again.

“...but then what I am saying may be nothing, you know?”

“I know,” Brazil returned.

She glanced at her watch and suddenly became animated.

“I need to go.”

“I am sorry to have detained you so long. I ought to have watched the time.”

“Let’s just go. Go. Go!” she said as she waved her hand towards their exit.

And after Brazil donned her orange-red coat that matched the hues of her streaked hair, she directed the old man out. She turned around to lock the door to the space, but when she made to offer him a ride to his destination, she found that he simply was not present any longer, perhaps unneeded.

JADE CANINES AND ORANGE MEN

Brazil recognized that she needed to move quickly. She disliked leaving her art behind, since she was able to work on an exhibit tirelessly until it was finished, or at least until she was satisfied for the moment. Her fire-red-orange shoes were becoming wet in the rain drizzling upon her as she waited for an available taxi. She ordinarily took public transportation, but she was late. Her conversation with the strange old man had distracted her from observing the time regularly as she almost always did. It was an old, tiresome habit that she was unable to cease unless she was somehow engaged in her work. She had been a secretary, among other things, until she showed her exhibit downtown where she had met the Newcomer. Why she still adored him she did not understand. Her cab took her downtown to a tawny building where a red carpet led imperial feet to finely polished elevators that delivered these wealthy possessors of empire to a physically beautiful and easy, yet treacherous, routine. She exchanged her now wet shoes for high heels, which afforded her an inch or two of height higher than the Newcomer. She thought that her stature might grant her an advantage, needed it. She was not certain that the Newcomer would perceive her efforts, he almost always detected any change, but she was at a disadvantage and she needed all the emotional strength possible. Still, there were clear advantages to the Newcomer's company. Brazil unlocked the door to the penthouse where she often slept and where she and her Newcomer entertained whatever crowd they, really he, happened to encounter that night. She was relieved to perceive that the space was loudly hushed. She placed her keys on the oak desk near the front door as she heard the tapdancing sound of organic nails on wood.

Click clack, clickclick, clakakclakclick.

Brazil smiled as she lowered one of her hands to greet two mostly hairless dogs who were quite excited to see her, licking her hands, dancing green-collared joy.

“Hi babies.”

Brown jumped up and down, waiting. He ran around the front room in circles howling again and again in hopes of a greater embrace. Brazil concentrated her attention on the Black dog with the green collar, giving him her hand and patting his head repeatedly. The Brown noticed that his course was bringing him no closer to attention, so he interrupted the head-patting with his nose and when Brazil was distracted, he lifted his muscular frame up and placed his paws on her side, refusing her refusal to grant him her attention. Brazil laughed.

“Ok, Ok,”

“I see you, baby.”

She kissed the Brown on the head and dogs smiling eyes all the while he howled gently in her direction. When Brazil removed her coat, the two animals rushed down a hallway, the one now outpacing the other the other now outpacing the one. They snapped at each other without injury while they ran into another room. Now there, they howled once or twice and then came running back to Brazil. Then, again, the two raced down the hallway alerting other occupants to her wanted presence. The same long hall had a narrow, high shelf along its left side, inserted specifically as a pathway. If one cared to observe the walls of the penthouse, one would see the same track along practically every wall with the result that a kind of jogging course roughly five inches wide ran along the entire living-space. As Brazil walked along the hallway, a nearly silent female cat with a yellow collar surreptitiously accompanied her. She walked only a few paces when she saw the animal. Brazil stopped as did the long-haired tortoiseshelled feline. She reached her hand up to the animal, and the feline first sniffed her hand and then lowered its head just enough so that Brazil was unable to pet her.

“Hello Dora.”

Brazil was unable to repress a smile. It was strange to her that the Newcomer was so disagreeable, and yet he adored these seeming friends, acted as though they were made of gold. All were well-tended and seemingly content. The dogs went with him wherever he traveled, and when the animals were all at home in the penthouse, Dora might easily evade the at-times vicious pursuit of the two Xolos simply by running along the track, which the Newcomer had designed himself. He walked the dogs every day, giving treats for handshakes and obedience. The Newcomer kept a record of the animals’ health and regularly

paid an on-call veterinarian to come give check-ups and advice about diet and care. All the animals were vigorous and healthy, and likely to remain that way. Brazil continued along the hall and Dora caught up with her, then raced past, jumping over the width of the hall onto another section of track that led to the Newcomer's study. She trotted around the corner of the room and plotted herself down onto the desk of the Newcomer where he busied himself with something internet.

"Hi, girl," he said to Dora.

"Well, hello," Brazil returned.

He did not turn round to greet her, but ceased working in order to allow the feline to rub against him with her long, black and brown hair. He turned her yellow collar round her neck until he saw her nametag, making certain that Dora's registration was up to date. She dropped halfway down onto his lap, paused while she awaited another round of attention. When she at last planted her body full onto his thighs, he gently pulled the animal to his chest and hugged her.

"That cat is madly in love," Brazil observed.

"She's a good kid."

"So, are we ready for another round of 'gathering of fools'?"

Brazil had known him long enough, and she was observant enough, that she was able to determine when something was amiss. He had always been distant, but now she perceived something new.

"I don't think so."

Brazil knew that it was nothing out of the ordinary that he would refuse an outing, but his tone had changed -- a foreign sound. He waited for Dora to be sated, and then he rose from his desk; his long hair was not tied tightly as usual and he appeared to be intoxicated, which was out of the ordinary since his tolerance was so very high. Brazil thought that he had imbibed for perhaps many hours.

“Had a few have we?”

The Newcomer turned towards Brazil for a moment, staring blankly. In that instant, he was sober and his dark eyes observed her coldly. He appeared prepared to pounce, yet he restrained himself.

“Actually, I’ve had nothing to drink today. At least no alcohol.”

He said these words with a kind of contempt, which Brazil noticed was not necessarily directed at her, but perhaps. Still, she was taken aback by his vehemence. She rose high on her heels without realizing.

“What then?”

She expected that he had another new plan, perhaps another experiment as he called them.

“We visit Mallory.”

Now Mallory had come closer to the Newcomer and Brazil recognized that he had been hurt, but without realizing it she resented the attention given to the unfortunate.

“I doubt that you would visit me as often.”

The Newcomer paused his tapping of Dora on the head, but made no eye contact with Brazil.

“I would, but you would still whine.”

She knew that he was joking, but the admission that he would visit her was a novelty. The Newcomer appeared to Brazil to sag a bit. Lapse of spirit in addition to his somewhat desultory appearance. When he did not deliberately annoy her, she began to wonder if she ought to contact someone.

“Maybe we will search for fools, I don’t know,” he said, seeming genuinely confused.

The Newcomer was annoying and he had a habit of generating anger deliberately, a habit she had grown to tolerate; he had no certain beliefs upon which to fall back, but he made certain decisions about what he was about to do. He was an act in action. Brazil thought that his life must be difficult, since he never attended church and he belonged to no organizations, at least none that he took seriously. He was fortunate enough to be able to do so. When he claimed that he did not know what he might do, she recognized that something plagued him. The pair headed towards the hospital where Mallory remained. He was due to be released in a few days and the Newcomer had already made plans for his retrieval. Mallory was silent, since he had been drugged immediately before their arrival. Still, and strange for Brazil to behold, the Newcomer sat at the man's bedside almost as if Mallory were a relative, a brother or even an old friend.

"Brazil. I think I understand why women obsess."

Now, Brazil was annoyed already, since she knew what was likely to come, but she smiled inward and she was somewhat relieved.

"I think I understand why they continue to give themselves problems. Why they retain a problem until it becomes ineradicable."

He grinned while he talked and Brazil cocked her head back and waited.

"What brings this on?"

He ignored her contempt.

"Estrogen. They are filled with estrogen."

"That's it?"

He ignored her contempt again.

"They feel more than they think, or one might say that they experience the thinking feeling. And that emotional thought, that feeling they are able to resurrect continually as if they were experiencing it at any moment."

He waited for affect, was unable to suppress a chuckle.

“Yeah, get it out,” she said in a bored tone.

“So, thirty years after a man has cheated on his wife she remains incapable of forgetting it. Why?”

“He’s a bastard who’s done it repeatedly.”

“She experiences it emotionally as if it were the day before.”

“Yeah, yeah,” she said turning her head away from him.

Brazil was annoyed to the point of aggravation, but he was not satisfied. The wait in the hospital was unbearable, though the Newcomer very much wanted to remain in case Mallory awoke. He craved a cigarette, but he was unable to leave his seat. He thought about having a drag, how refreshing it would be, and then he realized that he had not eaten for some time. He thought about it again, and he realized that he had not eaten in a few days. While he had imbibed no alcohol, he had also not drank any other beverage. A few more thoughts made him aware that he was parched, perhaps even dehydrated. What had he done? He remembered going to Corpu-tech in order to clear his head, and he remembered his visit with Mallory earlier, but he had slept for quite a while after that and when he awoke, his head was clearer, he had forgotten something, buried it deep. He remembered that he had talked at an unconscious Mallory, and he recalled that he thought about *Lumen Novum*, his old school. Why had he thought about that long-ago place he did not know certainly.

“Oh, that’s what it was,” he thought almost aloud.

The Newcomer walked to the mirror and straightened out his long hair, brushed off his attire, which he had been wearing for two or three days now, needed cleaning.

“You know what happened to him?” He pointed to Mallory.

“You never said.”

“The fool, he didn’t watch where he was standing.”

He recognized that he had been partly responsible for Mallory's condition.

"That miserable little slob couldn't watch out where he was or what he was doing," he said angrily, and then he laughed out loud.

The Newcomer was then silent for some time. The brief moment of mirth was followed by a long, melancholy quiet that rattled Brazil's head like a badly tuned instrument, but she did not want to hear what else he said. She wanted only tranquility for the time being.

"Damn delivery-boy mugger," he murmured.

Brazil did not know what he meant, and she did not care. She wanted him to return to normal, though his normality used to be intolerable.

"Do you remember Capor?" he asked.

Capor was a colleague of Brazil's who had been declared legally blind.

"I don't want to hear it."

"Mallory reminds me of Capor."

Capor had followed both the Newcomer and Brazil practically everywhere they went. He was a clever man who had taken a liking to Brazil's art and technique, wanted to emulate her, but he was uncoordinated and awkward with his hands. He also asked many ignorant questions, sometimes unconsciously setting himself up for ridicule. Brazil loved the man dearly, but he became somewhat of a nuisance, since the Newcomer had taken a liking to Brazil and he was offering to become her patron. Brazil did not want to disrupt her opportunity and she recognized the Newcomer's distaste for him.

Capor was an obstruction whom Brazil didn't want to insult, a warm and dear pest for whom Brazil had a great deal of affection and sympathy. Having failed at bronze-crafting, Capor wrote poetry that left something to be desired. He attended poetry recitals where he was welcomed with hesitation and while Capor read, the Newcomer met his eyes with Brazil's when the words made little sense or the rhythms sounded out badly. Provoked, she was unable to suppress a grin and at times she laughed aloud and Brazil's laughter appeared to hurt the

warmhearted pest. Still, the Newcomer continued to frown at Brazil around the times when the poetry was particularly bad, and she laughed. She hit him and scolded him, but the Newcomer merely sat amused. Brazil and the Newcomer did not dislike Capor, but they wanted him to leave them at peace. Twice Brazil explained to Capor that the two needed their space. At that time, Brazil thought that perhaps a romantic relationship with the Newcomer was possible. Capor informed her that she was mistaken, another problem created for Capor. He rented an office-space near a university where he labored over his poorly written poetry and he invited both Brazil and the Newcomer to visit often. Brazil lacked the nerve, or possessed too much grace, to refuse. The Newcomer had warned Brazil that he intended to put an end to their wretchedness, but at the time Brazil did not believe him capable of anything untoward. When they arrived, delighted to see them, Capor was a gracious host, but his near blindness prevented him from offering much. Water and crackers were all he possessed. Both sat passively for one-half hour or so, listening to Capor rave about Brazil's work, rant about his own. His office-space was littered with trash and tools. Among the tools and metal sheets and rubbish, the Newcomer found a length of tie-wire. He played with it for a bit, forming it to different shapes until he was bored. He knotted up some spare string found on the office floor and fastened it to one end of the wire. He formed the wire into an arch and thrust the string about the office-space as though it were a fly. Capor and Brazil were distracted by a conversation when opportunity arose. Every so often, as Capor chatted with Brazil, the "fly" would touch Capor's temple on the right and then on the left. Blind to his tormentor, Capor batted at the nuisance at first, but rather quickly he became irate. Brazil watched as the Newcomer antagonized Capor with the "fly." Unable to suppress a laugh, she thought the trick unkind. Capor swore angrily at the "fly" and he made several attempts to eradicate the pest to no avail, but since Capor was no moron, he inferred what was happening. He heatedly confronted the Newcomer who explained to him that he was merely joking, that Capor was taking his torment personally. He claimed that anyone who does not possess a sense of humor must have a psychological problem, explained that he was attempting to cheer up Capor with levity, and he then repeatedly claimed that Capor had no sense of humor because he did not enjoy the "fly" jest. Brazil was unable, or unwilling, to defend either party because of her relation to both of them. After that experience, Capor bothered the pair less frequently until he eventually received them into his presence not at all. Every so often, the Newcomer would remind Brazil about Capor.

"I don't want to hear about it."

“Remember this? ‘Can you hear the fire in my voice? Can you feel it?’” He quoted Capor’s best line.

The Newcomer laughed and Brazil was unable to suppress her laughter as well.

“That poor man.”

THE PURPLE DIVINITY'S JOYOUS RAVINGS

Mallory did not awaken during their visit, and the pair decided that a search for fools was in order for the night. They went their ordinary route, and Brazil understood that all would be as it was. The Newcomer chose the targets this night with his instinct alone, and mostly spontaneity was the guiding force for the evening. The ordinary rigid control over events and figures was absent. Unexpectedly, the gathering of fools provided a better crop than usual. Perhaps the reason was the quality of taverns chosen, or perhaps the night was filled with revel-makers who were of sturdy mind and sound body. The Newcomer brought his beloved dogs with him and the jaded Brown and the jaded Black received extra attention. He did not command them as he ordinarily did, but rather they were rewarded simply for being the animals that they were. Brazil was surprised, but she thought that a more welcoming demeanor was an acceptable change to the thorny, rigid existence he seemed to lead, however long the difference may continue. The gathering consisted of a lawyer, a folk musician, a painter with whom Brazil particularly enjoyed chatting, and a few others whose occupations and dispositions were little explored. When the company arrived at the Newcomer's abode, the folk musician took an immediate liking to the stage where, once he had procured an instrument, he began to pluck and string. The small, eclectic crowd was prepared and receptive to the making merry, and the moment just right. Brazil and the Newcomer danced inexpertly and the undersized crowd was receptive once more to the spun-yellow mood. Where there had been little joy prior, there now was some mirth and where there had been boredom, now there were higher spirits. The Xolos were in their element, prancing from guest to guest, receiving favors and treats prepared and given to guests in order to bribe the dogs. Dora sat passively for the most part, desiring attention from the Newcomer alone. Once or twice, she begged for and received a barely tolerated pat. When the dancing had ended, the Newcomer and the lawyer chatted long about business and tax law. Brazil was taken with the young woman painter whose interests seemed to mesh with her own. She and the

Newcomer enjoyed their city and its diversity. There they and their guest-entourage might find the rigidity of city life or the mollified disposition of Midwestern hospitality or any degree between the two, and they enjoyed their degrees. Both took delight in literature and they had wished to find a poetry-reading that suited their needs, but the scene was a difficult one. Each coterie of poets had their own, sometimes unrecognized, initiation rites and each time the pair began to visit a gathering of poets regularly, they refused to conform or mocked the group--sometimes openly. The result was that the two were regular visitors to poetry sites around the city, but they were never permanent members. They actually enjoyed a good deal of the writing, but there was a necessity to weed out the foul writings from the fine and most times neither had the patience, though they had the time, to do so. Their reputation among the various poetry coteries grew sour and flat. Sometimes, the pair would sit in the foremost seats and stare hard at the reader or whisper to one another, as they did with Capor. Brazil would giggle. They might take notes while a poet read or

“You wrote that this very evening, didn’t you?” Brazil or the Newcomer might say just loud enough that the poet was able to hear.

Some poets laughed and others paused in their reading, but the poetry that was well-written and meaningful was left unmolested. Neither of the two read any of their work, and Brazil enjoyed these times: that malice whose home was commonly hers sent to another. It was thus that the poetry-reading scene left the pair cold and dry after a time and having been delightedly disinvented to a few gatherings, they pondered a new outlet for their amusement. Since the pair regularly gathered bacchantes to mix and drown in lavender honey, they possessed, as they did now, at practically any given time a group of ready revelers.

Brazil thought of a way that the two might amuse themselves alongside their newfound comrades. During clear, cool March evenings such as this one, they took their guests to Wheaton where Brazil had grown up. She specifically targeted her old neighborhood, in a way dancing around the house where her mother still lived. Brazil had arranged carols that a given group might sing; she modified the song slightly and grew satisfied with its content. After the chatting and the folk music and a few rounds of drinks, some tuning of instruments, they were eager to begin. Since the gathering was spontaneous, they were little prepared and so during their initial rehearsal, not a single warbler sang in tune and most mispronounced the words or simply did not sing certain portions, but

once the crowd settled into comradery, they became a group finely arranged that not only sang all of the words, but even carried half of the tune. Brazil learned that she ought to be satisfied with as much and their provisional coterie meandered about Wheaton, door to door, knocking on wooden entrances and singing:

He is sweet upon the cities.
He drops to the boulevard from the running packs.
He wears the blessed skin of drab-olive; hunts the wild
homotherion and kills it.
He delights in street flesh.
He runs to the swamped cities, to the cities of *Homotheria* he runs!
He is *Pedai* who leads us!
Pedai! Pedai!
With crude the city flows! It flows with wine!
It runs with the blood of mercury!
Like charred amber in its scent
is the blaze of the torch he bears.
Flames rise from his trailing staff
as he runs, as he dances,
kindling the idlers,
spurring with cries,
and his black curls stream to the wind!
And he cries, as they cry, *Pedai!*
On, *Pedai!*
On, *Pedai!*
Follow, glory of *Pedai*,
hymning the other
with a tumble of drums,
with a cry, *Pedai!* To the industrialized god,
with a peal of vacant cries,
when the blessed lute like honey plays
the sacred warbling of those who go
to the cities!
to the cities!

During these songs, the Newcomer, his hair down and flowing, carried a torch while directing the hastily choreographed dance of the chortling warblers, and at one house near the end of their caroling Brazil managed to choreograph a group

dance performed while the song progressed; the Other ran and the dance made bonded delight. As often as not, their reverie was met with silence, dumbfoundedness, anger, or vacuous ignorance, but the people of Wheaton for the most part welcomed the warbling revelers. And Brazil with her Newcomer welcomed the new members; joy never seemed brighter and more fulfilling than within that group of strangers whose association was strong because temporary. After they returned to the Newcomer's abode, the sun arose before anyone wished to depart, and when the guests had left, the pair laughed to one another that the night had been a success.

"That is how every night ought to be."

And before the pair had decided to rest, Brazil donned her nightgown and sat to talk with the Newcomer. He had been alert and energetic all night, and she had been surprised that he teased no-one, his acerbity in remission. He prepared himself for bed, donning his pajamas and plaid green robe. They talked about how fruitful this crop had been, how they would invite the same group to partake again. He seemed serious and his demeanor changed, or rather it returned and then suddenly he arose and walked along the long hallway his face floorward. He made few sounds, seemed to have been afflicted something buried but now arrived at the top of his senses, as if to disrupt the mirth created by the charming, delighted company and the springtime caroling. He ran to the bathroom and Brazil was able to hear the ululating groans of a man vomiting. Dismayed, she, Dora alongside her on her ledge, carefully maneuvered themselves around the presence of the Newcomer leaning over the bathroom sink. Their eyes met through the mirror and Brazil was able to discern a look of fear and antipathy on the man's face, as if he had witnessed a murder of kin. He quickly turned his face away from hers while Dora reached down one of her paws, demanding that he carry her to his level. He jerked his frame away from the animal and at the same time pushed her off balance with the result that she slipped more than dropped onto the bathroom floor.

"Something wrong?" Brazil interrupted.

And the savage tone returned.

"Nothing. It's nothing. Leave me be."

"I was only concerned."

She thought.

“We were concerned,” referring to Dora.

The Newcomer glanced at his animal who had obstinately climbed atop the commode and was seeking his attention again with an outstretched paw. He grabbed the animal and held her tight against him in a seeming apology, then he dropped her gently, satisfied, to the floor where she trotted an exit out of the bathroom.

“You were so cheerful today I thought I’d drop dead from shock.” She teased him.

“I am as capable of warmth as you!” he bellowed.

The vehemence of his reaction startled Brazil, but she had become accustomed to him; the one who had danced and been so jovial was the one to whom she was unaccustomed. She wondered at his swing of mood.

“Go to bed. Stop pestering me.”

The next morning when Brazil awoke, her first thought was to check on the Newcomer. She thought perhaps it might be a bad idea, but she was too concerned to deny him the attention. She walked quietly to his room where the door was ajar. Nervously concerned, she pushed it slightly in order to observe his bed, but she found him absent from his comfortable sleeping place. She searched his home, looking for the troubled man, but he was nowhere to be found. She cleaned herself and dressed for the day, intending to return to her studio and art. Her day was spent nervously arranging and rearranging her work at the gallery. She did not encounter the odd old man who had chatted with her the previous day, and she felt somewhat disappointed, somewhat relieved. Her work was tedious it might seem, but a bliss to her, and when Brazil had arranged her bronze figures to her satisfaction for that day, she gave herself a rest. The time was the number two and she settled down on the floor atop some blankets in order to relax. She was roused by the sound of a woman wandering about the exhibit floor in high heels. The apparently conventional woman wore business clothes.

“Hello.”

“Oh, hello, nice to see you again.”

And Brazil recognized the woman artist from the night previous. She had dressed much differently then, khaki and black. They had chatted about their respective pursuits long and the woman had promised to visit Brazil’s exhibit. Brazil did not believe the woman would appear at her site so soon.

“I wanted to see what you were talking about.”

“Oh, yes, I’ve been trying to find the perfect narrative for the arrangement,” Brazil returned.

Brazil looked around at what she had accomplished, again unsatisfied.

“These pieces are just beautiful. Your descriptions don’t do them justice.”

The woman ran her hand along the body and face of the Dionysian figure who led the narrative.

“Thank you.”

“I’m sorry, I know I’m not supposed to touch, but I can’t help myself. The figures are so lifelike and yet they seem grotesque. That is intended, right?”

“It is.” Brazil smiled.

“I would love to show you my current piece. I just finished it.”

“Is that the one you told me about?” asked Brazil.

“Oh, no, no. This one is finished. It is a post-impressionistic piece, I guess you might say.”

The woman drove Brazil to the north side of the city. There the surroundings were vastly improved from the gallery where Brazil exhibited her work. Her new acquaintance was a financially independent Northsider who had a great deal of time on her hands. Her home was large, but modest. She directed Brazil to her

studio, which was similar to Brazil's. The painting she showed to Brazil was done in the post impressionistic style, lively colors. Provocative, it depicted a man in an alleyway stabbing another man, but the picture was difficult at first to discern. The dark of the alley contrasted wildly with the vibrant colors of the assailed man and the assailant was composed of dark colored, wide brush-strokes, as if emerging from the alleyway obscurity. The peculiar aspect of the painting was that the faces of the men ought to have been clearly visible to an observer standing so close as Brazil and her friend, but no details were available. The title of the piece was "Witness." Brazil was fascinated by the idea of a lack of comprehension at the point of what was supposed to be absolute clarity.

"And of course the title is appropriate," she thought.

Excited at the prospect of discussing art with this outrageous and ordinary woman, Brazil felt the vibration of her phone, and she was animated quickly. The display on her cell read "X." She unfolded it.

"Hello. Yeah. No. Yeah. No. No, no. Alright."

She closed her cell phone.

"I have to go," she explained.

"You must come again and bring your boyfriend with you," the woman said in a charming fashion.

"Yes, yes."

Brazil was again concerned about the Newcomer. He had, in the past, made sudden demands, but his voice sounded odd this time, as if he were on the verge of tears but was unable to admit to it. She made her way as fast as possible to Corpu-tech where he claimed to be, found him in his office. The Brown and the Black were wandering about the outer space of the office, the employees afraid to discipline--some afraid to even touch--them. She rounded up both animals and led them into his office where she saw that the Newcomer was clad in the same clothes he had worn the night previous, head buried in his hands.

"Hello." He greeted her with a damp, pleading smile.

“What’s going on?”

“Just having fun here at Corpu-tech.”

He seemed to have thrown darts against the window of the office; his jacket lie on the floor and one of his shoes was missing.

“Really, what is your problem? Where were you all day?”

Half of the Newcomer’s long hair fell down across his face as he leaned over his desk. He sat, and leaned himself back in his chair while he groaned.

“I was defending myself.”

“From what? What are you talking about?”

The Newcomer did not answer and Brazil sighed exasperation.

“I am not able to help you, if you don’t tell me any thing,” she asserted.

The Newcomer came to Brazil and cupped her shoulder in his hand. He bent over and hugged the woman who recognized that he had not slept all night. The next few weeks were a repetition of similar events. The Newcomer regained his composure with Brazil’s assistance, and just when he appeared to have recovered, she would find him thrown to despair, disheveled or pleading forgiveness from some shade. She once found him digging through garbage.

“Dumpster diving,” he said.

Again and again, she found ways to bring him back to his senses, but she recognized a peculiar pattern. He would regain his senses until the subject of Mallory arose in conversation, or when they visited him. He made certain that Mallory had the best care, even treated his mechanic as if he were one of his own. Brazil even became annoyed at the preferential treatment afforded the drunken opportunist. Still, she continued to bring the Newcomer back to his senses and she recognized that he muttered certain phrases, or certain very similar phrases, over and over again when he had these episodes.

“Only protecting myself”, “Delivery-boy mugger”, “Ignorant slob” were particular favorites.

The pair continued their gathering of fools, and, assisted by the Newcomer, Mallory convalesced in his home, but the comradeship and revelry that they attained that one day was rarely successfully imitated, never repeated. Brazil noted that the gatherings were becoming more frequent, as if the Newcomer were looking much harder for something that he had always been seeking. He confessed to her that he had thought Mallory was the one he sought, but he remained uncertain, thought that he would find this person more by accident or instinct than anything else. Once, when the Newcomer was in a particularly deep testiness, he smashed several chairs in his penthouse, the animals running frightened. Always, he calmed down and out of the ordinary he sometimes apologized to Brazil, but especially to his animals who at times bore the brunt of his ravings, if not physical abuse. He harmed no-one and was profoundly regretful after his outbursts, which was out of the ordinary. Eventually, Brazil became wearied and emotionally worn down. She was uncertain how to contend with him, since he was always rather unmanageable. Unable to manage himself, he might cause great harm.

Thus their bond.

TARNISH BROWN THE YELLOW GIANT

Leon Ochrowskovich did not understand his predicament at all, no not at all. He had met with Dareios over the course of the last few months and Dareios wanted information about him and Corpu-tech operations. Well, to be sure Leon provided information about the workings of Corpu-tech and such a man as Adder Dareios always benefitted from bits of intelligence about rival companies, but Corpu-tech was hardly the caliber of business entities owned or operated by Dareios Inc.

“No, no. Not at all, not at all.”

Leon was confused indeed, but perhaps he knew what was happening at the same time. Leon met with him at lunch semi-regularly. He always treated Leon to some of the best food that he had eaten and indeed the restaurant was an elegant spectacle with its many-course meals and shirts and ties immaculately cleaned and the perfectly ordered tables. Leon was in Nirvana with his belly full and his aesthetic exquisite, and Dareios appeared to treat him as though he were at least a valuable contact, if not an equal. It was thus that Leon informed Adder about the workings of Corpu-tech: that there had been no downsizing, that the company did not seem to generate income but remained financially stable. Once informed of these facts, Dareios inquired about the politics of Corputech: who did what when, when and where did the Newcomer arrive.

Leon, the ultimate insider, knew most of the details. He had noticed that the Newcomer was coming into the office more frequently. He did not assume a managerial role, but rather the Newcomer appeared, frequently shadowed later by the large, orange-red streaked woman, planted himself in his office with the door closed and then emerged hours later only to depart until the next day or even the day after that. Leon explained to Dareios that the Newcomer seemed to be disheveled.

“I assume such a man to be ordinarily quite well-kept, yes, well kept, and immaculately dressed, certainly aesthetically proper. But, he seems to have it rough, yes, yes, I do mean rough. I will tell you everything and hold nothing back.”

Leon knew few details of the reason for the Newcomer's condition , but Adder was delighted to listen.

“Of course, I am not happy that he's having a bad time, but I am hopeful that I may be able to help him, as I have done for others. I know the rigors of entrepreneurship and how they affect a young man,” Dareios reassured a well-intended Leon.

Leon was overjoyed that he had provided much-needed information to Dareios, but Dareios was not really sponsoring Leon's project; he was merely receiving information, and Leon had reservations about sharing information regarding Corpu-tech. That he was betraying a trust kept Leon awake at night sometimes. He cared for practically everyone who crossed his path, like Felina and Hal Joystick, and he had done so almost all of his life. His father had died when Leon was a boy and, emotionally speaking, he had cared for his mother ever since. He had suspected that women avoided romantic relationships with him because he had a close bond with his mother.

“They compete with the mother, they do. I've seen it.”

He listened attentively to many women complain about their boyfriends or their fathers, and when they had purged their emotions, they departed most times only to meet precisely the same sort of emotional thief from which they had freed themselves, ignoring the yellow-spun, gregarious giant of a man before them. Leon also cared for his superiors, like the Brigade. He was, in fact, continuing his association with Adder in order to keep the Brigade from becoming involved more deeply in intrigue. And now he was concerned about his superior, the Newcomer. Still, Leon had little choice. He would be unable to defend himself against the assault of a man like Dareios who wielded so much power. Thus did Leon obsess over his bond with the powerful man repeatedly, and still

“I'll tell them that everything will be fine, just fine. And I'd reassure them that all of their disagreements are mere wind and smoke. Yes, wind and smoke, that's

all they are.”

Leon agonized over his situation for more weeks as Dareios inquired further about Corpu-tech, but there was nothing more to tell. He explained that he might not be of any more real assistance to the great man and in the process the project that Leon had been completing for years faded into the recess of his concerns. He did, however, believe that he was able to perform a service to both Mr. Dareios and the Newcomer. He thought that if he were able to bring the two men together, both might benefit. And, if things went well, that is if they were genteel and kind to one another as one might naturally expect, Leon’s position would be itself elevated and though Leon always did, yes did always, wish and attempt the best for everyone, he remained an ambitious man, yes he did. Now, the trouble, the trouble was that Leon had no plan to bring the two men together. He thought that he might persuade the Brigade to organize the company picnic somewhere near Dareios or his office, but the picnic was some time away, and the sooner the two men met the better, yes so much the better. Leon imagined that he might arrange a meeting with the Newcomer and with Dareios at the same time, but his ruse would then be obvious to both men and should their bond be weak, or break, Leon would suffer for it.

“No, no, Leon must not suffer,” thought Leon.

How to arrange the meeting continued to plague Leon as had many other machinations over the years. He did feel as though he was doing a service here, yes a service to all, and everyone might benefit.

“Yes, yes, it is all a good enterprise, but how?”

Leon then imagined that if he simply approached both men, told them that he knew they would be a fine team, they might react well and have the best of relationships, but then Leon thought--yes Leon was careful--he thought that if the Newcomer were to inquire about how Adder Dareios associated with Leon, his superior might become suspicious, or worse, he might even guess that Leon had an agreement with Dareios, and disclosure of his bond with Dareios would bring disaster upon Leon. Leon decided that he did not like involvement in intrigue such as now plagued him.

“No, not at all.”

Still, he continued to wonder how he might bring the two men together.

“Why am I unable to be honest with both men?” he wondered.

Now, the trouble, the trouble with honesty was not the honesty itself, no not that at all. The trouble with honesty was that all would be there on the table for all to see, and Leon may not fare well in that instance. Also, the Brigade would become very nervous about who knows what and what happens due to whose knowledge. Leon must be careful not to involve the Brigade, and of course he must ensure that the Newcomer be pleased, and Dareios must profit, and most of all Hal and Felina must be able to continue their employment at Corpu-tech. Everything rested on Leon’s shoulders, and he was determined to make everything good, yes make it all good for everyone. Leon came to his decision one morning shortly after he had awoken. It seemed to him that he had thought about the matter all night and had arrived at a decision after a long deliberation with himself.

“I will simply approach each man and tell him that they simply must meet.”

He was resolute.

“I will make my goal in life to forge a strong bond between them.”

Again, Leon did not know how to go about it precisely, but he was resolute, yes resolute indeed. He thought that he would first approach the Newcomer, since he was readily available. Leon waited and watched. He knew that the Newcomer typically arrived in the office during the late morning followed a few hours later by the large red-orange woman whose name Leon continued to forget. Leon thought that he might chat with his superior before she arrived, yes that will be the right time, the correct time that is. Thus, one fine Wednesday morning, late, around the number eleven and thirty he rapped lightly on the office door of the Newcomer. He heard no response, so Leon knocked again, this time a bit louder than prior. He heard no noise, but the louder rap opened the door. He peered in, seeing that the Newcomer sat alone, his back to the door. His chair faced the office window, which was practically the entire wall-space.

“Hello.” Leon began meagerly.

He shuffled nervously into the room, looking about this way and that. He

attempted to take everything in that he was able, memorizing.

“Are you in, that is, are you here...”

The Newcomer turned his chair round so that he faced Leon who grew startled at his appearance, but Leon retained his composure. His clothes were clean and his face well-shaven, but the mien of the Newcomer was different. He sagged in his chair as if some air had been let out of him. He appeared haggard and his ordinary vigor was absent.

“What do you want, Leon?”

“I came to...well...you see I have arrived here...I...”

“As you can see, I am very busy here.”

There were no papers on his desk, nothing to indicate that the Newcomer was engaged in any work.

“Well, sir, I will come right out and say it, yes, I will. After all, there is no need to hold back and I will tell everything, yes, openness and honesty will reign this day.”

“Leon...”

“I wish to say that I believe you and another man I have come to know may make an unbeatable team. That is, I have the utmost respect for you both and both are industrious figures...”

“Who, or what, are you talking about?”

“I mean to say, that is, the man I mean is Adder Dareios who seems to me to have an interest in you as well.”

Leon let the last part slip almost without notice. He was accustomed to telling all and all would be told so that everyone would benefit, but he ordinarily told all through a series of phases, not all at once as he just did, producing a situation that may prove volatile. Leon needed to remain calm, yes he did. The Newcomer’s ordinary tenebrous appearance seemed to Leon the ochre giant to

be exasperated by a darker presence, a weight on the man's wits. The skin on his face took on more the appearance of leather. As if a man staggered by dismay, he leaned back in his chair a bit while he patted one of his green-collared dogs. The animals alone inspired a grin on his chiseled face.

"Now, how do you know Adder Dareios?"

Leon had prepared himself for this moment, but now that it had come he stumbled.

"I have had...well...that is I met the man at a gathering..."

"A gathering?"

And running with it, "Yes, and I have been fortunate enough to meet with him. A remarkable man, a truly remarkable man, I understand."

"And, you want to do what?"

"Well, you see it occurred to me that you and he are in a sense kindred spirits."

The Newcomer obviously did not find the implication pleasing.

"That is to say that you and he are on equal footing, you see. He is an entrepreneur like you..."

"I am not an entrepreneur and I might add that he is self-made. I make my self."

Leon was not certain what this meant but

"Well, I'll be honest with you, sir. I believe that men of stature ought to associate with men of stature. It seems to me that you might forge a powerful bond."

The Newcomer knitted his brows as he rose from his chair. He tapped his fingernails on his desk and then he gazed at the greencollared Brown Xolo who had set himself down near the exit to the office. He approached the dog and

massaged its side. The animal responded with a tail-wag and “Rhumpfh.”

“Leon, I want you to leave my office,” he said in an irritated tone without looking up.

“Yes, yes of course, sir, but just consider...”

“Go.”

“Just consider that you may need the companionship and I know that he recognizes the rigors of entrepreneurship and its affects on young men,” Leon said rapidly.

The Newcomer turned aggressively away from the animal, and Leon, sensing that his welcome had ended, exited the office faster than one might imagine a tawny gregarious giant might be able. The next few weeks were pure torture for Leon who felt as if he had not only failed, but that his real association with Dareios might be revealed. Again, he thought of ways to bring the two men together as he watched the Newcomer arrive and depart each day, or every other day as the case may be. Each day drew the Newcomer further into what appeared to be impending implosion--sleeping sprawled out on his office floor, disappearing for days, wildly inebriated. The large orange-red woman who accompanied him less and less was almost as harried as he. Leon thought that he might chat with her.

Thus their bond.

PURPLE TREATMENT FOR THE UNFORTUNATE

Mallory's head hurt. He had been awoken in the early morning by the sound of something smashed on the floor of his home. The Newcomer had insisted that he support Mallory in his convalescence, and Mallory was glad that he was willing to do whatever was necessary in order that he be comfortable, but there were incidents that made him anxious. He wanted a closer bond to this wealthy, wellconnected person. He might be able to drive a wedge between him and that fat bitch who hovered above and around him as it were some comic-strip witch. Mallory's body still ached a bit when he moved or when he performed ordinary tasks, but the exercises he did and the medication that he took strengthened his body and numbed his mind sufficiently. He had been surprised that the Newcomer visited him so often; had assisted personally bringing Mallory back to his apartment and even minor details that Mallory never tended were now no concern for Mallory at all. The Newcomer was talkative, and to Mallory's surprise, jovial. In fact, Mallory did not know how to interpret the Newcomer's attitude at first. He suspected that he would begin his usual mocking, but he continued to see to Mallory's every need. Mallory noted that the Newcomer appeared to be somewhat deflated since his accident with the engine hoist, some useful change.

The Newcomer brought his jade-collared animals with him almost everywhere--Mallory decided was not particularly fond of them--but at least they were dogs. He would not have been able to contend with that cat who ran around the Newcomer's penthouse just out of reach; sometimes he wanted a pellet-gun to drive the animal out of sight--hit it right in the ass. Mallory even began to enjoy the visits of the Newcomer, not only because they appeared to annoy Brazil, but also because the animals were therapeutic. The two dogs had a particularly joyous time running after green balls that the Newcomer threw about Mallory's home. They also heartily enjoyed games of tug with a rubber chew-pull toy, entertainment which was true therapy. Mallory grudgingly enjoyed the green

tug-toy game with the Brown Xolo who favored him as well, the dog attempting to drag Mallory out of his chair or bed. Mallory noticed as well that Brazil was in as sorry a state as the Newcomer. He teased her at times with the knowledge that they were both at odds with circumstances. What orange-clad joy it was. And there presented itself another opportunity for Mallory. The red-orange fat woman was accustomed to chatting with the Newcomer in private, but since Mallory's accident, the Newcomer appeared to share more with Mallory. It even seemed to Mallory that he was barred from no conversation, but that Brazil was present when they chatted.

"I had a strange visit from Leon the other day," the Newcomer observed. Brazil merely laughed, expecting the Newcomer to do the same.

"Who do you mean?" asked Mallory.

"You remember the large, friendly man who did a lot of the talking at the Mazurka?"

"The one who looks like a giant dandelion?"

"He wanted me to meet with Adder Dareios."

"What?" Brazil seemed surprised.

"He said that the man had been inquiring about me and that he thought Dareios and I might 'forge a strong bond.'"

The idea amused the Newcomer.

"That clown has got to go. You said so yourself," Brazil interjected.

Mallory recalled the title of her sketch "Drunken Opportunist."

"I don't know. He seemed to pull everyone together."

The Newcomer was silent, but pensive.

"What?! We make fun of that guy in our spare time.

‘Mere wind and smoke, yes, wind and smoke is all,’”

Brazil quoted derisively. The Newcomer remained silent.

“I think he’s not a bad guy, once you get used to him,”
Mallory added.

“He’s an oaf.”

Mallory was thoroughly enjoying himself.

“He seems to have everyone’s best interests at heart. I
had a friend like him once. He was annoying most of
the time, but when the cards were down, he was there
for you.”

Mallory mixed his metaphor with a lie, but all for a good cause.

Thus their emerging bond.

A BLACKENED YELLOW AND A TAWNY BLACK

Leon remained unsure how he would contend with his current predicament. He had showered properly this morning; all had gone well. The bathroom steamed perfectly and he had achieved the suitable proportion of hot and cold water-mixture so that as the room steamed, just enough of the vapor exited through the small window inside of the shower-cell. He would be able to observe himself in the mirror without the cumbersome necessity of wiping its surface with a towel. He lathered heavily, naturally a tawny scent, and his ordinary half-hour of shower soaking was quite pleasant. He had also opened the door of the bathroom at precisely the correct time in order that once he clothed himself, he felt comfortable, not an ounce of sweat or smell disturbed his perfectly cologned existence. The ride to work: perfect. The walk along the street, watching the pedestrians, and the morning air: exquisite. Everything had gone well until he arrived in the office that morning. Leon greeted Felina.

“Felina the great.”

He chatted with Hal Joystick and the Brigade about the Bulls. All of those interactions and necessities went well. He noted that the Newcomer had arrived early in his office, that the dogs were with him, this time not running about the office. Leon wanted to chat with the Newcomer once again, but he recalled painfully that the man was most times unpredictable. Leon wondered whether the Newcomer obtained good sleep regularly, from the look of things present probably not. And Leon inferred that his state of insomnia must be atypical, since he did not strike Leon as a man who was concerned enough for anything to disrupt his slumber. He was about to knock on the door to the Newcomer’s office when he realized that he did not have a prop with him. Leon occasionally needed some kind of tool, a piece of clothing, even a pen or pencil, to hold so that he might comfortably fidget while he chatted. It allowed him to relax and he was then able to converse and to persuade, even to charm, without hindrance.

Today, Leon needed a cup of water to drink, to place on a counter, to retrieve and even perhaps to toast or to use to point out a fine picture or refer to a good thought. He would be able to sip, and therefore delay, his conversation so that he had time to think, but the water became the first obstacle that barred him from good humor for most of the day. He returned to the entrance of the office where was located the water-cooler, jug on its head that it is. He pushed down the knob as he always did, but no water trickled out. Leon smacked the plastic foundation within which the jug sat, but only a few lingering drops of water dripped along into his waiting cup. He did not at first panic, since there must be water-jugs waiting to be depleted. He asked Felina

“Where are the water-jugs?”

“Where they always are?”

She led him to the storage-closet where several empty jugs sat, waiting to return to the water company in order to be refilled. Leon and Felina looked about, but there were no full water-jugs that Leon might sit atop the plastic foundation of the water-cooler where, its substance depleted, it might assist him in his endeavor today. The lack of jugged water was distressing.

Certainly, Leon was capable of sleeping soundly when his job was threatened. Assuredly, he was able to save Corpu-tech while maintaining a balancing act between sharing information with the Brigade, charming a dangerously unpredictable magnate, and chatting amicably with a superior whose thorny personality assailed everyone. But because he had no suitable prop, Leon began to panic. He shuffled through the empty water-jugs, hoping that Felina and he had missed the only full jug in the closet. He looked again and again, even shaking the jugs in order to determine how much water might be inside. None were present. Leon ran back to the water-cooler, looking around to see if any half-depleted jugs might be there. None present. He returned to the closet only to find that Felina had not only departed, but she was now located at her desk, tending her own tasks once more.

“Why did you leave?” he yelled at more than asked Felina.

She gave him an incredulous look, then sighed.

“Sorry, Leon.”

The two then returned to the water-closet where Felina opened the door, her eyes rolling about in her head. Leon once again searched the pile of water-jugs for one that might possess some small amount of needed liquid. He was in mid-panic at this time.

“Why don’t you just get some water from the bath room?” Felina asked.

Leon was on his knees, looking under a shelf that held up photocopy paper. His rust corduroy jeans were becoming unkempt and he thought he was able to detect the slight emanation of sweat on his person. More and more aggravated, he remained calm. He did not comprehend why Felina of all persons did not understand his predicament.

“I must have a prop, yes, I must have a prop.”

“So, get a prop. Take a pencil with you.”

“No. Water! I need water today.”

“Get some water from the bathroom sink. Drink that.”

Again, Leon was unable to fathom Felina’s ignorance. He turned his head toward her while he remained kneeling.

“Are you mad? I can’t drink water from the *bathroom*. I must have liquid from a proper water-jug,” Leon said calmly, though he was quite upset.

Leon rushed back to the water-cooler where several thoroughly examined water-jugs resided under a table, and he once more rummaged through the empty containers, this time wildly throwing some of them out of his way and rolling others out into the hall and around the desks of his fellow employees who stared back at him. Ordinarily, of course, Leon was annoyingly optimistic, even unrealistic in the face of certain disaster, which he most-times narrowly avoided. But now...

“You’re crazy.”

Leon ignored Felina and continued to rummage and spill water-jugs into the hallway until there were no remaining empty containers to fling. Felina was incredibly dense today.

“Get some damn water from *Heisters* downstairs.” Felina was referring to a local convenience store located in the same building.

Leon paused and stared out into space for a moment. Perhaps bottled water would suffice, but he wasn’t certain that it would be adequate. Conceivably, if he poured the water into the cup that he regularly used to contain water-jug water, he might be able to do it. Just as suddenly as Leon had crawled onto the storage-closet floor, he arose and began hurriedly placing the empty jugs back where they had been.

“Felina, get me some of that water,” he commanded more than asked.

Felina did not like the tone that Leon took with her, but because Leon was Leon, she overlooked his attitude this particular time and walked calmly and slowly downstairs in order to purchase bottled water, her speed being Leon’s punishment. Leon dusted himself off and washed his face in the bathroom. He wetted a bathroom towel and ran the damp paper over the clothes that had kissed the floor of the office.

“Not in perfect order, but presentable enough, yes, presentable enough,” he thought to himself.

Leon was pacing back and forth near his cubicle when Felina arrived with the desired liquid. He had grown worried wondering how the procurement of a small amount of liquid could take so long for an adult female. He dared not complain to Felina, since he knew that she would not receive criticism lightly at this particular time, accurate though it may be.

“No, no, time to be calm. Relax and smile gracefully,” he told himself.

Leon rapped on the door to the Newcomer’s office, since he was prepared now for his encounter. His dress was immaculate and hair perfectly sculpted; he carried the water-cup in his hand and he had even taken some sips from it in order to say truthfully that he wanted refreshment, but no answer returned.

Curious, yes, curious indeed.

He was able to observe that warm bodies of amicable creatures with jade collars moved within--the dogs seemed to be wandering about--yet the form of man remained motionless in the office chair. Leon thought that the Newcomer was a damned peculiar man, quite peculiar undeniably. Still, Leon knew that he was helping his superior, and that was what remained important. His efforts were always well-intended and he was a welcome sight to those who associated with him; it was a matter of course that almost everyone liked him, recognized the good graces that surrounded Leon. Leon thus felt perfectly comfortable easing the door open after he had rapped twice, received no answer and perceived little motion within. When he entered, the Newcomer paid little heed to Leon, but sat peering forward in an apparent attempt to examine documents in front of him. Leon was uncertain, yes uncertain, about what he ought to do next. He had opened the door, and he found himself in the strange place out on the edge of the Newcomer's awareness. He was certain to be observed, soon, and he had rapped on the door, encountered no reaction and presently helped himself to an entrance. Were he to close the door, he would be observed. Were he to move, his motion certainly would bring the tawny giant's presence to the center of the Newcomer's awareness. Leon felt as if he were unable to budge; he was even unable to sip from his water-cup in order to relax himself enough to determine how to extricate himself from this potentially embarrassing position. He continued to stare at the Newcomer, dumbfounded.

"LEON, WHAT DO YOU WANT?!" suddenly emerged from an irate Newcomer's mouth.

Leon instinctively sipped his absurd refreshment and followed the gesture by dropping the container, which bounced off of his foot and poured cool liquid into the fine, tawny, suede shoe that adorned so delicately his massive foot. Leon bent down in order to retrieve the cup, which was practically empty, and he managed a kind of bumble-some boogie as the cup refused to surrender its freedom to his well-manicured hand. As a result, he did not reply immediately to the question of the Newcomer, but stood bent-over on the threshold of unemployment, shifting his weight back and forth. Ordinarily, such clowning would amuse the Newcomer.

"I am glad to...that is I...," Leon managed to express,

still bent over.

He managed to tame the renegade water-cup, the fluid remaining on the floor before him. He stood straight and observed a rather disheveled young man who had apparently been observing some paperwork on his desk. Leon edged more closely towards the Newcomer.

“I HAVE NO TIME FOR THIS,” the Newcomer added.

“Oh, yes, sir, I mean to say that I simply wished that you and I might chat. You see, quite honestly, yes quite honestly, I am, as you have no doubt already surmised, a bit of a talker. I wished only to know only what I might be able to do for you...,” Leon managed to stammer out, having been thrown off by his inadequate entrance and the absence of water in his prop.

“LEON, GET OUT OF MY OFFICE AND DO NOT RETURN,” the Newcomer raged suddenly, his tone not in keeping with the severity of the event.

“In fact, Ochrowskovich, I want you to go to your desk and pack your belongings. You are no longer a part of this office.” The Newcomer expressed himself in a soft-spoken rage.

Leon himself was taken aback by the strength of the response. He did not know what to do, but “I only wanted...” he managed.

“Go now, Leon” was the quietly raged response.

Leon quickly exited the office and assessed the damage to his suede shoe, his joblessness not yet registering in his mind. He removed his soaked shoe and having alighted to the lavatory, he wrapped it in bathroom towels, hoping that the water would seep into the absorbent paper.

“Expensive loss” went through Leon’s head.

And while he was pressing the paper onto the leather,
“...go to your desk and pack your belongings...” ran over the crest of his mind.

Leon paused while he pondered what those words mean. He recognized that the Newcomer was often in rather mean spirits, but the present occasion appeared to be somewhat worse than usual. Leon wondered if the Newcomer might actually be serious about firing him. The very idea seemed absurd on its face, but it was possible that Leon would be unemployed in the morning, that is if he had not already lost his job. The shoe was drying out properly--it seemed--and at least that much was right in the world. Still, Leon began to think about his mother and how he was their primary source of income. He wondered what he would say to her when he returned home, and fear fell down into his belly. There are hospital bills and mortgage payments, taxes and miscellaneous expenses that required tending, and for the first time Leon began to feel nervous during a crisis; he had, after all, always worked at Corpu-tech. He was unable to leave. At least, that was how it seemed. He walked to his cubicle and observed that the Newcomer had not yet removed himself from his self-imposed solitude in his office. Leon considered talking with Felina about his predicament, but he believed she would create more anxiety than she relieved, having a tendency to overreact, Leon thought. Her reaction this morning about his need for proper water proved her lack of empathy as well. Felina was a fine person, but there were times when she yelled at Leon for no good reason.

“Yes, Felina will only blame me for this unforeseen predicament,” he thought.

Perhaps he would be able to chat with the Brigade about what he ought to do, Leon thought.

“No, the Brigade will react in the same unreasonable way that Felina does,” he considered.

It was odd how these two very different persons reacted in a remarkably similar manner to situations in which Leon found himself. It wasn't as if Leon had not assisted the two of them in the past. He thought about it for a moment and then he realized that he ought to consider a plan of action on his own. The notion that he must be alone in the matter was discomfiting to him but that he was unable to chat with anyone made him nervous to the point of fidgeting. He walked to the back of the office-space, away from the Newcomer's office, all the while his chin in hand. Observing that the Newcomer was unlikely to emerge from his office, Leon walked back to the front of the office arena. The water-jug had by this time been replaced by the nearly silent, thin adolescent male who bears such

things on a cart once per week. Now the water proved aggravating to Leon, but he filled his water-cup nonetheless. He continued to ponder his next action while he imagined scenarios of financial and psychological ruin. He would be forced to leave the family of friends he had developed at Corputech, if he lost his job. He may even be forced to work elsewhere, or to sell some of his belongings in order to support himself and his mother. His health was certain to deteriorate, since a good man must work in order to prove his value to others.

“No, no I cannot go without working,” he thought, but maybe he said it aloud.

While Leon considered his future, his belongings remained at his desk and he began to pace about the office-space back and forth. Hal Joystick thought that Leon was behaving erratically, but then Leon always behaved in an odd manner. Hal watched and listened as Leon passed by more than four times.

“Shoes must stay fit.”

“I’ll keep the drive, yes he’ll not deny me...he knows I deserve it.”

“Mother must dress well.”

Hal was likely to have heard Leon mumble as his gait became more and more quick and his face reddened, deepening in hue to purple. Leon stopped by the now-refilled water-jug at least five times while he refilled his cup and planned his next maneuver.

“I must not see him now. The time is simply not ripe, no.”

Felina witnessed Leon’s meandering and recognized it for what it was. She was not concerned, since Leon was so capable of extricating himself from bad situations and she recognized that he must be contending with another bad situation, like the one with the water-jug this morning.

“What a clown.”

Felina had not interacted much with the Newcomer; she thought the man was eccentric and she suspected, perhaps rightly, that he was the difficult kind. He had always been distant when he arrived, and that strange rotund woman with the red- or orange-streaked hair and the dogs disturbed her somewhat. She

remained distant from all of them, wanted to remain as far from them as she was able, and she had experienced no trouble keeping the Newcomer at a distance; he wanted nothing from her and he rarely talked with anyone who didn't initiate a conversation. He was aloof and in general impenetrable, more for Felina to dislike and to project upon him. She thought that Leon was a bit strange himself, but in an endearing way. She did not believe that the Newcomer was capable of endearing himself to anyone. And when she saw him over the past few weeks, she saw a man who was agitated, more disruptive than usual. The Newcomer often smelled of one or more kinds of alcohol, or particularly rancid nicotine. Once, when she had seen him sleeping in the office, she noted that one of the dogs had defecated in a corner away from the entrance to his office, and he did nothing to remove it. When Felina saw it, after almost everyone had departed, she noticed that it had been in that spot for at least a few days, but no-one mustered the courage to remove it, or to inform the Newcomer of its presence. Perhaps no-one paid any attention to it, or they were apprehensive of a reaction. She gathered it in a plastic bag and disposed of it in the office trash-bin. Felina was nothing if not sanitary. She learned it from Leon, she did. Felina sometimes wished that he would go back to where he came. She was therefore surprised to see the Newcomer approaching her at her desk. He seemed less haughty in the manner he talked to her, but he was apparently cheerless. He seemed slightly deflated, a bit pathetic. And Felina felt a slight tinge of sympathy for him.

"Where is Leon's station?" he asked Felina.

She remained suspicious.

"His desk is over there." Felina pointed to Leon's immaculate work-station.

Leon himself sat at the desk, talking to no-one. The Newcomer thought at first that Leon was using a hands-free line, or that he possessed an earpiece that allowed him to chat with an invisible, yet real, person, but when the Newcomer approached him, he realized that Leon was indeed chatting with aether.

"...know that I deserve it, I'll say. And he will agree" the Newcomer heard when he approached Leon.

Leon ceased chatting when he recognized the incoming Newcomer, but he did not immediately turn his head toward the man. Leon greeted him with a contrite

countenance and stood up before him, as if facing royalty. Not even slightly embarrassed, Leon rolled directly into what appeared to be a rehearsed speech.

“Yes, sir, hello and good greetings to you. I realize you may object to my continued presence here, but there are many good reasons why I’ve not yet departed, and I wish that you would consider, simply consider, that my employment at Corpu-tech is well worth the patience and investment...”

The Newcomer lifted his hand in the air, as if to ward off Leon’s barrage of arguments. His air softened, the appearance of a kind expression emerged. One was able to observe the fragility of the expression and the effort exerted by the Newcomer.

“Leon, let me apologize for my behavior. I have been under great stress recently and I am a bit out of sorts.”

Leon shifted his weight to the left.

“...I want you to remain at Corpu-tech and I hope you take no offense at my words.”

The present thoughts were authentic, something about their tone, but Leon was unsure whether he ought to take them seriously, or launch an assault of words that might prevent the Newcomer from explaining that he was fired anyway, or that he was joking.

Instead “I wish to make the humblest apologies myself,” he explained. “I ought not have entered your office unbidden, a lesser man going to the house of a better.” He laughed.

The Newcomer approached Leon and Leon’s initial impulse was to shrink from the encounter. The Newcomer amicably placed his hand on the tawny giant’s shoulder.

“I think one ought to get along with everyone possible. There is so much strife,” the Newcomer mused aloud with his voice trailing off at the end of his sentence. Leon was surprised to hear such sentiments and again his initial reaction was to raise his guard and protect himself. He sensed that the Newcomer’s words were authentic and he remained cautiously optimistic, as usual.

“Oh, you’ve taken the words from my mouth,” Leon said.

“I wish to be a moral man. A good, moral man.”

Leon did not understand the Newcomer’s words, though he suspected they related to whatever plagued him.

“Our morality is as organic as our life.” he stated.

Leon gave the Newcomer a puzzled expression.

“We grow into it, you know,” he continued.

The topic seemed to emerge from nowhere.

“You mean that we must act amorally before we can act morally?” Leon asked.

“I mean maybe we merely grow and our decency is not possible without baseness. No-one wishes to admit to its fragility. Perhaps morality is born, it grows and it abides precariously balanced until we die, or until it fades or vanishes.” The Newcomer stopped there.

“How does one grow in this manner?” Leon was genuinely curious.

“Bonds, I suppose.” The Newcomer wondered.

Leon sensed an initial irritation in the Newcomer. He listened civilly, even with an affable interest. Yet Leon resisted the urge to encompass the man with a massive bear-hug. That was too much, yes, too much.

“I’ve always embraced whoever will allow me to embrace them,” Leon continued. “I wish only to do what is right in the world, you see.” He went on.

The Newcomer turned away from Leon and Leon suspected that the man had

had enough, that his usual character resurfaced, but the Newcomer motioned to Leon to follow him into his office. The two men sat down at the direction of the Newcomer, Leon onto a recliner beside the Newcomer's desk and the Newcomer onto a sofa nearby. The proximity of the men was unusual, but Leon was in his element. They chatted affably long into that afternoon and found that they shared an interest in technology, though the Newcomer was critical of it. Leon had researched the Talbot-Lago for just such an occasion and they were thus able to chat about one of the Newcomer's projects. At one point, the Newcomer asked about the employees of Corpu-tech and the history of the company; and Leon surrendered what information he possessed without betraying any significant trust.

"Who is able to judge the character of a man?" Leon thought to himself as he noted in passing some of the documents on the Newcomer's desk. "Are you investing?" he asked.

"I have some various investments in different places," the Newcomer responded, giving a rare glimpse into what was private control over a public world.

"Ah, the world of finance, one that will forever elude me." Leon laughed largely.

"To be honest, Leon, you are missing very little. I am weary of the constant attention paid to this investment here and to that one there. The numbers tire one out after a time."

The Newcomer paused.

"Unless, that is, one possesses a certain personality."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the kind of personality that really is no personality at all," the Newcomer surrendered.

"I can imagine what you mean." Leon agreed in part.

Leon noticed that most of the legal documents that lay on the Newcomer's desk had the heading "Geldsbaum, Gesetzbrecker and Geldsgewalt" on them. He nodded at the Newcomer's statement and the two continued a pleasant conversation, but Leon was distracted by some of the documents. This man was quite wealthy.

Thus their new bond.

ORIGIN OF A VERMILLION CHARACTER

Brazil was angry and that situation was a common one. She had been a friend of and associate with the Newcomer for some time now, she recalled years, but she was unable to remember now precisely how long they had been acquainted.

“How was it that we met?” she asked herself.
“Oh yeah...that’s right.”

She recalled only after a few moments thought that the two had met at one of her art showings. He had been impressed with her sculpture; that was it. He claimed to admire the universal appeal of the work coupled with the peculiar texture of the metal. Brazil always gave the outer layer of her sculptures a rough surface, really different degrees of roughness and smoothness was the aim. Otherwise, despite some purposeful distortions, each sculpture was technically precise and realistic; she captured the likeness of the figures--standing four feet tall or so--in detail and realism; her distortions communicated, and she recognized how that rough tendency had arisen. She was certain that her perspective arose largely from her association with her family. They were upper middle class members of the community of Wheaton, accustomed to obtaining precisely what they wished--believing as they pleased. Brazil had been the oldest of her siblings and she had grown up possessing an impetuous character. Her mother had been the parent who disciplined her, and because Brazil was incorrigible, her mother had resorted to strict, one might say vicious, methods. The motivation had been, of course, laudable; Brazil’s mother wanted her to act in a moral way, and she believed that her daughter needed direction. In fact, the family was convinced, largely by Brazil’s mother, that the former obese woman was an incorrigible reprobate. She drank alcohol; she used drugs at times; she had premarital sex and she questioned whatever authority was before her. As a result, she regularly found herself without support from many of her family members, her siblings

frightened at the prospect of suffering at her mother's hands. She would be the only sibling missing from the family Christmas celebration, or she celebrated her birthdays at the house of a friend. Brazil had been awoken on several occasions in the middle of the night by her mother and beaten in order to rid the girl of the demons that possessed her, at times the demon residing in Brazil's hair and so her mother tore out the negative influence. Despite the obvious physical trauma apparent on the body of her child, Brazil's mother felt perfectly entitled to discipline her. Brazil thus had experienced a heavy moral hand. Most times heavy with alcohol, Brazil had survived on the good will and generosity of a number of persons in the small community within Chicago where she and the Newcomer met. She had virtually eliminated each opportunity that her new acquaintances presented to her because she was unable to hold a job for long.

"I want to get my brain back," she'd say, repeating the same phrase to everyone.

She said it so much that her artist friends rolled their eyes when they heard it, though they wished desperately to assist in improving her obviously precarious psychological state. Brazil was a fine partier, but becoming seriously involved with her entailed certain risks. She was volatile--like the Newcomer--and she was intelligent enough to seek out minor flaws in a person's character. She had a habit of ensuring that she pointed out the flaw to the very person who possessed it.

"Virginia, you're a nice person. It's too bad you're unable to stop controlling everyone and everything."

She would comment publicly to an equally intoxicated Virginia who raged in return. Brazil was also unable to retain any job that might come her way. She believed that she was better than most of the menial positions available, yet she would arrive at work intoxicated, and she remained unable to conform to any direction. These apparent flaws were turned to benefits when she sculpted, since Brazil was very aware of the conventions of sculpture and art in general, yet she was unable to adhere to them strictly. The result was an awareness of how other sculptors fashioned their subjects coupled with a lack of attention to convention. Possessing a profound visual sense, she combined aesthetic forces in novel ways. The Newcomer recognized Brazil's artistic acumen and gave her credit for it. She was exceptionally grateful for that particular acknowledgment and she thrived on the attention he gave to her as a result. At times, she suspected that he granted her precisely that life-generating attention in order to control her, a kind

of death-bonding that begat Brazil the artist; the lack, or diminishing capacity of, that bond angered her now. The Newcomer had begun to associate more with Mallory than with Brazil and though the pair regularly fought, the stress and strain was life, and, of course, the Newcomer had paid to rid Brazil of the consequences of the depression brought on by her family. Brazil was intent on not losing what was she. Still, she was quite content alone, able to work on her art. Brazil had completed one full narrative, which was at least seven bronze statuettes, and she had begun work on another. She was torn between the productivity that was her art and the bond that she had established with the Newcomer. She decided that because the Newcomer supported her, her art might suffer if her bond with the Newcomer suffered. When the Newcomer began to restore his precious Lago with Mallory, Brazil was relieved. His absence was restful, in fact, and though Brazil recognized that she still enjoyed his company, she also realized that a break from him was necessary and seemingly long overdue. She slept longer and she associated with some of her painter friends, like Fuscus and a few others. Yet, those associations grew thorny as usual and Brazil did not maintain a close association with them in the same manner that she had done with the Newcomer. She avoided her usual haunts, and she turned off her phone, which was risky. He was demanding, and if she were not present for him quickly, the consequences might be difficult, though he was unpredictable lately. Still, he did not attempt to contact her, and when she turned on her phone after a few days of good sleep and relaxing mindlessness, there was no message from him demanding her presence. After a week or two, perhaps it was three or more--Brazil was unable to recall--she began to wonder what he was doing.

“Maybe he called but left no message and I don’t have a record of his call because the phone was turned off and he left no message.”

Brazil turned on her phone, but there were only the usual messages and contacts from Fuscus and her mother, who wanted desperately to contact her for some reason.

“It’s strange how I am able to communicate with her at all” Brazil thought.

Yet angry at her mother and her siblings, Brazil chatted with them with relative frequency and her family wanted contact with her, but the Newcomer had given her the assistance she needed; he had comforted her, in a manner of speaking, when she was destitute; and he would assist her in the future, of that much she

was utterly convinced. She needed to contact him and she missed his presence somewhat, she had to admit--thorny and difficult, inconsiderate and provocative though he was. Brazil phoned him and left a message; he was certain to return to his usual manner and bother her simply for sport, or for some sadistic amusement. Immediately, she regretted having initiated contact. It was too soon. Maybe if she finished another sculpture narrative, she would be better able to vie with him. She knew that she would regret his presence and become aggravated with herself for initiating so much aggravation. And Brazil waited, and she sculpted with the Newcomer in the recess of her mind. When her cell tone went off, she smiled and leaned over to retrieve it from the seat next to her, but the call-identification read only "Fuscus" or "Mother of god." After a week without any response from the Newcomer, Brazil grew more concerned, but she did not want to contact him again; no, another effort on her part would seem anxious, or, worse, desperate. Brazil waited longer and refrained from calling. She had many projects and chores to finish, and his company was not pleasant ordinarily and even more unpredictable recently--she needed to remember that. She plunged herself into her work, yet she was certain to leave her cell-phone on in case he called, needing her immediate attention. Brazil completed her first narrative, which took away from her life about three weeks, but the Newcomer did not respond, or demand her presence other than a few texts and hellos. She decided to phone him again, but after a few days she surmised that she would not hear from him, and she needed a break from her second new narrative. Brazil cleaned her apartment and she considered entertaining a gathering of her painter friends, but such events were often tiresome and sometimes they even depressed her more than anything else. No, she would straighten out a few affairs, and then she would try to contact him again, but when her affairs were tidy and her life was as ordered as it might become; he had not contacted her. Brazil grew uneasy once more, so she found her way to his penthouse. Possessed of a key, she let herself in to the domicile, but only the yellow-collared Dora was present, trotting along the passageway that ran along the top of the walls. He ordinarily was at the penthouse at this time of day, and the jadecollared dogs were not present. Brazil remained there for the rest of the day, but no Newcomer arrived. She phoned him again, but no answer returned and she left no message, was becoming tired of no response. Brazil returned to her apartment and attempted to return to her artistry and having succeeded in refining some of the statuettes that she had already completed, she found nothing new arose in her mind. Frustrated, Brazil left her apartment and slept at the Newcomer's home in order to ensure that she see him. She remained there for some time before she heard the lock on the door turn. She remained where she lay when she heard

“Hello? Hello? Anyone here?” from a female voice.

Brazil greeted the woman, a petsitter named Eleanor. No Newcomer present. Eleanor claimed that the Newcomer had hired her about a week ago, that she did not know when he was to return.

Brazil considered where he might have gone, which was practically anywhere as far as she knew. Brazil went on a hunt for him. She was upset with herself originally for not remembering the drunken opportunist. Brazil phoned every two or three days, but she did not recall where Mallory lived. Eventually, she ceased calling him and returned to her apartment where she continued her work on the second narrative. At least she was able to create on good days. She visited his penthouse semi-regularly in the hopes of encountering him, and inevitably one night the Newcomer arrived, weary. He walked into the living room where she sat sketching. Brazil was located on the floor near the middle of the space, a large-screen monitor displaying some video she had been streaming. He surprised her by sitting next to her and she initially gave to him a sour look. She awaited his cruel humor or some acerbic comment.

She broke the silence.

“My mother would like to meet you.”

“Yeah?”

“I think you’ve shamed my family into actually helping me.”

“How is that?”

“I told her about you and what you do.”

“What I do?”

“You know,...what you do for me,” she responded slowly and with apparent reluctance.

The Newcomer did not respond to her statement, but instead he picked up a keyboard that controlled the computer behind the monitor and directed it to a site

where videos are uploaded and viewed by others. He searched for “woman beats up man” and at the top of the list was a domestic scene depicting a heavysset woman and a somewhat shorter, thinner and drunken man. The man arose from a squatting position on the lawn of a small house ran towards and swung his fist at the large woman who easily avoided it. She became irate with him and pushed him onto the ground where he sat dazed for a moment, the wildly-drunk pugilist. The skinny man, enraged, is put to the ground by a woman whose weight trebles his and whose inebriation was half or less. The little man flailed about in an attempt to strike the woman who was only once perturbed by his fist, her earring falling to the ground. But the loss of her decoration only sent the woman into a kind of frenzy where she acted the role of a prize-fighter.

“Come on. Come on,” she said as she danced her way around him, he too drunk and too small to significantly harm her. He swung wildly back and forth and nearly fell over each time he attempted to make connection.

“Wait, here it gets even better,” said the Newcomer, pointing to the monitor.

Brazil shifted her eyes towards him suspiciously, but she was unable to suppress amusement. It was at that time that the woman avoided two of the little man’s attempts to strike her; she grabbed his shirt as he almost tripped over the first stair of the front porch to the house. She pulled him back towards her with one hand and as his momentum carried him towards her she struck him on the jaw with her fist, drunken raggedy-Andy doll.

The Newcomer turned his gaze toward Brazil and a wide grin emerged on his face; he continued to stare at Brazil as the woman pulled the little man up and down and back and around her as if he were a kind of toy. And each time the little man was jerked back and around by what appeared to be his wife

“URrrrurhhuuuuuhheereuuuuuu,” he would cry. And it was the

“Urrrrurhhuuuuuhheereuuuuuu” that accomplished the goal of the Newcomer.

The little man uttered that sound four times. By the third time, Brazil was possessed of a smile, and by the fourth time she had begun to laugh.

“That’s not funny!” she practically yelled at him.

And the little man uttered “URrrrurhhuuuuuhheereuuuuuu” one more time while he fell to the ground. And Brazil was incapable of suppressing a laugh one more time.

“That’s not funny,” she repeated with a wide grin.

The Newcomer laughed heartily and Brazil continued to laugh while she insisted “That’s not funny!” repeatedly. The woman and the man continued to wrangle until he plopped his form down on the grass. Once there, he dropped down his arms seemingly exhausted. She stood overtop him from the rear and grabbed his hair and without any resistance from him, she swung her right fist twice and struck him on the left eye. The heavyset woman then jumped back away from the sitting man and again danced as if she were going to spar with him.

“Come on. Come on!”

Brazil managed to cease laughing and she continued to insist that the video was humorless, but the very ones who filmed the incident roared with laughter as the heavyset woman once more sparred with her husband in the middle of the street. A police car drove through the scene and the couple ceased their pugilistic dance until the auto had passed by oblivious. The woman then ran after the little man and dragged him along the pavement by his hair and shirt until a neighbor rescued the diminutive creature, seemingly wanting to save the drunken fool from further beatings. Brazil continued to laugh and sober herself alternately.

“I can’t believe you!” she raged at him, pushing him away with all her weight.

The Newcomer rolled along the hardwood floor of his home. He continued to laugh while Brazil arose and shut off the power to the monitor.

“You are such an asshole, its’ unbelievable!” she said. “I haven’t seen you in weeks; you don’t return phone calls; you’re not home; someone else is feeding Dora.” She waved her hand towards the recumbent cat.

The Newcomer stretched along the floor of his home where he lay his head onto his outstretched arm. His humor at an end, he did nothing except remain on the floor with his head propped up along his arm. Brazil did not know precisely what to do, since she had never seen him in this state. Fortunately, he composed himself and stood up as if nothing had happened.

“I came home in order to clean up,” he announced.

And he left the room. Brazil thought while her friend showered and composed himself further, and she wanted to know what happened to him over the time he had dropped off the face of the earth. When the Newcomer returned, he asked her if she wished to accompany him to visit Mallory. Though Brazil found Mallory unpalatable, she was relieved to be a part of the Newcomer's distraction. Immediately upset with herself for attending, she was irritable as the two of them proceeded to Mallory's home. Mallory had recovered quite nicely, and he did not appear to need any assistance. Brazil thought that the man remained perhaps a bit sore from his injury, but he was not bedridden as he claimed. Every so often, Mallory would grimace or knit his brows, and the Newcomer would tend to him. At lunch, the Newcomer made certain that Mallory received whatever he desired; in the afternoon there was time for a movie; Mallory purchased various items online. Brazil was glad that her friend was taking care of his employee and the man had every right to a friendship with the Newcomer, but the unfortunate who engaged in his habit of sitting around his condominium dressed in his nightclothes and a robe, belching and arranging himself arbitrarily had corralled the Newcomer. Clearly, he had lived alone for some time. Brazil was relieved when the day ended, thinking that she had done something worthwhile. The Newcomer had made a habit of spending the night at Mallory's condominium, but this particular occasion inspired him to spend the evening at his home with Brazil. whose delight was obvious.

The next few days were strange for Brazil. She remained with the Newcomer and she even brought her sculpture to his home in order to be near him and to watch over Mallory who had taken to sleeping at the Newcomer's abode occasionally. The Newcomer arose early in the morning each day and he found his way to Mallory's home where he would care for the unfortunate one. Brazil sometimes accompanied the Newcomer and sometimes she remained at his penthouse. While she remained there, she noted the Newcomer not preoccupied with his search the way he had been; he was not particularly inspired to go on a hunt for drunken fools. She managed to compel him to go out in the way that the pair had done, but the spirit of the endeavor was not the same. They continued to poke fun at the persons they met, but the Newcomer lacked the caustic wit and critique that he had possessed formerly. Disturbed by the change, welcome though she had thought it would be, she began to believe that the Newcomer wished to justify himself to Mallory and to others with whom Mallory had been acquainted.

"I am not a bad person," he began one night after they had spent the day with

Mallory.

“What?”

“I’m not a bad person,” he repeated.

“What makes you say that?”

“Well, the fact that I’m *not*.”

“You know that’s not what I mean.”

There was a period of silence on the part of the Newcomer. Brazil surmised that he had perhaps something he wished to say, but she knew better than to ask him to say it. If he wished to say something meaningful or in some manner significant, then he would say it. She suspected events in his past that he was now, perhaps just recently, not proud to claim as his own, or some underlying difficulty that he was barely aware of himself.

“No, you are not a bad person,” she added.

The Newcomer remained silent but gazed pensively at the formerly obese woman.

“I don’t know what you’re worried about,” she continued.

“You do an awful lot for many people. You’re generous. You have a good sense of humor.” She lied a bit “...and you’re kind.”

The Newcomer threw a critical and questioning look at Brazil who chuckled in return, and once begun she was unable to refrain from a further chuckle and the chuckled one turned to a laughing, and the laughter continued. The Newcomer did not frown or scowl as usual, but he stared blankly for a time while Brazil was unable to refrain from laughter. Having recognized the absurdity and the gravity of the situation, he nodded ever so slightly and began to grin, yet he was unable to laugh. Brazil continued to giggle when her laughter died. Strangely, when the pair went to a tavern with the two Xolos in tow, the Newcomer asked

if the dogs might come into the establishment with them before simply bringing the dogs inside. When the tender or the owner refused to serve the pair with the dogs, they made way to another tavern until they found a place where the dogs were permitted to accompany them. Brazil was stunned.

The oddest and most unwelcome change was that the Newcomer had not the tolerance, or perhaps the desire, for alcohol that he had prior. He had not decided to refrain from drinking alcohol altogether, but his consumption had decreased a great deal. Mallory's intake of the liquid had risen while the Newcomer's had fallen. Brazil had no idea how to contend with this alteration in a Newcomer who had merely lost interest in consumption of substances, yet though certain differences were obvious to those around the Newcomer, there were other aspects of his life that had not changed very much, or perhaps they had changed, but the old lingered around the new. There were moments when he grew weary and he was annoyed with the employees at Corpu-tech, but he became fond of Leon whose manner previously annoyed him. The Newcomer had a great deal to oversee, since he had inherited much money. He had never been particularly fond of looking after his investments, and now he grew rather annoyed at the mere thought of tending to them, as if his wealth were a hindrance. His old, angry and abusive self returned at these moments, and woe to anyone who happened upon him at that time. He remained fond of compelling Brazil to laugh when she meant to be angry or sad, but his dark sense of humor was not quite so cumbersome to a Brazil who recognized the spirit with which such teasing emerged. Even that habit appeared to diminish, though he was unable to refrain from splitting her emotions. There was something reassuring in consistency, even if it was consistent aggravation. Though the Newcomer appeared to lighten his demeanor, he also experienced fits of depression and rage that seemed to emerge from nowhere. One day he would be laughing with Brazil at *The Everyday Tavern Entautha*, and the next day he would leap into a rage-filled tirade against an unsuspecting individual who had befriended the pair that very evening, or he might do just the same to Brazil--sometimes Mallory. The difference appeared to be that the Newcomer would emerge, or rather some new Other would emerge, from the rage. He calmed down and became contrite with the person, or with Brazil, with whomever.

"I have been in bad sorts for some time."

That said, he would procure for the vulnerable acquaintance another drink, or perhaps take them to dinner, offering many more apologies. Most who

encountered him at this time believed that he was a troubled man who at his core was decent. Many readily forgave him, but there were those who disliked, or even detested, the man afterwards. And the Newcomer, much to Brazil's surprise, wished that it were otherwise.

"I just wish he knew what sort of man I am."

Gradually, the Newcomer grew tired of treating Mallory like a child or an invalid. He explained to Mallory that he ought to return to work on the Lago, and when Mallory was unable to move quickly, or awaken early enough, he became irate, telling the unfortunate that he was lucky to be employed at all. Afterwards, he approached Mallory in silence and the two men said little, but each recognized the communication that emerged between them. All of the Newcomer's doings, of course, aggravated Mallory's condition, but the result was slow progress rather than none at all. Observing all of these developments, Brazil considered asking him if he wished to talk to anyone; someone else; her; Mallory; anyone, but she reconsidered because she realized what his reaction would be, or at least she realized what his reaction would have been prior.

Events transpired in much the same manner for some time; the exacerbated capriciousness of the Newcomer became the norm. Brazil made herself available to him more than she had by accompanying him to his favorite haunts and by suggesting new excursions. He wished to remain close to her at times and at other times he desired a distance, which maddened Brazil, with an amused Mallory observing recent events from a distance. Brazil disliked Mallory's attitude, but she was unable to explain her thoughts to a Newcomer who was somehow attached to the unfortunate one.

Thus their bond.

VERMILLION RED PRETENDS JOYOUS YELLOW

Brazil's family had been attempting to bring her back into their fold for some time, perhaps three or more years, but the conditions under which she departed prevented more than rudimentary communication between the family and the formerly obese woman. Momma mater, or "mother of god" as Brazil called her, was at the head of the clan as she had been for many years. She was an older, portly woman who had gained weight over decades by eating sweetbreads and candies, five pounds here and two pounds there. Her hair was thinning and graying in some areas, but she turned it an unnatural jet black color. Still, the color suited her because her entire appearance was unnatural, her suits and polyester slacks were loosefitting and one was unable to determine their color. The family had grown fat with success and was not surprisingly well-pleased. It had contributed significantly to Foedimmanis fundamentalist church where they were prominent members, assisting in making decisions for the whole congregation. Momma mater had become acquainted with the great one himself, Adder Dareios, through her personal relationship with the blessed reverend Jackdaw. She had been a part of the church from its inception, a significant contributor though she had much less funds in the beginning. Her son was the authentic success story; he directed a computer software agency, family owned of course, that created all sorts of software and installed and updated systems for more than a few business institutions. Though Adder visited their home once and in the context of a church-leader meeting, he had become a part of the family--at least so far as Momma mater was concerned. Adder himself warmed up to the clan slowly. The reverend Jackdaw was delighted to spread the word to such a vast audience as that of Foedimmanis fundamentalist and he felt as if he were proselytizing in just the right way. He was a regular visitor to family outings. In this way, the Adseculae family was blessed on both ends: spiritual and secular. Their world rather perfect, they knew what god wanted of them; possessed his book given directly to humankind, to them personally. They lived in abundance and they enjoyed a kind of upscale mediocrity coupled with

the drowsy complacency of materialism and of excellent food, supersugar pastries. The family had problems, it is certain, but they possessed none of the dire needs that arise from poverty or minority status. Momma mater kept her children in line not with the discipline that she had used earlier in their life, but with an alliance with the oldest of Brazil's siblings who owned the software company and who held sway over the rest of the Adseculae. Brazil wanted little to do with them. Though she had been treated badly, she communicated with her mother once in a while. Their relations, of course, were less than perfect and now Brazil held the upper hand because she was an adult who had been able to find a way to survive without the assistance of her mother. Still, Momma mater was never quite satisfied with her relationship to her daughter Brazil. She enlisted the aid of her eldest son to investigate Brazil and every so often Momma mater would quietly inform her daughter that she had information about her.

"How is Fuscus?" she might ask out of the blue.

Brazil had never discussed Fuscus with the mother of god. Brazil recognized what was happening, and initially she was nervous about what her family was doing and how they were determining who were her friends and where she lived, what she was doing. Every so often, Brazil would encounter someone who obviously did not fit into the artist community, but who lingered about one of her shows, or who observed her and the Newcomer on more than one occasion. They were obviously not a part of the ordinary crowd, one who propositioned Brazil once much to the amusement of her friends.

"Tell my brother I love him so," she said to the man.

Brazil became a bit paranoid because of the investigations, and every so often, when the Newcomer was in one of his more foul moods he would comment.

"Look." He pointed to an empty corner of the room "There's your brother."

"Cute. Real cute, asshole."

While much of her family's obsession was innocuous, Brazil's mental health suffered from the constant suspicion and the occasional confirmation of an "agent", as the Newcomer called them, following her. That she supported the Newcomer in his current crisis and that he in turn teased her aggravated Brazil, but she was unable to refrain from assisting him. He did not always refuse to

take her situation seriously. When they had first met, he suspected that a contributing factor to her serious health problem--her obesity--was the surveillance put on Brazil by Momma mater. She felt helpless at times, certainly frustrated, so she enlisted Ulrich Geldsbaum, the Newcomer's lawyer, to convince her family to leave her in peace, but there was little proof of their involvement and the family had committed no provable crime or tort. Immersed within an increasingly desperate need for solitude and rest, Brazil continued to refine to a sharp point her habit of drinking herself into a bliss of forgetful oblivion, necessary for her psychological survival. The Newcomer having realized that he ought to do something about her situation, he paid for the surgery that artificially reduced her weight, and which alleviated some of the stress on her tortured heart. Her physician had recommended she lose weight and when she reached a certain plateau--so to speak--he agreed that the surgery might be physically beneficial. She had been forever grateful to the Newcomer since, but she recognized that she might be obligated to him for a very long time, perhaps a lifetime. Still, obligation to the Newcomer was better than subordination to the Adseculae.

Momma mater continued to wish that Brazil would return, and she considered the reconversion of her daughter to be a potential political triumph within the congregation, though she was not entirely aware that she thought in political terms. Momma mater had convinced herself long ago that what she did was correct no matter what it was and after two or three decades of utter conviction of her righteousness, she had little awareness of any doubt about her actions. She was simply correct and any question of her position was met with a kind of silent rage, the kind of rage she had inflicted on Brazil. Momma mater was thus unaware of her own political machinations, but she imagined that she would show to all Wheaton how powerful her connection to the lord was, a connection which, as far as the society of Wheaton was concerned, was paramount to her. In fact, that position was paramount to all of the Adseculae, with the exception of Brazil. Gradually, therefore, it became a major concern to the Adseculae that Brazil be brought back into the flock, or that she at least be brought under heel. Momma mater, after a lengthy absence of communication, began to utter a barrage of little niceties that seemed to Brazil bizarre and uttered within a frightening kind of denial.

"Brazil, dear, you have always been a favorite of mine."

Brazil related her mother's statement to the Newcomer who was as perplexed at

the statement as she. They laughed at the situation until another nicety arrived during one of “Mother of god’s” phone calls to Brazil.

“Brazil, dear, you are a beautiful girl.”

“We would all like to see you again. I miss the time we spend together,” her mother offered.

The situation was becoming more than usually disturbing to a Brazil who had as well the mood swings and innate difficulty of the Newcomer with which to contend. She was able, only intermittently, to craft her sculptures, but when made possible, her art gave her the most comfort.

Thus their continuing bond.

TARNISHED YELLOW AND IRON RED RUE

Nervous indeed, Leon was unconcerned that his relationship with the Brigade was becoming fragile, the Brigade's anger directed mostly at Leon. Leon had convinced the Brigade, for the most part, that Leon would be able to take the brunt of any anger that came from Dareios, that Leon was capable of smoothing over all the potential rancor and malice that might arise from their difficult situation. No, Leon was not upset at his predicament with Adder Dareios, though the man himself disturbed Leon a bit. Leon was more concerned that the taxi that had taken him from his office-building to a small restaurant in the downtown area had smelled rather badly. He suspected that one or more prior occupants had relieved themselves either on the seat where he sat or directly in front of it. The result appeared to be a transference of scent from one site to another and Leon was able to smell the different scent that was his at the moment. He was not given to anger or frustration quickly, no no, but there were certain occurrences, certain peculiar occurrences that drove him mad. The presence of a foul odor happened to be one of them. Still, Leon remained composed. Not having panicked as he thought he might, Leon simply waited for Adder to arrive, trying desperately to ignore the obvious stench.

“The man will smell me and think me a fool,” he thought.

“No, it will be worse than that. He will believe I associate with homeless persons, or worse, he will believe that I am a homeless person.” Leon continued his thoughts.

Adder Dareios enjoyed his rides in the back of limousines and such, but those were for show, a part of his method of inspiring awe and shock in a partner or a colleague. Adder preferred to walk about the city, sometimes at least, and carry Dareios with him where he went. His notoriety necessitated security guards almost always, and so Adder was unable to relieve himself of that necessity, but

he enjoyed the attention he obtained by bringing Dareios the magnate with him. He perceived the others perceiving him and he relished the fact that many of these strangers were in debt to him, that they needed him desperately and they did not even realize it. Adder was not entirely confident that he meant so much in the grand scheme of the universe, but he had control over many persons and even more things in the lives of himself and of the many Others whom he met. Such a realization that though he was unable authentically to generate much that was of any use to these others, he was able to obligate them to turn to him when they did generate useful or pleasing modes of life. He was able in that manner to place himself between the creative others and their creation in such a manner that he might destroy them or their work at any time. That being the case, Adder Dareios was not aware of his own intentions. Certainly, moments occurred when Adder Dareios was conscious of his actions and intentions, but they were brief and he needed their brevity because he did not wish to recognize what Adder was doing. He was therefore proud and content to be himself, to bring the name Dareios about with him, a man who was unable to understand why he was trifling with a paltry and insignificant naught like Leon Ochrowskovich, besides the obvious.

“What need do I have of him?”

Adder Dareios smiled to himself without recognizing it. In fact, Adder had wasted a fair amount of his time with Leon already. Leon was a very bright fellow in some ways, but Dareios had many others employed who were in all probability just as talented and just as useful. The two met as they ordinarily did, at a small restaurant along Michigan avenue. The places were chosen by Dareios, or at least by one of his men. The pair would chat at one of the tables set along an inner corner of the eatery. Adder trusted the yellow giant for some reason, and thus he did not force Leon to submit to a search before a meeting began.

“Good to see you, dear sir,” Leon began. He arose when Dareios entered, and he dared not turn his back on Adder.

“Leon, Leon, what have we today?” Dareios asked.

Ordinarily, Leon had little to offer the man that was of genuine interest, except that Adder Dareios had taken a petty interest in the goings on of the Newcomer. The young man interested him because the Newcomer appeared to Dareios to

have abundance, at least so far as Leon determined.

“Yes, Yes, It is good to see you again, Mr. Dareios.”

Dareios was quiet, but Leon brought a smile to his face.

“I am afraid that there is almost nothing to report to you today, sir. The office has been relatively quiet and our new friend has not been visiting Corpu-tech regularly.”

“No?”

“No, sir. As you know, he has been in bad spirits of late...”

Here Leon paused. “...oh my...,” he said.

“Yes?”

“I forgot about an incident a few weeks ago.”

“Tell me then, Leon,” Dareios commanded.

“Oh it was really nothing. No, not really anything at all. Perhaps it is best left unsaid...”

“Tell me,” Dareios commanded more authoritatively.

“Oh, well, it was a trifling incident, really. He arrived in the office and he appeared to be out of sorts, uh, well, much more than usual. He has mood swings these days...”

“Mood swings?”

“Oh, yes, he has swings of passion. I might suspect that he possesses a great deal of strong emotions or something else...” Leon trailed off here for a moment.

“And?”

“Yes, well he actually fired me.”

“Fired you?”

“Yes, he fired me because, well, because, I really can’t remember what was his reason, but he fired me. Of course, we made up in the end. I believe he is a troubled man at heart. I suspect that he will do well by Others eventually.”

“He fired you and then re-hired you?”

“Oh, he never had the intention of firing me, I don’t believe. No, no. He grew annoyed when I came into his office, I remember it now, and I believe it was his trouble, that is whatever is troubling him I don’t really know, it was his trouble that brought such mean spirits to him, but when he came to himself, that is when he returned to his ordinary demeanor, he asked me to forgive him and indeed as if we had both hugged and cried and slapped one another on the back, we fast belonged to one another again.”

“And you don’t know of anything that might have set him off?”

“Well, I only know of one thing that seemed to...well it was a trifling and paltry thing...”

“Tell me, Leon.”

“Well, I noticed some legal papers that sat on top of his desk. I think he may have believed that I was snooping on him.”

“Of course you weren’t.”

“Me? I would never...” Leon cleared his throat as he recognized his present situation. “I saw nothing of the content of the legal papers.”

“No?”

“I noticed only the heading of some of the letters he had received: Geldsbaum, Gesetzbrecher and Geldsgewalt.”

“Gesetzbrecher?”

“Yes, I noted that name as well as the others. Strange name for a lawyer.”

“Strange indeed.”

Adder nodded and chatted with Leon for a while longer; the large man was so entertaining. But, he had gotten what he needed.

Thus their bond.

CHANGING HUES

Mallory recognized that his situation had become problematic. His plan, while working itself out in a favorable manner, was not materializing in the way that he wished. The Newcomer and he had become somewhat close in the past months, and Mallory recognized that the Newcomer possessed a certain affection for him. The bond that the two men shared did not, however, translate into any real material benefit for Mallory. He had labored over the Talbot-Lago, learning a great deal about that particular auto and asking Amity's husband, Gruntle, for advice and guidance, which had been problematic. Gruntle did not appear to enjoy Mallory's company any longer and being a quiet, possessive sort Amity's husband was reluctant to discuss anything with anyone who might not agree with every word that he uttered. Mallory had no idea what the man believed and did not make an effort to demonstrate any willingness to indulge him. Gruntle was able to form authentic bonds with the most obedient beasts and trapped wives, but not anyone else. Socializing with him was difficult. The result was a strained relationship, one that was as unproductive and puerile as that Mallory possessed with his coworkers. Mallory was simply unable to lower himself to their level in order to converse. He disliked "those people" as much as they did him. Mallory felt as though he were interacting with his father once again. He might have consulted any one of a number of groups, online and off, that would have been glad to assist him, but Mallory refused assistance from those sources. He had recovered from his injury for the most part some time ago, but he took advantage of the unusual sympathy he received from the Newcomer by claiming his wound incapacitated him more than it actually did. He and the Newcomer became inseparable for a time, but when the Newcomer realized that Mallory was less incapacitated than expressed, the bond that tied them seemed to loosen, the Newcomer becoming less sympathetic recently. The Newcomer's absence might have something to do with that fat bitch though.

Mallory concerned himself with the Lago almost compulsively. Assured that its completion would bring the two men together again, he was convinced that he was able to reassemble the auto when necessary because of the manner with

which he had disassembled it. Mallory kept a strict note of each part and where it had been. When he removed the engine block, he placed each of the parts around the large hulk of metal in specific positions; labeled each one and ensured that no piece moved. He explained to the Newcomer that his father had worked in precisely the same manner so as to ensure that no piece was lost. Mallory was systematic about the disassembly and he was certain that he would be able to construct a better-running mechanism than the one that he at first met. After some procrastination, he was prepared to fit the Lago back together again. The Newcomer had given up the habit of watching Mallory while he worked and Mallory labored, piece by piece, over the reassembly of the vintage car alone.

“Good.”

The auto had not yet been painted because the Newcomer insisted that the mechanics of the project be completed first. All of the pieces fit back where they belonged and Mallory was proud, and quite relieved, that the car was whole again; each part seemed to fit where his diagram indicated. On the day that the Lago was to be test-driven, Mallory was taking no chances. He started the auto early in the morning, long before Brazil and the Newcomer were to arrive for a short test-drive. At first, the engine sounded rough, as if the timing of the machine was not perfect and Mallory set out to adjust the mechanism. The Lago did in fact sound better than it had at any previous time, and Mallory was again relieved. The two men had noted that the car ran rough, and that was when Mallory suggested a complete disassembly and reassembly in order to ensure the perfect working order of each part. He had cleaned and inspected each piece. Still, the engine was not as smooth-running as hoped. Mallory test-drove the car around the parking lot where it had been stored and the Lago at first reluctantly emerged from the great cavern of its rebirth. After a time, and a few lurches, Mallory was able to ride more steadily. Perhaps the lack of care for so many years and the newlyassembledness of the Lago conspired to make the car less reluctant to ride smoothly. Still, Mallory solved a few problems before the Newcomer and Brazil were due. When the pair arrived, Mallory had already placed the Lago back into its storage area in order to give the impression that the car had not yet moved from the spot where he labored over it. The engine remained hot, but with a little luck and lack of observation on their part Mallory might be able to pass the ignition off as a cold start.

“I can feel the heat from the engine” were the first words out of Brazil’s mouth when they arrived.

“Oh, I’ve adjusted the timing and such,” Mallory replied defensively with a bit of malice in his eyes.

The Newcomer said that it was time to test the car. It had been in storage for some time, and he was anxious to finish the project. The Lago roared into service and ran more smoothly than it had when Mallory tested it. He closed the hood and trunk and the two men drove the auto around the parking lot more than a few times. Mallory’s face lit up with joy and relief when the car maneuvered well around the parked autos. The Newcomer even drove the Lago somewhat hard in order to test its limits, but the machine refused to sputter or lag. As the pair brought the car back into the storage area, they observed Brazil kneeling down onto the ground. A smiling Mallory removed himself from the Lago, leaning his frame onto the front of the car.

“What’s this?” asked Brazil, referring to a bizarrely-shaped piece of metal she had found.

Mallory walked toward her and took the object from her outstretched hand. He examined it, but he was unable to determine precisely what the part was or where it ought to be placed. He wanted to create the name of a fictitious part, hoping that neither party would recognize it or possess any information about it.

“That’s a point-spreader,” he offered.

“A point-spreader?” Brazil asked.

“Yup.”

Brazil removed a small, black box with a keyboard on it from her bag. She busied herself looking up the supposed part. “Point spreader” returned no hits from her search engine.

“There’s no part listed like that,” she remarked, careful to refrain from grinning.

The Newcomer did not appear surprised, but he simply folded his arms. “It ran well,” he commented.

“Better than ever” Mallory was relieved to reply.

“But this part goes somewhere, right?” Brazil asked.

The two men did not respond, but Brazil was unable to suppress a grin.

“Oh, wait, I know,” she continued. “That was the problem all along, I bet.” She grinned. “Too many parts.”

Thus their bond.

ROSEY FINGERED RAGE

Mallory hated that bitch. She had been unfriendly to him since they first met, but now he was certain that she was attempting to make him look bad. And she had succeeded, as far as he knew. Now that he had recovered from his accident for the most part, the Newcomer and Brazil were together more and more and Mallory attempted to join them with only some success. He knew little about art; cared nothing for history; philosophy was to him nothing but a waste of time. And the more he learned about the Newcomer, Brazil and their friends, the less he was able to relate to them. Mallory was capable of educating himself in art and such, but he recognized that he might need years of study. Even though he was able to find a brief, educational outline of such topics and learn superficially in a quick manner, he refused. Mallory simply was not interested. He enjoyed drinking with the Newcomer and he had learned quite a bit about Lagos; amazingly he found that he enjoyed working on cars. Still, Mallory attempted to study art and philosophy, hoping to relate to the Newcomer in a way that Brazil was unable.

“There must be something I can do.”

He often stayed at the Newcomer’s penthouse. The three of them regularly stayed there, if only because Brazil and Mallory did not wish to leave the Newcomer alone without the other. Brazil and the Newcomer went out with a fair degree of regularity, and Mallory was aware of the times that the Newcomer would not be at home. He often examined objects in the Newcomer’s apartment, and he developed a habit of looking into this and that here and there. He would remove from its secure place an ancient helmet that the Newcomer had purchased. Mallory laughed when he thought of how much the Newcomer had paid for the piece of armor that he used to place on his head and wear for an hour or so when he knew no-one would be at home. He often sat in one of the many recliners and sipped mint julep, protected by “Homer’s helmet.” Having donned the Corinthian armor, he played video games and sometimes he would eat dinner by himself, slipping his spoon through the vertical opening on the front of the

helmet. The armor-piece became soiled by food slipped through it and once Mallory spilled a few drops of mint julep on it as it sat next to him. It was Mallory's own private joke that he was able to do all of these things while neither the Newcomer, nor Brazil were aware of them. Eventually, Mallory became bored with the helmet and he turned his attention onto other objects in the Newcomer's home. Having developed the habit of hunting for expensive objects, he rummaged through a massive closet that was practically filled with strange things, mostly art pieces that looked to Mallory more like penises than anything else.

"Those things gotta have something to do with that bitch."

Mallory did not relish the idea of touching any of the penises, and so he avoided them as he investigated further into the storage closet of the Newcomer. He found a number of smoking pipes and some strange dried leaves, whatever they were--definitely not marijuana. He discovered a few bronze statuettes that he had to admit were pretty cool: a Homeric warrior, an apparent god with grape vines for hair. Both seemed dynamic and valuable pieces, but Mallory did not wish to steal anything, not really. He observed the wine in the god's hand and the smug appearance of satisfaction and glory, and Mallory actually found himself smiling inadvertently. Behind the statuettes was an old, abused storage cabinet made of thick paper--the kind that a college student might possess. Mallory was unable to resist the urge to peer inside, so he slid one of the drawers open. In it resided many documents and some old computer disks that covered the education of the Newcomer. Mallory learned from them that the man had attended *Lumen Novum*.

"No wonder."

Besides the brochures and the other odd documents, there resided a black plastic box that contained more computer disks. The documents on it were terrifying and at the same time a revelation. One set of letters was a correspondence between Ulrich Geldsbaum and Alphonse Titanman, the head of *Lumen Novum*. The letters detailed an implication on the part of *Lumen Novum* that the Newcomer, as a little boy, had somehow harmed a little girl named Clara. The girl had apparently died, and Geldsbaum was defending the child Newcomer from legal action. The school was adamant about expelling the boy, the Newcomer being very young at the time, but the last correspondence from *Lumen Novum* simply thanked Geldsbaum for so promptly and thoroughly

ironing out the matter with the administration. Something had calmed the raging dogs.

“Money.”

Another, more disturbing, set of files concerned an assault on the person of a boy named Robert Kessler. The boy had been on his way to church when attacked. He had suffered broken ribs; a concussion; had lost three teeth. The narrative about Kessler consisted of copies of a number of articles and Mallory had to infer most of what had happened, but he thought he understood the general outline of events. Again, Geldsbaum communicated with the school about the matter, and from what Mallory could determine, the school simply had no evidence with which to convict the young man. They possessed only suspicion, which Geldsbaum had claimed was the result of a prejudice developed against him. Again, the matter seems to have been dropped without any real investigation.

“Money again.”

A third set of files did not directly accuse Mallory’s friend of anything, but they concerned the beatings of three boys: Kasper, Prentice and Oslow, on a University campus. The pair had been suspected of recent muggings, and they too suffered numerous contusions and broken bones. The files in this set that puzzled Mallory were those that concerned the death of a youth named Kasper. One of the same youths who had been beaten had apparently died of asphyxiation, while allegedly attempting to burglarize a technology center on a university campus. At least the newspapers suggested as much. The youth had no prior record, and the cause of and circumstances surrounding his death remained an unknown at the time; so the documents claimed.

Mallory did not know what to think about these things. He realized that they had something to do with his friend, but Mallory was somewhat bewildered for the remainder of the day, and when Brazil returned with the Newcomer, he said little to them. Both were in good spirits because they had “gone caroling.” Mallory kept quiet and when the pair again left in order to carouse, or whatever they did, Mallory removed the papers and the computer disks from the closet and copied all of them.

“Might come in useful.”

Thus their bond.

MORE CHANGING OF THE HUES: A REDDENING UNFORTUNATE

The Newcomer did not feel like his usual self. Ordinarily, he might go about his day without many cares, but with curiosity. He was not a religious man; he thought little of and infrequently about god. Spirituality was not his sort of meditation, though he was fond of the kind of meditation that focused one's thoughts and made clear one's mind. No, he was not an atheist, nor was he pious, but rather he was properly agnostic. He believed in the here and now only as the here and now and the here and now appeared to be and not be what they are; that much he had learned. One might say that the Newcomer had no belief at all, or that he rejected belief, but he rejected even the rejection of belief.

"One needs belief at least."

"Perhaps not."

His understanding of belief constantly undermined every perception and potential belief he encountered, and he enjoyed what others might call a predicament. That was why, he thought, he had so few actual connections with others, but his presence was changing, so he believed. Brazil thought that he took no joy in life, that he was so pure of a nihilist that nothing was his only friend, but the Newcomer did not accept that state as his own. He delighted in being, in the act of existing and he indulged in everything he did. One might consider the Newcomer to be the ultimate transitory figure, but that again was mere belief and if he were consistently transitory, then that aspect of him at least was fixed, and so he was not merely transitory because he was merely transitory. Occasionally, he wrote poetry, which was difficult for him. He was not unable to express himself, but he understood himself as inexpressible, and when he witnessed others attempting to put their lives in paltry words, or worse yet numbers--so certain they are--, when he witnessed even the best of poets

bringing themselves about through the domicile of language, he was left disappointed. Each occasion that provided him with a new revelation was bliss, but it was also poverty; so every bit of knowledge he obtained led him only to more ignorance than he had existed within prior. He recognized that each word was infinite in this manner, and one might accuse him of religious intuition if one heard him confess that case, but he hardly ever confessed it, and only to unconscious men. The closest he had come to true expression of what he was was a short poem:

Immerse yourself in all you do
and of the things you do not know
throw yourself into.
Be part of all that is yourself;
be part of all that is.
For, if you find some thing that's not,
you'll not know what it is.

He hardly related to others what he thought or how he felt, but he did in fact possess thoughts and feelings. No-one would have doubted that he possessed thoughts; it was the feelings that others denied. In fact, the Newcomer himself denied his own attachment to others. At least, he was not aware of any attachments, he who was almost entirely self-sufficient. Still, his self-sufficiency was imperiled by some vague force that he was unable to comprehend. It was overpowering him and one casualty of that struggle had been that he lost the ability to imbibe the substances that he enjoyed, that "made him glad" as he put it. He attempted all-night drinking-bouts with Brazil and Mallory, the kind that had gladdened the three of them in the past, but he became drowsy after only three scotch-drinks and he actually began to slur his speech at one point. He was astounded; his old friend Blackman had seemingly abandoned him, or perhaps Blackman did not enjoy the Newcomer's company any longer. Reluctant to reveal any affection, he demonstrated no signs of worry--so he thought. Yet, when he considered that Brazil's family had investigated her, peered into her private life and that they intended to continue the practice, when he thought about these things, he thought that he must act.

"Someone ought to drive them away," he continued to think.

He mused over just how to perform the excision. He might hire Geldsbaum to rattle their cage a bit, but then a disturbance might beget further, larger

disturbance. He thought that a subtler approach might assist, so perhaps a gentle persuasion will ease some fears, or keep family interest satisfied; he really did not know what the family might want by investigating one of its own. He did not understand her particular situation; she had not shared all of her history, only enough to make the Newcomer more curious of the situation. That the Newcomer himself was not his autocratic self was not helping matters. He himself noted that his moods tended to emerge wildly and arrived out of control. He once found Mallory hanging his coat up in a closet that contained valuable documents. Enraged and nearly out of control, he threw the man's coat to the floor, and grabbing him by the shirt, lifted Mallory off of the floor.

"You do not go into that closet. DO YOU HEAR ME?"

Having frightened the unfortunate, the Newcomer regained his composure and let Mallory drop to the floor. He appeared disoriented for a moment while a sad and pained expression fell upon his face. He turned again to Mallory who recoiled from the madman, assuming another assault was imminent.

"I'm sorry, my friend. I don't know what came over me," the Newcomer claimed.

He tapped the unfortunate on the shoulder, itself a rare demonstration of affection. Having witnessed the altercation, Brazil was shocked. Not at the Newcomer threatening Mallory, no that was pure joy. But, uttering those words. She smiled.

"I knew it."

The next weeks were no better, except that the Newcomer wished he had enough information and a plan to assist his large, artistic friend. Mallory was perturbed by the event at the closet and the Newcomer issued apologies with fair regularity.

"I don't know what came over me," he would say.

And Mallory seemed to take the incident in stride; the man had, after all, practically saved his life and paid his medical bills. He was Mallory's employer. They remained friends and Mallory believed that the Newcomer understood nothing about what he had taken, or rather copied, from that closet. It was almost

laughable, if it had not appeared so dangerous. The Newcomer was everything Mallory might wish to be. Having ambivalent feelings toward him, Mallory smiled at his friend's face and disdained him in private.

"That maniac doesn't know half of what he thinks he knows," he would complain to Amity.

Still, Mallory practically lived at the Newcomer's home, waiting. He had to endure the sight, the smell and the words of that fat bitch who believed her statuettes were the next great artistic trend, yet lately the Newcomer's attitude toward Mallory coupled with his unexpected ragings drained Mallory of the energy needed to remain where he was. The Lago was running smoothly now and Mallory had actually determined what the extra part was and where it belonged. He quietly fit it back where it ought to have gone, and the auto ran just as well after that. Yet, the completion of the project unnerved Mallory in a way. His immediate usefulness was now past, and once the Lago was painted and aesthetically restored, Mallory might not long remain in the Newcomer's life. More and more he felt as if he did not wish to live in the Newcomer's home.

"I wouldn't pull that shit on that bitch," he would say to his friend Amity.

Amity merely listened.

"Why the fuck does she do it? All I wanted was some connections, you know?"

"You mean you wanted to 'Network'?"

Amity placed the word "Network" in quotes with her fingers, and the pair laughed.

"Yeah, fucking network," Mallory added.

Mallory hated that cat as well. It was useless; all it did was eat, sleep and crap. It protected no-one and it was only affectionate with the Newcomer, and sometimes with Brazil. When he tried to pet Dora, she ran under a table, a dresser or a bed. Her temperament annoyed him and Mallory recognized that there was little chance for any affection from her.

"I'd like to throw that thing out the window."

The dogs he grew to like after all. They were not only friendly, but they asked for affection as well. They would do practically anything he told them to do, and they enjoyed playing ball in the Newcomer's home. Mallory developed a habit of taking the Xolos out for a morning walk; the Newcomer even encouraged the practice. Those morning walks were the events that made Mallory's later stay tolerable. He may not ever obtain the connections he wanted, but the amusement with the jade-collared dogs were irreplaceable. As time went on, Mallory became increasingly frustrated at the lack of attention from his new-coming friend. Mallory would not phrase his frustration in that manner, but he did miss the company. In fact, the Newcomer, while more unpredictable than usual, was now more approachable than ever. "Believe it or not," Mallory thought. His approachableness made Mallory all the more angry because it was now possible to achieve what Mallory had desired all along: influence over the Other. Left alone in the Newcomer's home, Mallory took his frustrations out on the creature closest. "Not the dogs," he thought. No, Mallory would protect the Xolos. "That fucking cat." Mallory had attempted to set the dogs on Dora, but there were too many obstacles. Dora was able to jump up on the track that ran along the top of each wall in order to get away from the Xolos, and even when Mallory knocked the cat onto the floor and encouraged the Xolos to "Sic 'em" the dogs would not respond. In fact, when encouraged to have at the feline, the dogs turned towards Mallory, ears down and eyes downward, and shyly plumped themselves onto the floor. Try as he might, he was unable to encourage the Xolos to chase Dora. Again frustrated, Mallory turned toward more desperate measures. He had seen the Newcomer disciplining his feline, but not with the slap of a hand. "No, he would never harm his fucking cat," he found himself thinking.

Instead, the Newcomer had purchased a small, yellowtinted squirt-bottle; he filled it with water and when the cat jumped up on the kitchen table, and Mallory thought that this was often, the Newcomer shot the cat on the hind legs, most times intending to hit the cat's rear. Never harming the animal, the Newcomer thought that this practice was amusing.

"He only harms humans."

Mallory took the squirt-bottle and emptied it by half. In place of the absent liquid, he filled the bottle with white vinegar. He carried the bottle with him most of the time in order to accustom Dora to the sight of the weapon in his hand. When he had the impulse, which was fairly often, he let loose a thin

stream of water onto the cat. He ordinarily hit Dora on the back or on her side, but sometimes he would strike just right and hit her in the face. He recalled the first time he had struck the mark; Dora had jumped--as per usual--but when the vinegar hit her eyes she flipped about three times and ran off beneath a futon where she remained until she had wipe-licked the substance from her face. "That was hilarious," Mallory thought.

Thus their bond.

CORVUS MONEDULA

Marvin Corvus Jackdaw was an unremarkable man in himself. Dressed regularly in black and possessed of gleaming, clear blue eyes, he was the spiritual leader of a gigantic flock of followers, but he had not accomplished everything himself. He was possessed of a friendly disposition and he did not lack charm; he was generous, as long as he had his fair take of things and as long as others recognized their place. Marvin lived well enough as a child of a middle-class family, the fourth son of five children. He achieved better than average marks in school, only better than average. He learned early the value of objects, he being a kind of scavenger of shiny things found in parking lots, fields, playgrounds and deserted buildings. He developed the scavenging habit early because his father had little time for the last two children; Marvin meandered away on his own seeking stimulation and not so much adventure, but titillation. When twelve, he had gathered meticulously a significant collection of odd bits and ends of aesthetically pleasing baubles, what-not and hand-me-down shinies: half of an earring, a dead, bronze pocket watch, the window crank of a 1964 Dodge Dart, a part of the mass of shine that he adored. Marvin's mother, aware that the child was going astray, explained to him again and again that his hobby was entertaining, but that the objects he found were of little value. She pointed out that he ought to be careful to clean them and disinfect them as well, and he dutifully obeyed. Otherwise, his family might take his collection from him, and that for Marvin would be death.

The young not yet reverend Marvin Jackdaw learned quickly about the state of social affairs in his family and community. He emerged within a straight-line hierarchy that demonstrated a clear pecking order. His father at the top of the list, each member of the family was able to press upon the other what he or she wished; his sisters enjoyed equal pecking status so long as they remained within the order of things. Little Marvin applied the same structure to each institution he entered, and for the most part each institution cooperated with him by bringing him into a hierarchy. Marvin did well for himself by determining what each institution expected him to believe, how it expected him to act and how it

expected him to comport himself, how to conform to those expectations. He lived comfortably within the confines of a snug community and the chubby allure of downy life fit over his rounded frame like a flabby second skin. He exercised little and each year his flab grew larger his frame, a bit slower, and certainly heavier. While Marvin was a friendly sort, he was somewhat intimidated by the ladies. They were powerful entities capable of ruining his comfort with a single word. Marvin was reluctant to pay attention to them unless he possessed enough information to ensure that they respond to him in the manner that pleased him. He befriended more than a few of the ladies for the express purpose of learning what certain other ladies thought about certain topics. He was always discreet and somewhat cryptic when asking. He discovered the love of his life, a truly spiritual coupling, when he asked one of his friends about a girly woman who caught his fancy. She was blond and she wore bright clothes and her lively demeanor attracted Marvin. His female comrade informed him that his interest was welcome, and with that heard, Marvin's reticence vanished. The two made an agreeable couple, living easy within the inertia that both enjoyed so much, but Marvin had not found his passion at that time. He recognized that within his world he had to manage the maddening confusion of conflicting alliances. One institution expected that he conform in a way that another institution did not. He was unable to determine how to drive his conflicting alliances into one force, yet he desired to bring all under one firm, clear, unrelenting umbrella. He craved certainty. Marvin, though now grown to adulthood, had not lost his habit of gathering baubles and shiny, attractive objects. He had refined his habit with the slow creep of age compelling him to grab only the more serious and valuable objects, such as watches, pieces of jewelry, rings and other adult trifles. Marvin did not steal his precious baubles; he was not that kind of Jackdaw. No, he found them, lying here and there and no-one appeared to want them, so he claimed his right to their brilliant presence. As an adult he had found several old-time watches, some of which were in good working order. He had found bracelets, had some appraised, and he came upon many small clocks that sat simply squat in places where everyone could see them, but no-one picked them up. Marvin thought that strange, but providence favored him. He acquired a massive collection in this manner, one that filled a room of his home. He had been with his lady-love for only seven months when he made a discovery that added to his collection in a considerable way. He was wandering along a gravel road outside of the city where he was most comfortable, all the silence and calm his companions. He held his head down as usual, hoping to catch a glimmer here or there. And he came upon the brightest object that he had ever seen. It appeared to have fallen off of

someone's neck or been lost, so brilliant was its sheen. It had a piece of wood attached to its back and it was two lines, the short one crossing the other near the top. A little, golden, bearded man lay atop the intersecting lines. He seemed to be in exquisite suffering and Marvin found that the cross had a leather strap that he might tie or untie around his neck. He untied the knot already fusing the ends of the leather strap and then fastened the whole thing to his neck. Marvin found himself in that shiny, golden moment. He immersed himself in the podgy churchwork that he had begun to adore, and his friendly disposition coupled with his desire and hope to conform made him an ideal member of the community of Foedimmanis Fundamentalist church. He quickly set out to determine where he fit into the hierarchy of the organization. He discovered that at that time the church was ageing. Many of the prominent members were older and growing slower, not falling away quickly but one in succession of another such that Marvin, while not intending to arrive at the top of the structure, actually stepped lightly, of course contentedly, to prominence. He had completed his training at precisely the right time to become the spiritual head of the flock. Marvin had achieved without stress, no actual exertion, lightly gliding into his most comfortable chair of all. Remarkably, he had made only a few enemies. His rise was as easy as his life had been and Marvin developed his oratory skills, always refining and becoming more of that comfortable character. Marvin initially led a not insignificant, but modest, flock, and he made a habit of collecting bright and beaming persons who were in trouble, or perhaps they were low in life. He unearthed them from half-buried states or he found them wandering about the city aimless and without company or amity. As he gathered each new acquaintance, and he arranged them inside his dwelling, the church, where they perked and dusted themselves off until at last they shone brilliant and content. Marvin continued to gather personages in the Jackdaw manner, and the process was slow, but he did not mind the pace because Marvin was able to pick up and dust off so many others. He had an intimate relationship with each one of them and they were grateful. Each personage was for Marvin a delicate, golden bond with which he populated his home. He arranged them as he had learned from his family: in specific and clear hierarchy. Thus, he was able to be generous with each one. Yet, Marvin's private trifles of personages changed when he discovered the most brilliant object that he would ever find, more powerful than the shiny, bearded golden man on the cross. He was meandering about in the city with his wife when, looking down as usual, he discovered a man's ring. Ordinarily, Marvin would not be able to relinquish such a brilliant object as a ring, and it was a trinket of pure gold; he just knew. It held in its grasp the shiniest diamonds that Marvin had ever personally beheld. He permitted his wife

to see the object only after several pleadings on her part. When she examined the inner part of the ring, she pointed out to Marvin that they ought to return the ring to its owner because it had an inscription inside: **ADDER DAREIOS**.

Marvin realized immediately that he ought to return the ring. “But how?” How does one contact such an individual in person? Marvin was not the brightest man on earth, but he realized that he ought to get the attention of Adder Dareios himself. He paid an enormous sum to author an open letter to Mr. Adder Dareios, explaining that he had found a ring that was perhaps valuable to the magnate. Dareios was relieved enough to retrieve the ring that he met Marvin in person and their temperaments suited one another. Dareios built the hierarchy and Marvin kept it in place. The two men found a common interest in things spiritual and after a few years, Adder was willing to assist in the expansion of the Foedimmanis Fundamentalist church, which was planning a move to another city. And now, the church would be purchasing an entire complex with funding from “Mr. Dareios” as Marvin called him in person and in public.

Adder Dareios always wanted to break into the church business and once more life seemed to present to Marvin a blessed series of fortunes. When someone asked Marvin “Did you work hard for what you have? You must have worked hard,” he responded that he worked as hard as the lord had given him the strength to work. Marvin was convinced that God had wanted these things to happen for him and the more comfort he experienced in his life, the more he believed that God wished him well in every way. The Foedimmanis Fundamentalist church grew from there, mostly with the financial and political guidance of Dareios Inc.. And Marvin prospered in many ways more than spiritual, having gained a reputation for good oratory. He thought to himself that he was not bad at speaking before a crowd. He became the friend and psychological leader of scores of persons who themselves were willing to contribute to the church, each possessing a shiny story to tell Marvin. And each possessed a private relationship with the reverend Jackdaw that they possessed with no-one else. And Marvin cherished these intimate bonds as if they were gleaming gold, or resplendent silver. Now that he had found the brightest bauble, he was able to attract so many others. As the congregation grew and diversified, Marvin learned more about the different cultures and social backgrounds from which his flock emerged. He considered his duty to understand them as well as to speak at them. Here was the body of Christ before him, literally the bodies of Christ who operated within the hierarchy of the church, each intimately connected to Marvin. And the reverend Jackdaw understood the position of Paul

and the struggles of the early church whose sufferings were the spirit of the lord brought down to earth through the followers. And Marvin believed without question in the factual basis of the New Testament as well as its symbolic value. He roared his speeches to his flock that they act as much like Jesus as their nature would allow.

“But, of course, you will not be like the lord,” he would say. “You will be his imperfect body on earth, tending to the lower ones, as Christ did.”

Marvin delighted in his success and he realized that there were imperfections in the flock that had gathered around him, like nicks in a silver watch. He became privy to many struggles and indecisions and he learned how best to counsel his flock, believing that he guided them along the correct path. It was the way which he had never questioned, nor had he considered his path to be anything except the only one. “After all, haven’t I benefitted? Hasn’t the lord given me so much?” Marvin must be correct about his beliefs, or so he thought, because he had been so fortunate and so obedient to all that was around him. It was into this set of circumstances and church developments that the Adseculae family became members of Foedimmanis Fundamentalist church. Momma mater and Marvin fast became the closest of allies, she one of the more intimate of intimates. She brought status to Marvin’s church with her several publications, mostly concerning the spiritual position of woman in the church. All of that had transpired years ago, and the church grew wild and thick to a point, and then the growth ceased. Marvin was as popular as ever, but there had been scandals at other churches. One minister was accused of purchasing crystal meth from his homosexual lover, and another was found to have embezzled millions from his flock, disappeared. Marvin continued to speak and he even addressed some of these issues in his sermons, temptations that they were, but he never lost faith; he never questioned the teachings that he had been given from the first time he was able to ask questions, and he abided with the assistance of Adder Dareios. Now Momma mater wanted Marvin’s assistance once again, and he was only too glad to offer his presence. She asked him to help her coax her errant daughter back to the flock. He considered her request his mission, sent to him by God in order to give back some of what God had given him. Momma mater’s daughter would be another whose shiny reflection would shine light on Marvin.

Thus their bond.

FETTERS OF THE ENRAPTURED FAMILY

“Are we meeting them or what?!”

Brazil paused, trying to remain calm in order to aggravate him as much as possible.

“I liked you better when you were a drunk,” she evenly returned.

“...liked you more...”

“What?”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means that I think the alcohol that you used to drink when you woke up made you a better person than you really are.”

“It’s the morning whine again.”

The Newcomer’s suggestion that the two of them become proactive in Brazil’s relationship with her family was a relief and a beautifully unexpected gesture, so Brazil had thought. He had chatted with Geldsbaum about the legalities of confronting the Adseculae since the surveillance placed on Brazil was becoming oppressive, if only to Brazil. Proof of the hiring of a private investigator who had been employed by the Adseculae to monitor Brazil was needed. The Newcomer was resourceful enough to discover who the detective was, but the man proved unwilling to betray his clients, even for money.

“What do we do now?” Brazil asked.

“We present a written document to your mother that we are aware of her surveillance.”

“Forge a document?”

“How will she recognize the difference? What we need is that she cease, not that she believe anything or other about us.”

“Once she contacts the investigator?”

“She will have been embarrassed into stopping the investigation.”

The admission in hand, they planned to travel to Wheaton where they might confront the family and end the nonsense, as the Newcomer phrased it. Yet, meeting with the family was not as simple as it initially seemed. The Adseculae did agree to meet with them; they agreed readily to a date and time.

“They never agree to any request of mine,” Brazil said.

Accordingly, when the date arrived, Brazil received a message that they were not meeting. The specifics of the appointment were now different. There were a few arguments while Brazil and Momma mater agreed again on a date. The time of day was at issue, and Brazil’s audacity to claim that Momma might not honor the present agreement caused friction, and again the date came and on this occasion Momma mater simply stated she wanted this or that done at a specific date.

“That’s their way,” Brazil explained to the Newcomer.

The Adseculae were accustomed to getting what they wanted. They dictated conditions whenever possible and there was no escaping their influence in the community; they held good repute. The family software company was thriving, so they controlled an influential portion of the economic part of the community, and they were intimates with Marvin Jackdaw, he with Adder Dareios. The Newcomer was unaccustomed to altering his plans for anyone, and he remained moody. He tolerated what he believed was unreasonable behavior only because such tolerance was necessary to assist Brazil, but the effort and something else

continued to madden him. Remarkably, for periods of time he was considerate and thoughtful and he remained calm when confronted with such childishness. Brazil regularly suspected that he was setting her up for another devastating insult; it was possible. But no, he had no devious maneuver in mind; he was genuinely concerned for his friends Brazil and Mallory; he had taken a serene frame of mind about their well-being, which disturbed Brazil. She was like an animal whose predator had been removed or changed, always suspecting. Mallory knew no better. It was then with an intermittently reasonable Newcomer that she had undertaken to communicate a difficult message with her family, and she thought that she would rather that he changed one way or another and remained one way instead of becoming angry only to become contrite only to find himself enraged, then calm again. She was, for the first time, proud of her friend, though concerned. Brazil suggested that they bring Mallory along. She thought that an inclusive gesture might compel the Newcomer to see that she liked, or at least tolerated, the unfortunate, a gesture aimed towards establishing good faith. Mallory agreed to attend on each occasion, but the Adseculae were themselves manipulating the logistics of the encounter, and the three were unable to meet with the family.

“Contending with them is like dealing with a hydra. Each time one makes an agreement with them, another plan pops up and disrupts everything,” Brazil commented to Mallory and the Newcomer.

When they finally made arrangements that were not summarily canceled hours before they were to arrive, the journey to Wheaton was mostly silent, except when Mallory--the man who insisted that he drive--found himself lost. He refused, for some odd reason, to listen to Brazil's efforts to extricate him from the labyrinth that he had created. He found his way to the large, well-kept house that was domicile to Adseculae only after a few pauses along the road to examine a map. Brazil and the Newcomer exchanged aggravated glances, and Brazil wondered why he refused to tell Mallory to accept her earlier offered assistance. Eventually, Mallory drove up a U-shaped driveway that ran along a huge front yard. He parked his car and then was asked to park it again, and yet a third time on the street out of the way of the guests. While he was parking his car, “Never again,” the Newcomer muttered so only Brazil was able to hear.

She smiled.

When they walked into the front parlor, they were asked to sit and wait where

they were. Their stay in the parlor lasted what seemed to be a long time, and the three of them were able to hear whispered debates where the words “Brazil”, “move them” and “guests” were bandied about. The three of them were able to witness a smattering of the taste that permeated the household. Several old-seeming books were decorously placed on glass end-tables in the corners of the parlor. The Newcomer became interested in one of them and he walked over in order to pick it up. The whispering that came from the center of the house ceased abruptly, but the Newcomer did not hesitate. The books lacked dust-jackets and they had the appearance of well-made texts with cloth woven onto the covers, but when he lifted one of them, all three “books” arose in his hand. The Newcomer amusedly sat down with Brazil and Mallory, appearance the substance of his surroundings. He laughed to himself, and Brazil was relieved to observe some of her old friend returning. She would ask him what amused him later, after Mallory had gone. Several classic “paintings” adorned the walls around them. There was a copy of the Mona Lisa and an over-elongated version of the last supper peered at them directly. The parlor was immaculately kept and the area rug with its frills had been recently cleaned, or perhaps no-one had ever actually stepped upon it. The Newcomer noted that most or all of the books in the parlor were bogus, and the copies of the most popular paintings of the ages had an artificial appearance to them, as if they had been printed from someone’s computer. The seats where they waited for their hosts were quite comfortable and someone had spent a great deal of energy ensuring that all the pieces sat well together, but they lacked that comfortable feeling of actual use. No wear diminished anything in the living-space. The whole house seemed to be the same, as if no-one actually lived there. Annoyed, the Newcomer pondered simply leaving without a word, something he customarily did. Yet, waiting here with Brazil and enduring the nonsense with her he actually found in some way gratifying.

Strange that.

The three had been waiting for an hour when Momma mater emerged from the back room. She was dressed in smart slacks and a woman’s suit-coat, thick with age and pastries; her dress tailored so as to conceal her imperfections possessed that same nonlived-in quality. Entering the room majestically and obviously accustomed to respect or even awe, she appeared as though she were wearing a robe--walking on purple carpet.

“Brazil, dear, it is so good to see you and your friends.”

Momma mater held out her hands for Mallory and the Newcomer to take and Mallory grasped the woman's hands in firm friendship. One might have witnessed on the Newcomer's face repugnance, not limited to the oddly shaped woman who confronted him. Momma mater looked expectantly at Brazil who recognized the unspoken command that her mother issued.

"Oh, yes, this is Mallory." Brazil motioned to the unfortunate.

Momma mater nodded towards Mallory and she asked
"What do you have to do with my daughter?"

The question awkward and intrusive, Mallory was not certain what Momma mater wanted from him. Mallory glanced back at Brazil, awaiting her deliverance from the strange woman. He fumbled about for a moment and he was about to speak.

"Mother, what does that have to do with anything?" Brazil asked in an agitated tone. Momma mater ignored her daughter and turned her eyes towards the Newcomer in an effort to diffuse the situation and regain control of it once more.

"I don't believe my daughter has introduced you. What is your name, young man?"

"His name doesn't matter," Brazil practically shouted.

Having recognized her daughter's tone, Momma mater fell silent. It was then that a portly fellow emerged from just behind Momma mater. Having watched from just behind Momma, he was dressed in black and he sported a patch of white near his Adam's apple. His appearance was immaculately presented in black, and his frame was soft and downy-like. He had obviously eaten well his lifelong and his eyes were striking in their bright-blue brilliance. The man fingered a shiny object in his hands, one that was difficult to discern.

"My name is Marvin, Marvin Jackdaw." He offered his hand to the Newcomer.

The Newcomer shook the man's hand gratefully, though he was unable to suppress a grin on his face. Momma mater put her arm around Brazil's shoulders

and Marvin Jackdaw seemed to the Newcomer unwilling to relinquish his hand. The three were led into the living room past more of the most popular copies of paintings and along a red and purple intricately patterned rug. The living area much like the parlor, the group sat and began their idle chatter. The Newcomer observed mostly, did not wish to chat. He listened to Brazil and her mother exchange barbs, compliments that were insults. The thick and unsavory tension between the two ladies was amusing if one did not have information about their past. Remaining beside the Newcomer as much as possible, Mallory said not one word. The discussion turned from Brazil to art with the Newcomer's comment on the reprints present in the room.

"Yes, we have no originals," Momma mater commented.

"You do not buy local art?" asked the Newcomer.

"Local art is such Trash," Momma mater added.

"Present company excluded, of course." She tapped Brazil's knee.

Marvin Jackdaw asked the Newcomer to accompany him to his art-room. And the Newcomer followed the man to a room filled mostly with bright, shiny objects and a few of what appeared to be velvet paintings. Marvin asked the Newcomer if he wished to drink some wine, which was refused. The two relaxed in an intimate room just beside the parlor, which appeared as though it went regularly unoccupied, so lacking was there any signs of wear and degeneration that are the signs of the living. Marvin began.

"May I chat with you a bit?"

"About what?"

"Well, I thought perhaps you might be interested in a book I have."

The Newcomer Slipped Marvin a skeptical look.

"C.S. Lewis *Mere Christianity*," he issued dryly.

“Oh, then you know it.”

“You wish to proselytize.”

“I wish to spread the word.”

Marvin smiled at the Newcomer.

“Let me ask you a question. If I listen to you and propose to change my beliefs, will you listen to me and propose to change yours?”

Recognizing what the Newcomer meant, the reverend Marvin Jackdaw ceased smiling. He paused a moment.

“You know what is true, and you know what I believe is false. I can’t say I know that about you. Yet, I am the indulgent one.”

The Newcomer paused here for a moment.

“Who is wiser?”

“You have no arrogance?”

“I possess another kind.”

“I take it that you are not a believer.”

“I am a believer, but not in your belief.”

“I am prepared to talk about anything with an open mind.”

“But your faith will never waver?”

“Well, no, my faith will not be shaken.”

“Then the topic you propose is worthless, since one of us has already decided what is true and what is not.”

The Newcomer began again.

“Let me ask you a question, since you wish to chat, and do not take offence at what I say; offence is not intended, though my manner is frank and abrupt at times, and others sometimes suffer for it.”

“It's alright,” said the Jackdaw. “Go ahead.”

“Well, I notice your manner and your appearance. You have the look of a man who has suffered not at all.”

“Whatever do you mean?” Marvin Jackdaw asked goodnaturedly.

“You have no genuine conflicts, nothing inside disturbing you. You live in safe comfort.”

“I have a bit of peace, I suppose.”

“You have no adversity, or strife, at least not authentic strife. Am I wrong to assume so much? Have you labored hard, suffered, for your position?”

The Reverend Marvin frowned a bit.

“I have dealt with strife and suffering...”

“...but that is not what I ask. Do you have any strife or suffering in your life?”

“I have, I have,” the Marvin returned.

“What would that be?”

“I have my own struggles. There are many difficulties associated with my position.”

“But you do not wonder who you are, or what your life is. You do not question your vocation.”

“I do wonder at what is the correct course of action,

what god wishes for me.”

“That is not the same as questioning one’s life.”

“It is difficult.”

“Difficult, but not suffering.”

“Perhaps it is not suffering as you wish it to be, no.”

“I see.”

The Newcomer looked around him impatiently.

“I would say that you are not a living man.”

Marvin Jackdaw cleared his throat, and sipped his soda.

“I would say that you have the look of a man who has no spirituality,” he said.

“Perhaps I appear that way, but I venerate every day of existence, every detail that emerges. Even the negative aspects of living are sublime. Living makes life meaningful. I don’t indulge in a ritual that serves to remind me how I ought to escape living.”

“You don’t celebrate any holidays? That’s a lonesome life.”

The Newcomer paused again here pregnantly.

“I relish birthdays, the beginning of the New Year, and the dates of the deaths of tyrants.”

Again looking around the sterilized room, the Newcomer paused once more here.

“I take joy from driving a well-built automobile. I relish ancient ruins, paintings, intimate performances of chamber music, punk music, the blues, things like that.

I require that others in my life be able. That recognition of every-day profundity is what one might call 'Spirituality.'"

The Newcomer thought to himself, chuckled.

"Perhaps I have been a bit too able and uncaring," he said to no-one.

"What do you do when you are depressed, when you need support from a higher source?" Marvin Jackdaw asked him.

"I suppose I turn to friends and the ritual of friendship."

"What you say sounds all fine and good, but there are wars, torture, death-camps, all sorts of evil in the world. What do you have if you don't have friends at a given time? Where then do you turn?"

"Then I suffer until I have new bonds that tie me again and lift me. It isn't as dreadful as it sounds."

"You have little, if you have no friend in Christ."

"Our conversation has turned on its head. You wish me to open myself to your beliefs and you are closed to mine. I am expected to turn myself and you congratulate yourself for lacking the ability to understand me."

"Perhaps another topic is better."

"Perhaps,...if you like to chat."

"Let's talk about your friend, Brazil."

"Let's."

"Do you really think that it has been so bad for her?"

"What do you mean?"

“Has she not told you horrible things about her family?”

“She has.”

“Don’t you think that she may be exaggerating a bit?”

“I am her friend, and so no matter the facts, I take her position.”

Thus their bond.

Mallory was enjoying himself more than he had in some time. When the Newcomer and the reverend Jackdaw departed, so did Brazil and her mother. He was left with a young woman of about eighteen years old who appeared to him to be the most attractive female he had encountered in person. She smiled at him when they first saw one another and her gestures and open-handedness welcomed him with warm regard. Mallory did not know how to act around such a female at first, especially since she talked to him like a female living within her early twenties. She was playful with her flashes of eyes and her light, nimble frame. Dressed in blue, she moved her body about delicately, as if a slight breeze might disrupt her charm. Still, she was able to preserve the allure that was so very powerful to Mallory with an easy grace. She knew that he was attracted to her and their insubstantial conversation was a more potent aspect of her general attractiveness. She inquired as to his beliefs, and he asserted that he had few of them, that he believed in something higher than himself. She smiled at his smiles and laughed when he explained his beliefs to her, which annoyed Mallory. Nevertheless, he did not demonstrate any obvious perturbation, since he realized that he might scare away the sweet young fawn. The two sat for a while chatting in the parlor about the knick-knacks and whatnot that lay around and on top of the various pieces of expensive furniture which welcomed visitors to the Adseculae. They then found their way outside where a fine, clear day greeted them. Brazil’s family owned large segments of land that had been a part of the community for many of years. A thin, grey, gravel path led them toward a lake where the two continued to reveal very little to one another, and Mallory found that he was permitted to touch the girl. He did so carefully and gently in order to

retain her attention, laughing at her humor and flattering her. She was indeed beautiful and she was not without motive of her own, though she recognized what was Mallory's intent. She held his hand and ran away before him, ensuring that he glance at her youthful legs and her slender, effortless movements. She asked him if he had been saved and Mallory replied that he had not been, but "I'm willing to try," he said.

She laughed and then frowned a bit, while she directed his interest out onto the calm, restive water. She need make no effort and Mallory enjoyed taking her. When they returned to the land, they again joined hands and she led him into the house. She stopped at the door and "Wait here," she commanded.

Mallory grew somewhat excited as he stood before the immense house, waiting in order to wait more. He paced along a multi-colored pebble path, looking down at the crunching stone beneath his feet. It had been some time, and he did not arrive here with the expectation that he would meet anyone who might take up his interest as she. Mallory saw the young brunette girl open the door to the house with a smile. Alone, she directed him up into the center of the building along a white-carpeted stairway. Mallory laughed to himself how he was floating up into a most comfortable heaven. As she directed him, she stopped at an entrance or a hallway, instructed him to stop and then whisk him along quickly in order to avoid detection. Mallory suspected that the girl had done this sort of thing in the past. Ultimately, she directed him into a room painted pink and adorned with images of horses and raggedy Ann dolls and cabbage-patch kids. She lay herself down on a bed nearby and tapped the space beside her. Mallory sat down quickly and rubbed her back. She responded by touching his arms and hands and the pair made single their varied desire. Mallory did not think while he was engaged with the girl, but somehow his wits returned when he redressed himself, and that thickening slump of lead that he felt on certain mornings again plagued him. Twenty minutes of pleasure now turned toward him with a vile grin. He observed her as he ruminated. She smiled back at him, but she also had less of the allure that she before possessed. Her need sated, she seemed to Mallory to be in a hurry. She guided him out of the room and into the hallway where she told him to wait, and then around a few corners and near the stairwell they came when she suddenly rushed him back along the same path into the same room again. Mallory noticed that there were several entrances to many of the rooms, some locked and others wide open. The girl exited her room and Mallory was able to hear muffled voices clearly.

"Another one up here with you?" asked the mature and confident voice of an

angering man.

“Daddy!”

“I saw you with a man on the lake. Where is he?”

Having heard the swishing sound of slippers on carpet and the opening of a door, Mallory quickly darted out of the room through a door to an unknown hallway that led to the rear of the house. He watched in front and back as he descended into the darkened backyard through what seemed like a shrine to television. He emerged from the house around the place where the pair had begun their lakeside voyage. Mallory stood by the lake and attempted to seem relaxed. He sat on a bench near the overturned boat that the pair had used, hoping that he would not encounter the father. He peered into the house and observed a man walking down the same flight of stairs he himself had descended. He was older, and a loose short-sleeved shirt concealed a potbelly. The man ceased his descent in order to observe Mallory as he sat before the small lake. Mallory turned his gaze away from the angry descendent quickly, but remained where he sat. He emerged and let a door slam in the face of his pursuing daughter. He examined Mallory carefully before talking and the unfortunate turned towards him.

“Hello.”

The man eyed Mallory suspiciously, then walked towards him. He lit a cigarette and looked out onto the lake.

“How are you?” he calmly asked Mallory.

“I’m good,” Mallory replied.

Soma emerged from the house with a concerned look on her face, which quickly turned to relief and then counterfeit anger.

“You see, Daddy? You see?”

The man continued to smoke.

“Jesus,” she continued. “You always suspect me, and for no good reason. I don’t do anything wrong and you never trust me,” she complained with a tear.

Trying to calm himself, the man turned to his daughter and embraced her.

“Perhaps I made a mistake.”

The portly man with the cigarette placed his arm around his daughter and walked toward the bench where Mallory sat. He seated the two of them down next to the unfortunate, himself beside Mallory between him and his daughter. Almost without explanation, his expression turned from dour to glad and he greeted Mallory with a grin.

“It seems I was in danger of suspecting an innocent man,” he offered.

Mallory turned a quizzical look toward Dareios.

“Perhaps I can make it up to you,” Adder claimed.

Mallory had sat alone for some time when Brazil and her mother emerged from the house in an apparent argument. Brazil was composed, but her eyes were red and her face exhausted. When they approached Mallory, the demeanor of Momma mater changed and she smiled at him courteously.

“Have you been out here long?” she asked him.

“Oh, no ma’am. There was a girl who took me on a boat ride earlier, and then she had to go into the house.” Mallory lied a bit, told a bit of truth.

“Soma,” Momma mater said with a grin.

“You know, I never learned her name. Anyway, I’ve been sitting here enjoying the scenery since she left.”

“She is one smart girl, that one. She’s a Dareios, you know.”

“Oh really?” Mallory lied a bit again.

The meeting with the Adseculae had not gone as Brazil and the Newcomer

would have liked. They had little chance to talk with one another, and the way that circumstances arose meant that they had no chance to present to the family the demand that Brazil's family discontinue surveillance. The Newcomer wondered whether the idea had been a good one in the first place. They might have appeared as though they were paranoid; the family was always able to deny their involvement, even though presented with evidence. Brazil had explained how they denied even the most obvious of inconvenient conclusions. The Newcomer suggested that they come to the house just a bit more often and develop a good relationship with the family. Perhaps when feelings were better and a bond was formed, the strange actions on the part of the family might cease. Brazil disagreed thoroughly and explained to the Newcomer that no amount of sugar would replace the brine that she tasted when she talked with her mother. The Newcomer was insistent; he wished to establish a good bond with them.

The next few weeks were uneventful. Brazil returned to her art and the Newcomer immersed himself in enjoyment of the Lago, much to Mallory's delight. He offered to assist Brazil once again.

"Anything that will help," he said to an incredulous Brazil.

Mallory worked with the Newcomer, but he was intermittently present to Brazil and his employer. Never explaining where he was going or what he was doing, Mallory simply disappeared for days in a row. Having returned, he appeared to be more satisfied with himself than usual--at least that was Brazil's observation. One morning after having fallen asleep on a couch in the living room of the Newcomer's living-space, Mallory was awoken by the pressing sensation of a light stream of liquid, a slight sting on his chin. Dazed, he wiped his face with his hands and felt again the jet stream of liquid near his eyes. The smell of vinegar somehow finding its way into his olfactory, he wiped the liquid from his face and rubbed his eyes only to feel a burning sensation when he opened his eyelids. He was unable to see his assailant because of the irritation that he felt. Annoyed, he wiped his eyes with his shirt-sleeves, expecting to see a Newcomer in front of him when his vision returned. Instead, he saw only a long-haired tortoise-shelled cat playfully ignoring him.

Thus their bond.

THE MINGLING OF BLUE AND BLACK

Leon's mother annoyed him. She was not like his father who kept his affairs in order and who gave a good impression wherever he traveled. She was weaker than he, and her way of living after his demise had deteriorated to the point that Leon felt compelled to live with and care for her. He missed his father.

"That man was well-dressed and clever."

He loved his mother, of that he was certain. Still, he wanted to get away from her at times. She was so needy in some ways, and her habit of purchasing, or scavenging, old objects and restoring them was quaint until the need occupied every recess and corner of every room of Leon's home with antiques; the crevices were next. Surrounded by old objects and the scent of stained and staining wood, Leon grew uncomfortable. He would never leave his mother alone to contend with a hostile world, but he wished that he possessed his independence, and he was unable to socialize at home because of the mess, which grated his good nature. Leon had to demarcate certain areas of his apartment where his mother was not permitted to stray; he needed some part of his place to be well-ordered. In spite of his request for controlled space, he treated his mother and everyone else well, and he had a great many options for social expression because he was well-liked by almost everyone; he was the tawny giant. He regularly visited his friend Felina who was grateful for the company. Felina was what Leon called a "Greater Confidant." She was informed about all that transpired in Leon's life and she was now aware of Leon's concern about Adder Dareios, but her comfort was not enough at this time. Leon also frequented one or two taverns in the downtown area, and everyone befriended him there as well. He visited the Chicago library, attended concerts and other events, but unrest remained. A number of college friends also kept regular contact with Leon, if only through internet sites. His contemporaries had, after all, scattered about the globe, but that kind of contact was largely unsatisfying to

Leon at the best of times. Now, he enjoyed such interactions even less. Possessed of a large network of connections, he was very capable and he had the potential to accomplish much in the form of material success, which was important to Leon.

“Quite important, yes.”

Still, he wanted a different kind of success.

“Not financial success so much, no, no.”

Leon needed something else, and he was under the impression that Mr. Dareios would be able to assist, as Dareios was able to assist in many things. He thought again that he might be able to bring the Newcomer and Dareios together in order that the two men form a bond. He had performed the service of bonding before with good results.

“Of course, I would reap some reward, well, of course.”

Leon was oddly attracted to Adder Dareios, but he was reluctant as well. He delighted in the gatherings of varied persons, and reveled in communal associations with many persons, so he did not feel as comfortable meeting Dareios individually on a regular basis, but Dareios insisted.

“No, I cannot refuse his request. How could I?”

And Leon met the man at different locations around the city, but always where Dareios happened to have a meeting or an engagement to attend. Leon thought it best that he not request to alter any of the important man’s plans, but the demands and the places where they met were becoming increasingly difficult for Leon to abide. He was willing to do as the man said, but he was asked to keep the meetings confidential and Leon’s store of excuses for long lunches and unexplained absences from home, work and social events were fewer and fewer all the time. Dareios never asked for any material that appeared to be private or harmful if revealed, so Leon thought that revealing information would be harmless enough to his friend and employer. Eventually, Leon’s assistance would bring profit to the Newcomer, so Leon was satisfied with his actions. Leon had a need to repeat that rationale to himself. Yet, what interested Leon most was that Dareios did not appear to be overly interested in the Newcomer.

He wished to possess information about his whereabouts on given days and his regular habits; he wanted information about what associates the Newcomer saw, but little else. Leon thought it somewhat strange that Dareios wanted trivial information, and he recognized that these men were competitors of sorts; he thought that a bond between them might be magnificent indeed.

“Why not permit me to introduce the two of you?” Leon asked on more than one occasion.

“I like to observe from a distance,” Dareios responded.

“Oh, well, I can vouch for my employer. I believe him to be of admirable character.”

“Oh really? What makes you say that?”

“Well, mind you, I have not been associated with the man for the longest time, no sir. So, I cannot talk for certain about him.”

Leon shook his head and placed his hands on the table before him, open-palmed.

“But, I have noticed that our mutual acquaintance has a thoughtful character. He is headstrong and unpredictable, but also forgiving and reasonable. I must say, as I have said before, that he has not been the same person of late, which is, it seems to me at least, a good thing.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well...I feel odd saying so, but he was never very communicative at Corpu-tech and he was in the habit of talking, well, let's say...caustically to the employees, but in the past months-I believe something has happened to him-he is now...how shall I say it...more compassionate.”

“That is interesting. I wonder at the cause.”

Leon was excited at the interest of the man.

“Yes, Yes indeed. I did as well. He is more generous, and he appears to have a greater concern for his employees at least. More affable too. I may be imagining

these things, mind you.”

“What makes you think so.”

“Well, I have never witnessed him invite anyone to his home, well, at least not me.”

Dareios chuckled and Leon cleared his throat.

“Yes, well, I had never been invited, that is, until recently.”

“I see.”

“And at first I thought that he was tricking me in some way; he still has a habit of teasing, but I’ve been to his home several times now.”

“I don’t see how that is any kind of change.”

“Oh, sir, if you knew him before and you knew him later, you would see that there is a different man present, at least most times.”

“Most times?”

“Well, he has changed for the most part, but he does relapse into a darker character occasionally, I dare say. His cutting silences and biting sarcasm are brief...I fear he is in some kind of depression...he rages briefly, and then he becomes contrite.”

“I see.”

“I should add also, oh I must, that when he comes to his new self, he apologizes and he makes certain that he has made up for what he claims is unreasonable behavior.”

“He is an interesting man.”

“I don’t believe he is any different than anyone else, no, I think he is simply more.”

“How do you mean?”

“He seems to be more of everything. More anger, more indulgence...more.”

“Oh.”

“I think it has been a problem for him, sir, but I am of the hope that he begins now to master himself.”

“What may be the cause do you think?”

“I do not know, sir, but it is as if there has been a birth of some sort, like a man who is on increase somehow. He needs to grow into conscience, or something like that.”

“I’m not quite sure what you mean.”

“Well, it is something that he said. He claimed one day that morality cannot be legislated, and no education will produce an authentically moral man. One’s morals need to grow because they are organic, a part of the, well, he called human beings *Homotheria*. So, morals are part of the *homotherion*, the organic virtue of that creature.”

“He is an odd one, isn’t he?”

“I do think so, sir, but perhaps not more than we.”

Leon continued to visit with the Adder twice more. He explained to the man the structure of Corpu-tech and he was able to alert Adder to much of the habits of the Newcomer: his schedule, his love of his dogs and Leon even possessed information about what Law firm assisted his employer. Dareios was delighted with the information, but their meetings came about less frequently. Leon inquired about the project that the magnate claimed he would fund, but invariably the conversation ended there, or some urgent situation demanded Dareios’ attention. Disappointed at Dareios’ refusal to discuss what the two had originally agreed to discuss, Leon was relieved that he was no longer required to excuse himself from meetings and other gatherings that he enjoyed so much. He remained committed to bonding the two men, but the danger to the Brigade and

himself seemed to have dissipated merely by the passage of time and Dareios' disinterestedness in the two men and their project. Dareios three times more sent a proxy to ask Leon questions, which the tawny giant disliked. Still, he answered the queries and waited, and after a time Leon had no more contact with Mr. Adder Dareios.

Thus their bond.

BLACK AND RED MAKE BLUE

Leaning over the table in order to reach a brush that had rolled away from her, Brazil did not wish to undertake the awkward and toilsome task of moving her large frame in order to grasp the artist's tool. She stretched her arm out and barely tapped the handle just lightly enough to roll it away from her. She needed it now, not soon, not later. Now. And it was barely out of reach.

“FUCKING THING!”

She surprised herself at her reaction. She stretched again, but the brush remained out of her every reach. The Newcomer was walking through his front room where Brazil sat.

“Can you get that for me?” she asked, pointing to her brush.

He walked three paces nearer to her, and then he stretched himself toward the brush, extending his hand only just short of the brush, though there was no obstruction keeping him from it. He extended his hand twice more in a sham attempt, mocking his friend with a grin on his face.

“GODDAMN ASSHOLE, JUST GIVE ME...GIMME THE FUCKING THING!” Brazil raged.

The Newcomer expected that she yell, expected that she call him names, but the vehemence of her reaction was stronger than usual, and he suddenly ceased teasing her. He stepped twice and retrieved the brush, handed it to her. She snatched it away angrily and refused to look at him.

“I was just kidding around.”

“You're a fucking child, you know that?!”

“I handed it to you.”

Brazil had been under a good deal of stress after her encounter with her mother. She had adopted the Newcomer’s habit of drinking almost every day. Her limitations unrecognized or disregarded, she imbibed hourly.

“I am glad that you are my friend,” she had told him.

She was not allowing her body to recover from the previous day’s drink, and the strain of Bacchus began to impair her memory further. She lost concentration at times as well, and the Newcomer noticed that she would express the same sentence repeatedly, thinking that she had not yet uttered the present remarks.

“My family is well to do. With all those, wohoo!” She pointed her fingers in the air. “... things that wealthy people have...”

And ten minutes later,

“I come from a wealthy family, believe it or not...” She pointed her finger in his face. “...they have big houses and are well-connected and all that wohoo.”

“You told me.”

And the next day...

“My family is well to do. With all those, wohoo!, things that wealthy people have...”

Brazil became increasingly unable to perform the simplest of practical tasks. Lately she was unable to follow directions to another part of the city, or she might board the wrong bus or train and travel miles out of her way. Previously, she had been more direction-savvy than most. But now, she became lost several times and the Newcomer was able to send a taxi for her only after considerable argument about where she was and a request to locate her cell-phone via satellite; she stubbornly refused to tell him, or she simply did not recognize where she was located. Often, her speech was slurred to the point of inaudibility and her most sober moments were quickly driven off by wine or liquor, even upon waking. Brazil claimed no knowledge of their whereabouts, but all occupants of the Newcomer’s abode understood where the alcohol had gone.

The Newcomer stored the most precious vintages elsewhere, noticing more and more that he enjoyed the state of sobriety--though he had not developed an aversion to drink. The sight of Brazil's descent was unpleasant to him and he wondered if he had appeared as she did when he imbibed so much. Brazil continued work on her statuettes, but only in appearance. The brush that she requested was about to be used to touch up one of her already completed projects. Polish was needed to complete most of her works, but not much. Because she was unable to conceive of a new figure, she occupied her time touching up old pieces. Brazil ordinarily occupied her time with art history readings, or French literature in translation, but recently she left those interests behind for her commune with Bacchus. Twice, the Newcomer and Mallory were compelled to carry her home after her date with inebriation. She had never been very tidy, but her area of the Newcomer's living space was increasingly unkempt and it had begun to emit a new odor, the likes of which neither Mallory nor the Newcomer were able to place. It was within her own wretched state that Brazil lived.

"Are you alright?" the Newcomer asked her.

"I'm fine."

She drank from a purple plastic cup.

"Since when do you care?"

The Newcomer had no response to her question and he decided that talking with her was senseless presently. He walked to the side of the room where Brazil sat and began to read. The space was quiet for a time until Brazil came over to him, sat on a couch beside him.

"So...I talked with my mother last night," she began.

The Newcomer lowered his book and gave her undivided attention, which made Brazil nervous somehow.

"They...they want..."

The Newcomer's patience remained short at times, long at others.

“They want what?”

“They want you to come to church with them...with them and me.”

The Newcomer laughed.

“They what?”

Brazil paused and suddenly did not wish to continue the conversation.

“They want you and I to attend a service of Foedimmanis Fundamentalist Church.”

The Newcomer was incredulous.

“Did you explain to them...”

“...I told them it isn't a good idea, but my mother insists that they want to help.”

“Help you?”

“Well, no. They think...”

“What do they think?”

“The reverend Marvin Jackdaw believes you are a troubled soul.”

The Newcomer raised his eyebrows and rolled his eyes. The two stared hard at one another, and Brazil breathed easier. Somewhere between the two of them a grin emerged and after several moments of contemplation, it appeared similar on the face of each. Both recognized and both laughed.

“Well, they have one thing correct,” said the Newcomer.

“You want to go?”

“Will there be drinks?” he asked smiling.

Thus their bond.

GLITTERING BRAZEN TRIUMPH OF THE UNFORTUNATE

The Newcomer felt joyous. He drove along Lakeshore drive in one of the smoothest rides he had experienced, simply because of his Lago. It responded quite well with the exception of some minor inconveniences. The car had been painted a glossy jet black and the interior refinished to the specifications of the hegemon himself. The Lago was not like other cars he possessed; rather it was better because he felt as if he were genuinely connected to the street. The simplicity of the mechanism produced a better bond to the ground beneath its wheels. The interior of the car was practically new, and the whole of the mechanism responded well to starts and stops. Mallory was delighted with the Newcomer's joy and the two men smiled and laughed as they tested and retested the auto into and then out of the city. Mallory was concerned that there might be an accident, that all his labor might be ruined, but the Newcomer was jubilant enough to feel invincible for the moment, perhaps the first time he had felt so. It was true that he had felt powerful on prior occasions, but somehow his present condition was different. He enjoyed the look and the feel of the auto and he appreciated its restoration; he was preserving a part of history, he thought, but historical preservation was not the sole reason for his jubilation. He did not recognize it, but that he was in the car with the two closest persons to him made the ride that much more pleasant. Brazil was close-packed in the single rear seat of the coupe, and the ride along with the joy that Mallory felt were grating her nerves. Still, she remained mostly silent, amazed and gladdened at the high spirits of her Newcomer. Seeing him as he was on the day that he first drove the newly restored vehicle brought satisfaction to her. It was strange that he continued to wish to help her with her relationship to her family, but she refused to question her good fortune. The trip around and about the city was a four hour one, but the three companions experienced it as if it were twenty minutes. They ate at a restaurant downtown, discussing the particulars of the Lago and its

performance all the while. Mallory claimed that there were a few modifications that he would like to make while Brazil offered that the car appeared perfect. The Newcomer agreed with Mallory, but he noted that the auto was running well enough at present. Modifications were in all probability constantly needed, as they had already been. The day was clear and the streets were less congested than usual because of the time of day that the compatriots had chosen. Brazil and Mallory even managed to converse with one another in a civil manner, but that graciousness did not last. Brazil continued her preoccupation with distraction and alcohol and her increasing mood swings dampened spirits.

It was coming time that the Newcomer and Brazil attend Foedimmanis Fundamentalist Church, and as the time for their initial visit drew near, so much did Brazil's attentiveness and coherence fall away. The Newcomer had attended services long ago, but he did not now recall their length or manner. What he remembered was a great hall with wooden benches, stained glass and intricate rituals accompanied by long-robed official-looking men carrying incense. When Brazil and he arrived at Foedimmanis Fundamentalist, he was amazed at the long, serpentine path that led to the place of worship. The ride resembled a drive through a subdued countryside as they passed a lake and a playground, a pool and tennis courts that were part of the overall complex. He wondered how natural they were. The actual place of worship contained less stained glass than the Newcomer recalled from his childhood, and the altar possessed less implements of worship, the place resembling a very large theater or a stadium. The seats descended gradually from a great height down onto and about the altar while another row of like plastic seats surrounded the lower ones. Shaped like a U, the area of worship extended almost the length of a sports field, and the maximum occupancy of the space exceeded any estimate that the Newcomer might level. Clearly, the space had been designed to house a great many worshippers. The altar itself surrounded by deep red carpeting, speakers had been set high above the audience and strategically placed about the worship-space in order to ensure that all attendees were able to hear the edifying words of the reverend Marvin Corvus Jackdaw. Brazil instructed the Newcomer on how to comport himself, which really was no direction at all.

“Oh, you can just be yourself. No-one will bother you. They really are nice people.”

The Newcomer pressed a dubious look.

“It’s just my family that’s psychotic.”

The worshipers were generally friendly, and the Newcomer noted that he was able to become lost easily in the mass of persons who gathered around the reverend. One was forgotten among them as easily as a herdsman neglects a single animal. Enormously popular even as reverends are concerned, Marvin Jackdaw was friendly and soft to the touch and his portly frame gave the impression of a man whose nature was a soft comforter, or a giant pillow. His manner was possessed of no jagged edges, and one might witness several different pieces of jewelry dangling about his person at any given time. Perhaps his nature would change without them. If one were observant, they would notice that the jewelry pieces were rarely the same, always a new trinket to greet his flock.

Momma mater took time from her busy schedule to greet and direct the Newcomer and Brazil to a foremost seat, at least nearer the reverend than they might have been, given their late arrival. She chatted with Marvin while the seats filled, and she and Marvin gazed toward and beamed at the Newcomer and Brazil, but especially the Newcomer. Though plastic, the seats were comfortable and the Newcomer noticed that the persons surrounding him were kind and soft, like Marvin. The congregation as a whole appeared to have lived delicate, comfortable lives, as if they had been sleeping gently on comforters and on enormous pillows. Many of the older ladies wore a thick makeup that was designed to conceal their age, but only made obvious how their faces had sagged over the years. Most worshipers wore ties and semi-formal attire, again the most comfortable, acceptable garb. The Newcomer and Brazil listened to a sermon from Marvin about the sad state of the faith and the need to continue proselytizing. The age that Marvin and his congregation lived was different than any other; certain persons had lost faith. His words were competently presented and many members appeared moved, but the Newcomer and Brazil felt a flat, mediocre, deadening sensation when he spoke about the friendship of Jesus. When the hour-long service had ended and the lights brightened, the worshipers stood and the great mass of personages blended into an immense dining hall where everyone paid a small, reasonable sum for breakfast or other foodstuff. The Newcomer observed vending machines and beyond closed double doors, he saw what he thought was a mini-mall with Christian stores along a quaint enclosure, mostly comprised of windows. Brazil motioned that he come with her and the two arrived at a table where Marvin Jackdaw and Momma mater hosted several worshipers gripped by every word either one of them uttered. The topics

were serious, but safe. Marvin beamed as Momma mater spoke to her captive, intimate audience about how profound her feeling of religious sentiment had become. She emphasized that she was particularly proud to be a mother and a steward of her children who had in turn followed the path of the lord. The Newcomer observed the sullenness that emerged on Brazil's face as Momma mater spoke. After the table had been fed and sated with coffee or tea, the reverend Marvin arose and announced that the festivities would begin. The room arose and worshipers moved one another about in a bustling egress out onto the field of the larger complex. Everything about Foedimmanis was large and seemingly expensive, but the number of members carried the weight of all that expense. The Newcomer and Brazil managed to join forces in order to refrain from being hustled where they did not intend to go. The reverend and Momma mater became so busy with guests and worshipers that they had no time to interact with them.

"When will we be permitted to talk with them?" asked the Newcomer on their trip home.

"I don't know. That's how it is with my mother. She asks you to come to her service, and then virtually ignores you."

"Her service?"

"Oh, yes. It is her service, you know. Jackdaw is only window dressing."

Brazil met the Newcomer's eyes.

"At least, that's what she thinks."

The next Sunday, Momma mater and Marvin Jackdaw were particularly aggressive about coaxing a reluctant Brazil and Newcomer to attend their service.

"Now, again, please explain why are we asked to attend when they ignore us once we arrive?" the Newcomer asked.

"That that's how my mother works. She won't ignore us

forever.”

The Newcomer was annoyed at the waste of time, and Mallory took some joy in asking questions about what the two of them were doing.

“I still don’t understand. You’re supposed to be talking with your mother about what? And she doesn’t even speak to you?”

The Newcomer grew more annoyed the more he contemplated the situation, and though his presence was requested, he wanted little to do with these social events. He felt nothing revelatory or profound when he listened to Marvin. The congregation, while genial, was for the most part vacuous; the majority, it seemed, were present only to demonstrate to others their dress, or manner, even their latest accomplishments and some of the others were annoyingly invasive. The older members of the congregation were the more involved, the more serious about the faith while the younger were aggressive. Still, the Newcomer had attended only once. Perhaps he would experience some unforeseen, edifying moment, and then he might have an altogether novel perspective. Again, the two traveled to Foedimmanis Fundamentalist, having asked a reluctant Mallory to attend. Again, Momma mater directed them to a particular place in the church where the two were surrounded by friendly faces and warm hands. The reverend Jackdaw presented a sermon on elements of the early church and the need to adhere to the strictures given in the bible. Marvin was blistering in his presentation on this occasion; one might observe the sternness of Paul in his voice. The members of the audience were moved to tears in some cases while the Newcomer and Brazil sat expressionless. The words and the concepts were familiar to both, but the life and the depth of feeling and intellect were again flat. The Newcomer contemplated that it was a certain feeling that he did not experience here, but rather he experienced such intuition elsewhere, practically anywhere else. At the end of the service, the reverend Marvin personally greeted the pair, seizing the hand of the Newcomer.

“You are most welcome, my friends. You are most welcome.”

“Thank you.”

“Thank you.”

“I hope we can chat again, like we did before.” He addressed the Newcomer

with a wink.

Brazil wondered at the remark. When Marvin paid attention more to his flock than to them, she asked him what Marvin meant.

“We discussed you,” he returned.

“You did?”

The Newcomer laughed.

“Well, not really. When any substance emerged in the conversation, he stopped talking. It was strange.”

He thought a moment.

“But not altogether different from his sermons, I suppose,” he added.

Marvin continued to tend to his flock, meandering about and gladdening with a touch and a polish all that crossed his path. Momma mater raised her hand in the midst of the crowd, directing the Newcomer and Brazil towards her. She smiled, as others of the congregation had smiled, and after the service, she drove the friends to her home just a few miles from the church, Brazil’s protests that they had their own vehicle going unheard. The Newcomer deferred to Brazil. At the Adseculae home, the two were given a large, early lunch where the talk consisted of the weather, Brazil’s dress, the delivery of the day’s sermon. Momma mater repeatedly placed her hand on the top of Brazil’s hand, telling the both of them how much she missed her daughter, how glad she had been when the two decided to attend services at Foedimmanis Fundamentalist. The Newcomer disliked the tone that she took with Brazil, one of a caring parent. Still, he deferred to Brazil. After lunch, two of the Adseculae children and Momma mater entertained Brazil and the Newcomer in the living room with a few drinks and snacks. Brazil sat quietly while she listened to her mother speak about her latest book and her lectures.

“Momma is a leading figure in the academic community,” Brazil explained with an obsequiousness that tasted bitter to the Newcomer.

Momma mater continued to speak about her accomplishments and her own

thoughts about this and that for another hour, and the Newcomer watched, waiting for Brazil to speak, interrupt, anything. Momma spoke and spoke and spoke again, all about herself.

“You have not even asked her to talk with us,” he said to Brazil when Momma had left in order to take a phone call.

“You don’t understand my mother,” she replied.

And Momma returned before the conversation went further. She led the two around the house, giving a tour of an immense basement and two floors of the cleanest and most neatly arranged material objects. She had invited another two of her companions to listen with Brazil and the Newcomer and together they formed a group that followed every word and gesture that she presented. Before either Brazil or the Newcomer realized how long they had been at her mother’s house, the afternoon had slipped into the early evening. Thinking the pair was a nascent couple, Momma asked cursorily about what the two of them did and where they lived.

“Mother, we are only friends,” Brazil corrected.

As the Newcomer continued to wait for the visit to end, Momma mater directed the company to a section of the house where Brazil used to sleep.

“This is Brazil’s old room,” she said, smiling at Brazil who frowned.

Obviously embarrassed and angry at the exposure, Brazil continued her obsequiousness with her silence. Momma mater showed her audience a number of porcelain dolls and figurines that lined the walls of Brazil’s old bedroom. Momma handed several of them over to Brazil, expecting that she in turn present them to the audience. Momma decided that the Newcomer ought to see one in particular that, while of little value, held sentiment for Brazil’s mother. The Newcomer held the trifle in his hands, observing it, while Momma compelled Brazil to feel the material on the dress of another figure. While watching the interaction between mother and daughter, the patience that had so remarkably composed the Newcomer observed that the figure was pleasant enough, even cleverly constructed, one of a portly girl and a little dog. There were a lot of little porcelain dogs silently barking in that room.

The Newcomer let drop the figure and it smashed into several pieces on the floor, impossible to repair. Momma mater and Brazil froze. The rest of the company said nothing. Momma bent over and began to piece together the figure while Brazil stared hard at her friend, realizing his intent. He shrugged. Recognizing the peril in which his maneuver had placed Brazil,

“Sorry about that,” he said.

“Oh, its alright,” Momma mater returned.

The Newcomer squatted, his face near Brazil's mother. He spoke in clear, and stern words.

“We have been waiting to chat with you about an important matter, but Brazil is reluctant...” he began.

Brazil began to fidget with her hands.

“You see, we discovered that Brazil has been followed...”

He had pressed his face close to Momma mater, an unusual intimacy. His brows knitted and his eyes cold, he reached into his pocket, retrieving a photo-copy of a piece of paper.

“...and here is a document that proves an investigator was hired by you to follow your daughter.”

Refusing the existence of the document the presence of her eyes, Momma mater did not possess the strength to look up at her company of followers.

“We wish only to ensure that she is followed no longer. The reason for surveillance on one’s own daughter need not be discussed, but you ought to know that her mental and physical health is impaired by it.”

Brazil turned her gaze toward the floor and refused to utter a word. Some of the company turned towards Brazil and others shuffled about, all wanting to leave the hostile intimacy that had been generated by a few words.

“I am glad to see that you have been such a success here in your community, but

it seems to me that your success as a parent has been...lacking.” His voice increasingly piercing her geriatric ears.

He regained his composure after he arose from his crouching position. Momma mater arose and placed the broken figure onto a small, decorative table. Unable to talk, shaking, obviously disturbed, she departed the small room. The audience that Momma brought left with her, some glaring at the Newcomer. The Newcomer and company were left to exit on their own. They walked in silence the two miles between the Adseculae house and the church where their car waited. Though realizing that he had lost his composure, the Newcomer was convinced that he had acted correctly, but for the first time he was nervous about what Brazil might say. She continued her silence until the next day when the topic of her family and the encounter with Momma mater disappeared. Otherwise, she seemed as much like the Brazil of late. She began her day with a vodka tonic.

Thus their bond.

VERA FAMILIA SANGUINEA

Brazil was difficult to move. She had fallen only a few steps and the limpness that was the result of the alcohol ensured that there were no real injuries from her slight descent. Mallory despised carrying the bitch up the stairs, but the Newcomer insisted that they put her in her bed. The most annoying aspect of Brazil's fall was not the difficulty of hauling the weight up a flight of stairs, but that she had collapsed from an alcoholic stupor at the number nine in the morning. Alone and refusing company, she drank herself into oblivion throughout the night. Two weeks had passed since the Newcomer confronted Momma mater and shattered her fragile, soft, but porcelain world. Brazil's family had not contacted her since the incident, but the surveillance seemed to have ceased for the time being. Brazil was convinced that it would begin again in some new and incomprehensibly devious and malicious way. Mallory continued to associate with the Newcomer and Brazil in an intermittent manner, and the Newcomer rarely took notice of his absence, so preoccupied with Brazil's deteriorating condition he had become. Brazil lay on her bed for several hours until early evening when she arose groggy and incoherent. She found a half bottle of wine, poured a tall glass and began to drink.

"You ought to lay off the drink," the Newcomer more commanded than observed.

"You ought to talk," she returned.

"I see you drinking an entire bottle of scotch in a single afternoon only to go out the same night and drain another half."

"But, I am able to tolerate my intake. You..."

"I am fine. And you do not have the tolerance you once had."

Brazil walked away only to run into the dining-room table next to her. She

almost fell to the floor again, and the Newcomer arose to keep her steady. She grasped his hand and threw it away from her.

“I don’t need you or your stupid deceptions,” she shouted.

She pointed her finger towards the Newcomer and staggered a bit and walked a bit away from him. She sat on the sofa where she had begun sketching many days before, but had given up the effort. Mostly, she had relegated herself to her own room where she watched television online and entered chat-rooms, occupying herself with innumerable distractions. She sat pensively on the sofa; the Newcomer, who was reading nearby, recognized that she was concentrating on a thought directed at him. Only a period of time separated him from its expression and he realized that she would soon be yelling.

“And I don’t need...” she began in a drunken voice. “... and...I don’t...I don’t...” She pointed at him.

Each attempt was more difficult for her than the last. She leaned towards him, anger in her throat.

“You don’t need...,” he said.

She glared at him.

“I don’t need you helping me with my family,” she finally asserted.

“I did what you...”

“no, No, NO!” She interrupted.

She again pointed her finger at him.

“I need to do what I need to do,” she again asserted.

She paused for a minute.

“And that is...” She wobbled while she sat. “...and that

is what is,” she claimed, shrugging at the same time.

Brazil placed her drink on the coffee table before her, and because she had said what she had wanted to say for weeks, she relaxed and fell dead asleep on the sofa. She awoke again only after another six hours of sleep and she knocked at the Newcomer’s door in order to ask him what she had been doing. She was unable to admit to him that she did not recall the past few days, but she felt satisfaction waking him up. Afterward, she took pleasure in annoying him, and to her surprise he tolerated it, so she continued all the more. She hid the books that he was currently reading in order to disrupt him, and she reprogrammed his computer with new passwords. He was always coming to her, asking for locations of books and passwords and when he misplaced his own keys, he came to her.

“I don’t know where your fucking keys went,” she said.

In truth, she had not hidden them, but she smiled inwardly at his consternation. At one point, she found and hid his journal, about which he was particularly sensitive. Mallory kept clear of the feud, but was present with detached amusement, present at the Newcomer’s home intermittently. The Newcomer disliked intensely the position in which he found himself. He had remained calm throughout, but over the period of a few weeks, he grew less and less able to contain himself. It seemed to him that once he offered solace, once he tolerated her bizarre behavior, she only acted out in her bad manner the more.

“I’M TIRED OF THIS CRAP!” He raged.

“GIVE ME MY JOURNAL OR LEAVE!” Again he raged.

He regained his composure only after he had thrown a glass and a book against one of the walls. Understanding his intentions yet still angry, Brazil waited until the day had passed, and when the Newcomer was safely asleep, she placed the journal on his bed next to him. The two spoke to one another little, each believing the other was in the wrong, each refusing to yield. Mallory enjoyed this period intensely, especially the grief that was obvious on Brazil’s face every day. Most meals were not common as a result and those that were witnessed few words from the angry pair. Mallory tried to initiate conversation between the three.

“How is the latest project?” he asked Brazil. “How is your mother?” he asked.

The two friends began to talk regularly once again only when Brazil’s mother contacted her. Momma mater’s tone gave no hint that any untoward or difficult circumstances had arisen. Apparently, the incident had never occurred, or perhaps it was an hallucination. Brazil had many such delusions and hallucinations that Momma mater preferred she didn’t reveal to the community of Wheaton, and she must have communicated them to her friend. At least that is what Brazil suspected Momma might say were she to breach the topic. Enough time had passed that the porcelain figurine incident faded from memory. Just enough.

“Brazil, dear, won’t you bring your friend to our home again,” Momma mater asked.

Brazil felt in her mind her mother tapping her on the shoulder, a slight, superficial hug.

“We so enjoyed his company, and we’d like to continue hearing from you as well.”

Brazil agreed to bring the Newcomer the following Sunday. And just before the end of the conversation with her mother her mother added “We’ll keep valuables out of your friend’s hands.” And that was the only reference to the incident that occurred. The Newcomer was under strict orders from Brazil to refrain from anything that might disrupt the counterfeit harmony. When they arrived at the Adseculae house, there were present as many guests as had been there the previous visit, though different personages. Momma mater did not greet the two immediately, but when she gathered all of her guests together, she introduced them as the daughter who was as close to her as anyone can be except the lord and her friend who is an intimate of the family. The Newcomer turned his head toward Brazil in order to express a smile of mutual amusement, but knowing what he was doing, she refused his expression. The events of the day were much the same as the events of their last visit, with the exception of the tour of the house. Everyone except Brazil and the Newcomer toured all the objects and collectibles there were to see and not much more was present at that house. The guests were taken to eat and to hear what they already believed. Momma mater was rather expert at speaking to guests like these. Most of them had heard the

same concepts, the same beliefs, even the same words from the first moments they were able to believe anything. There was no question that all of what they said was, is and will be true and all was bliss for the chosen. The Newcomer attempted to amuse himself by interacting with certain guests, asking them about their livelihoods and their vocations. Most being brokers, accountants, computer technicians and the like, he asked one if he had been religious prior to meeting the Adseculae and the man explained that he had been bereft of belief. He had been an alcoholic who engaged in all sorts of vile habits until he arrived at a nadir in his life. He had been without the aid of his family, and his work, while profitable economically, had left him without the ability to form strong bonds. Friendless and alone, he found the church of reverend Jackdaw through a group affiliated with one of his clients, a Dareios company. The church had given him strength when he was on the brink of something else, when he sensed that he needed to change his life.

Brazil and the Newcomer felt less comfortable when the guests gathered together in the rear sunroom in order to sing hymns and rockabilly Jesus shorts. Both given lyric sheets so that they might participate, neither Brazil nor the Newcomer were taken by the music, or interested in the company that refused their way of life and insisted that others accept, even embrace, their own. The company of persons, while cordial and warm, left him dry. Brazil had become accustomed to their kind of hospitality, but the Newcomer was anxious to leave after the first Jesus short. Accompanied by his wife and daughter, the reverend Marvin Jackdaw joined the group briefly. The Newcomer attempted to engage them in conversation, but besides Jesus or finance most were unwilling, or unable, to carry on a conversation. Those who did listen to him cut short the conversations, seeming averted to him, and he as if he were speaking to caricatures rather than real persons. The services that he had attended, while emotionally fiery and inspiring to most attendees, were mere repetitions of already firmly entrenched beliefs in which he was unable to partake and were he able, he would not have wished to do so. He felt as if he were dying here with these kind, warm and comfortable *homotheria* who wished him well. Brazil at times sang along with her family's friends and at times the gathering tired her. Both wished to return home, but the Newcomer recognized that he ought to wait for Brazil and Brazil was uncertain, or too timid, to explain that they must leave. A large meal and several snack foods gave way to drowsiness and lethargy.

"Hello, you are Brazil's friend, no?"

The voice of relief arose from tedium.

“I am.”

“I would like to chat with you.”

The man beside the Newcomer was older and seemingly imperious. He dressed casually, but one immediately recognized that he was accustomed to authority, one who regularly took or was given what he wanted.

“Adder Dareios.” The man offered his hand with his name. The Newcomer hesitated, but took the hand in his own. Adder’s grip was firm and long-lasting. The two men exited the gathering quietly and with little notice from the other guests. Brazil had been busy chatting with acquaintances from long ago, not noticing the Newcomer’s departure. Adder did not own the house, but he acted as if he did. He understood the layout of the structure as if he had occupied the domicile for years, and perhaps he had in an indirect manner financed the construction.

“I understand you are a well-to-do young man,” Adder offered.

“I am financially independent.”

“You are modest as well. That suits a man of finance,” Adder observed.

“I am no man of finance.”

Adder led them into an intimate den. He motioned for the Newcomer to sit on one of the comforters, a suggestion that was accepted. Adder poured a drink from behind the bar.

“Do you drink?”

“I do, but no thank you.”

Adder reclined in the chair next to the Newcomer. He observed the young man a moment while he smiled.

“Nice people here.”

The Newcomer nodded slightly.

“You know, I have little time for small talk. Do you have time for small talk?”

“I do not,” the Newcomer returned with suspicion.

Adder laughed.

“I’ll leave it out then.”

Dareios sat back imperiously.

“You know, I see good people around me. I see good men and women who do good things for others. Most of the people in this house are friends of mine. I feel a kind of attachment to them that I don’t feel for others. You know what I mean?”

“I do.”

“Who do you feel for?” Adder asked.

“Brazil for one, if that is your business.”

“Brazil, yes, Brazil. I can see that, I can see that. I suppose you worry about her as others do...but *I* worry about the people in this house. Probably just like you worry for your friend. I think we have that in common. I care for those who care for Brazil, and so I care for her and you do too.”

The Newcomer again nodded slightly. Adder paused a moment and the Newcomer sat patiently.

“Have you heard of a man by the name of Robert Kessler?”

“I have not.”

“No? Are you sure? How about Kasper Thanatos?”

The Newcomer paused.

“He was a roommate of mine at one time.”

“And Clara Alma?”

At the mention of that name, the Newcomer arose. His countenance darkened.

“Sit. Sit,” Dareios commanded.

The Newcomer refused.

“I mention these folks because bad things happened to them. I’ve heard that Robert Kessler was severely beaten when he was a boy. That was a strange set of circumstances.”

Adder scrutinized the expressionless expression on the face of the Newcomer.

“Clara Alma died from a fall. Seemingly unnecessary and thoughtless. Don’t you think?”

The Newcomer had no response.

“Kasper Thanatos was severely beaten, as well as his friends Oslow Depp and Prentice Ate. Kasper lived long enough to suffocate beneath a fence.”

After a silence in which the both men thought, “What do you want?” the Newcomer asked.

Adder leaned forward in his chair thoughtfully. He paused and then he rose.

“I...we...want your interference with Brazil Adseculae to stop. She is not your business.”

“And I am to understand that you will unearth my past, if I do not comply.”

“You will leave this family alone.”

Dareios sipped his drink and again scrutinized the Newcomer.

“That young girl died. Do you remember that?”

“When Brazil finds that no-one follows her any longer,
the Adseculae will find that I have no use for them.”

“I know who you are, and, believe it or not, I am your friend. Remember that the next time you speak with your friend’s mother,” Adder added.

In a silent ferocity, the Newcomer calmly left the room. When he emerged from the den, he walked slowly, but his heart beat fast as he attempted to quiet himself. Adder Dareios did not follow him into the waiting room where Momma mater sat, once more entertaining guests with her talk. She smiled at the Newcomer and he wondered how much she had to do with the conversation that Dareios just ended, but the Newcomer mattered not at all for the moment. Momma had a captive audience. “She has a lot of captives” he recalled Brazil saying.

Now, the Newcomer had an urge to disrupt the entire affair. Rage, insult, break the smooth, uninterrupted calm that dressed the comfortable gathering. Better yet, he was powerful; he had availed himself of his resources on prior occasions. “Why not destroy this woman and her delusions?” he asked himself. Act as though he were a captive to their threats; spread a few of his own veiled warnings; steal the women from the men and make them his followers; captivate the old men with promises of youth and long ago lost pleasure and then bring the walls of palace down around these Adseculae after shattering the bonds that were never a threat to him--these all were the thoughts that jumped about, laughed and raged in his head. And when he observed Brazil whose features had exchanged glad comfort in his home for bitter fear in the very house of her birth, he recognized that he must be sure to do none of these things. He had lost his calm too many times, had broken the backs of those around him, and he recognized that such acts must be tempered or altered into others. He was not a most influential person because he was wealthy, but rather he was able because of what he might set into motion. His acts took on lives of their own, and when he did good things, good perhaps was the result. It was nothing more than his will and his recognition that his friend might suffer that wrapped a just habit around him. The Newcomer squatted beside Brazil who was seated in a lounge chair and placed his hand on her shoulder. She recoiled at first, thinking it her

mother or another member of her family. Realizing it was he, she leaned back, again permitting the touch.

“It seems you are in demand,” Momma mater said quaintly to the Newcomer.

She pointed to Jackdaw. A beaming Marvin motioned to the Newcomer to come toward him. After his encounter with Adder Dareios, the Newcomer did not wish to converse with the reverend, but “Go ahead. Go on.” Brazil motioned impatiently for him to see what Marvin wanted. She remained with the other guests while Marvin placed his hand on the shoulder of a Newcomer who instinctively withdrew. Marvin led him into the kitchen where several women were preparing another meal for the guests and beyond into one of the sun rooms.

“I hope to see you next week. Brazil’s mother and I noticed that you have not attended our service for a while,” he said as they walked.

The Newcomer marveled at Marvin’s ignorance or denial.

“No.”

“Well, we invite you to come any time and find the lord.”

“Find the lord?”

“Yes, every week. Every week, every day, every year we find the lord here.”

The Newcomer pondered the situation for a moment before he replied. He observed the well-dressed and portly man whose appendages were decorated with gold and whose fingers glistened with bright stones.

“And Adder Dareios is part of your congregation?”

“Yes, indeed. And proud we are of that fact.”

Marvin bit off a piece of some pastry he had been carrying with him.

“In fact, our church would not be what it is without Mr. Dareios. He is a cornerstone of our efforts to spread the word.”

“Would you say that his input is important to the church?”

“I would say that it is vital.”

“Marvin,...” The Newcomer took the liberty of addressing the reverend by his first name. “...on that much we agree.”

Thus their bond.

THE FATE OF THE UNFORTUNATE

Mallory moved back completely into his home, never having really been satisfied living with the Newcomer; and that fat bitch he would not miss at all. The dogs were another matter, friends of course, though he would never live with an animal of his own. Once Mallory completed his change of address, it was evident to him and to the Newcomer that they would not keep one another's company as often; Mallory did not realize then that the pair would grow apart completely. He had been concerned for his employer for a while because of the mood swings that the man experienced, but he had also become afraid. It was strange that Brazil, though seemingly as afraid of the Newcomer's ravings as Mallory, was prepared to remain with the strange man.

"One more time, if he had acted that way one more time, I'd have knocked him out," Mallory told Amity.

"Hey, I am just glad that you are away from that guy. Trust me, he's no good," she returned.

Mallory nodded, but he felt as if he had wasted a lot of time trying to form a lasting bond that proved to be worthless. He had not accomplished much, though he had good employment for a time. Mallory was also a bit angry that the Newcomer had not found him some kind of better position. He had expected as much, but when Mallory hinted at such assistance, "Do you have any special skills?" the Newcomer asked.

"You know I am a good mechanic."

"Yes, that's true, but I don't really have any projects right now. If I have need of someone, I will contact you. Is there something else you can do?"

The truth was that Mallory had few skills besides the ones he used when he worked for the city and when he was the clean-up plasterer for “Blown.” He had the skills that his father gave him.

“I am not able to pay you for doing nothing at all, you see,” the Newcomer had explained.

Mallory pointed out that Brazil did nothing in particular and the Newcomer supported her almost entirely.

“I own a part of the proceeds from many parts of her work. She and I have a patron-artist relationship,” the Newcomer said.

Mallory frowned at that explanation.

“I know it seems as if we are only friends, well, we are friends...” The Newcomer continued. “...but she works hard to produce art that may one day bring in a great deal of money.”

Mallory was quite disconcerted about the outcome of his efforts. Still, he had found some joy in his encounters with Soma. She was rather younger than he, but her company was a delight and through her he began learning a great deal about the religion of his childhood. He had never really analyzed, or actually even read, the bible, though he accepted its teachings. Reading with Soma especially, Mallory had found a relief and a way of bonding, and association with her had other benefits as well. Through Soma he met the reverend Marvin Jackdaw and many others, all of whom were good contacts for Mallory. And then Adder Dareios himself was a connection that he had made.

“Maybe he will be better than that freak and his fat bitch,” he thought.

And Dareios was employing Mallory presently. Mallory possessed documents that were of interest to him somehow and Dareios wanted to hear information about the Newcomer. The two men met regularly and each time Adder gave Mallory something for his efforts.

“I may be able to use a man like you,” Dareios said regularly.

“I am able to do many things for many people. You’ll see.”

Mallory hoped that he might be able to do odd jobs for Dareios in the future, but for the time being he needed work. It was true that the Newcomer gave Mallory enough money to survive for about six months, but Mallory suspected that he would need money sooner because of the habits he had adopted while living around and about “those two Judases.”

Meanwhile, Mallory sought to return to his old job. “Blown” had been deleting the ranks of his underlings with steady force, and the supervisor above Blown did not wish to relieve the man of his job, but he was in need of a worker who was able to tolerate Blown’s attitude and temperament. And it was true that Blown and Mallory worked well together, but only if Mallory did as Blown desired. Mallory was hopeful that Dareios and his daughter might give him a new, more profitable direction. He had six months; he would talk more with Dareios.

Thus their bond.

TAWNY YELLOW ENDINGS

Leon Orchrosovich was annoyed by his mother again. Her usual habit had arisen just last Tuesday. She purchased another antique rocking chair that she wanted to refinish. Actually, she was adept at the process now; she was able to bring pieces of furniture back from the brink of oblivion and once her project was complete, each piece possessed a certain charm. Still, Leon's apartment, though large, housed at least five similar chairs; Leon had lost count. Also, his mother leveled the same complaint to him about his marital status, which had only changed slightly over the years.

"I'm fearful that I will never see any grandchildren from you," she lamented repeatedly.

Leon's mother purchased so many what-nots and knick-knacks that he simply had to leave his own dwelling, even though he had carved a path of order within it. These in addition to the chairs. He supposed that the precise circumstances of his bond with his mother would not change, until she exited the race for comfort that she had entered so long ago, almost ninety years.

"She is in good shape," he thought. "Good shape indeed. For a ninety-year-old woman."

Leon was also somewhat disconcerted that he had lost contact with Adder Dareios. He had not seen the man in months, and Leon suspected that he would never dine with the magnate again. He had given Adder a great deal of trivial information, and repeatedly he had attempted to bring his employer and Dareios together because he continued to believe that the two men would form a lasting and perhaps even profitable bond.

"They will thank me. Yes, yes. They will thank me, and invite me to an event that the two men fund. The event will be a formal one and the guests will all know, yes, know how to comport themselves. I will stand up and give a short,

meaningful and tear-jerking speech. They will all applaud and all the wind and smoke will disappear.”

Leon thought that the man would fund some private projects for him, that Dareios understood how difficult it might be for Leon to create software unfunded. Perhaps Dareios had researched the project and found, quite incorrectly, that Leon’s idea was not tenable. Such perspective was narrow and absurd, yes narrow and even childish, thought Leon. It would work one day. It would indeed and Leon would show them that they are all wind and smoke.

“Yes, wind and smoke.”

It was no matter. Leon had his companions at Corpu-tech. The Brigade had finally calmed down a bit after so much anxiety that was caused by what amounted in the end to almost nothing. Dareios had not given any information to the Newcomer, and so the meeting between the magnate and Leon was no issue at all, after all. Leon suspected that no potential problem actually ever existed, that perhaps Adder used the circumstances to his own advantage and there was nothing more to understand.

“Clever. Very clever,” Leon mused.

And Leon enjoyed his position at Corpu-tech. He was well-liked, well-liked indeed. Felina remained a trusted confidant. Knowing that he would always find a way to keep affairs running smoothly, she was ever grateful that Leon was present.

“Felina the great.”

Leon was surprised at the friendliness and sociability of the Newcomer. He invited Leon to festive occasions at his penthouse now, and Leon got along well with both Brazil and the Newcomer, though Brazil was increasingly difficult. Leon had spent an evening drinking from a silver bell, and he had also driven about the downtown area with the Newcomer and his artist friend, looking for recitals, bars, and sometimes simply walking about. The Newcomer had his animals always in tow, and Leon enjoyed their company as well. He had made the canines his companions long ago.

“Bribes work, they do,” he thought.

In fact, Leon was supposed to meet with them tonight, and his excitement led him to a desire to get away from his mother, his life changing in ways that seemed good. He had been invited to a grand occasion and he planned to bring several different kinds of persons together. The Newcomer explained to Leon that Leon was permitted to invite anyone. And, Leon thought to bring everyone together.

“Everyone possible, that is.”

Hal Joystick, the Brigade and Felina were only a few of those he told about the event. He invited college friends who would not otherwise gather with others, but the interest generated by Leon’s descriptions of the events made them curious. Leon was a gilded bonder, and the Newcomer appeared to enjoy his company. He heard about some additional difficulties that his employer had experienced, and as a matter of course, Leon offered his assistance and counsel. Leon thought that nothing would truly change in his life, that he might continue to work at Corpu-tech for decades, perhaps the remainder of his life. He may never have the opportunity to create his program, and his mother’s habits were not about to change any time in the near future. Leon was able to enjoy what he possessed, and others lacked precisely that edifying grace. When he thought about how many of the circumstances of his life were unchangeable, how perhaps he would die without doing as he always wanted, a leaden weight pressed upon the back of his skull, and down along the rear of his throat. But for Leon, the feeling didn’t last long. He had a thin, strong and tawny thread to interweave about, beneath and around those with whom he associated. When he died, he would at least have accomplished a bonding of persons, and though that itself was as temporary as his life, it gave comfort to the blond giant. He would abide, yes, yes. Abide he would, and gracefully.

Thus the tawny bond.

PURPLE BECOMES THE WINE GOD

The Newcomer was unusually calm in view of the news he received. He suspected that he was in shock, or perhaps the latest events had not come to realization in him. He had been moody less and less as the memory of Mallory's accident faded from his thoughts, and so other memories. He had made plans for the evening with Brazil and a number of others with whom he had little acquaintance. Like many others, these persons passed through his life somewhat quickly, some remaining in order to ask for assistance or favor in one way or another. He had reason to be suspicious and careful because he was wealthy; many others befriended him only to curry favor and he had the ability to discern an opportunist from a genuine friend, but he noticed that he let his guard down at times, not wanting to confront the tiring need to second-guess almost everyone. Brazil was sound; she would not abandon him, he believed. She had proven as much over the past few months even, but now she was genuinely a phenomenon. She was in a way taking control of the situation that now confronted both of them. The Newcomer was calm, but he was also inactive. Usually, he was able to take control of any situation because he had so much resource, both personally and financially. Presently, matters were different, but how much no-one was yet able to determine precisely. The Newcomer had found that someone within the trusted circle of his business associates had embezzled money from his estate and holdings. He did not consider himself an entrepreneur, nor did he believe he was possessed of an authentic business mentality, but he wanted that he remain comfortable and he enjoyed his indulgent living. Thus it was with a dreadful and terrifying awe that he heard the news. The most troubling aspect of the situation was that he had no contact with his most trusted aide and counsel, Ulrich Geldsbaum. His attorney appeared to have dropped off the face of the earth along with an unknown amount of money. Brazil was busy asking questions of different persons who had lesser authority than Geldsbaum. She looked into the Newcomer's affairs and directed him to ask this and do that, and he was grateful for her assistance because he was unable to muster the will to do anything at this

time.

“Now is the time to do everything in your power. Don’t hesitate,” she said.

It was possible that the Newcomer had lost everything that he possessed. Depending on the damage, he might even find himself in debt after everything was settled, but he had no lawyer to contact and he did not know precisely where he ought to look, whom he ought to trust, in order to determine the damage, though he thought he had held a firm vigilance over his property and capital. That was what drove him to inaction. The theft was done with inside knowledge, that much was certain. The identity of the thief would remain hidden until the Newcomer or Brazil, or some other, found their way through a labyrinth of departments and sections of Ousia inc. The thief had convoluted the path that would lead to his discovery by the creation of false accounts and misleading information. The theft occurred at an unknown time because the complexity of the investigation prevented a determined chronology as yet. Only Brazil was really trusted, and she possessed little understanding of finance. She faked her way through some parts of the inquiry, but it was evident that she possessed far less understanding than the Newcomer, so the process of determining precisely what happened was complicated further. Brazil was frantically attempting to ascertain damage and control loss, and certainly she had a stake in the finances of the Newcomer. The first thought that occurred to the Newcomer was that Adder Dareios was somehow responsible, but Brazil did not agree.

“That man owns more, controls more and has more ability to obtain more than you do. Why on earth would he steal anything from you?”

“I don’t know.”

Several days were taken up in the initial confusion and still the extent of the loss was not fully determined. Each time the Newcomer found what appeared to be a bottom of the loss, they found new accounts that were empty or false accounts that led to more debt. Computer files were missing as well. All of the news the Newcomer took in with an unexpected quiet. The loss of the money and other capital hardly affected him. Brazil expected some kind of explosion, and soon, but no destructive reaction emerged from the Newcomer. After they had investigated for several days, but before the extent of the loss was fully understood, the Newcomer took Brazil aside and asked her to let others

investigate.

“Let it go,” he said.

“Are you mad? You know that your way of life is probably dead, don’t you?”

“I realize that.”

“I don’t know what to do.”

“Let’s go on with our plan.”

“What plan?”

“We are supposed to go out tonight.”

Brazil let out an exasperated sigh.

“You can go out now?”

“I can.”

The weekend had come and the Newcomer and his ally continued with the scheduled festivities. The FBI was now involved, but thankfully the media had not learned that a potentially massive embezzlement had taken place. The Newcomer and Brazil were able to act as though nothing had changed. In fact, little had changed. That realization was part of the Newcomer’s comfort and “I am even somewhat comforted at the loss.”

And Brazil did not understand, but she took him at his word. Their scheduled gathering of drunkards would continue. Leon would be present and he claimed that he would bring many interested persons. Perhaps the Newcomer would find what he sought there, after he had searched for so long. He gave strict orders to Brazil to refrain from divulging any information about the embezzlement and she was to feign her ordinary self, and act as such.

The pair arrived at *The Everyday Tavern Entautha* at the appointed time where they met up with Mallory who brought with him a rather young lady. There

Leon and Hal Joystick, the Brigade and his wife, Felina the great, Amity and Gruntle, and another small gathering of others arrived and were briefed about how to sing. Brazil invited Fuscus, a woman who had been to one of their previous gatherings and an old man who appeared to be homeless. The Newcomer was suspicious of the old fellow initially, but Brazil insisted that he would not cause trouble. Each was given sufficient drink to soften the edges and relax them. All the expenses the Newcomer paid. Possessing an indescribable allure over them, the old man drank wildly and danced with as many young girls as would agree. Hal and Felina mostly associated with one another and the Brigade and his wife departed early, before the true festivities. Fuscus enjoyed shocking the attendees with nihilistic comments about the environment and politics. Exceedingly inebriated, Leon meandered back and forth, asking questions of everyone and laughing almost constantly. The Newcomer imbibed wildly his intimate associate, Blackman, once again able to tolerate the joy-giving liquid. Brazil was content, if the Newcomer was satisfied, but she was curious.

“You were looking for someone, weren’t you?”

“What do you mean?”

“We were trying to find someone, or something for the longest time.”

“Oh, yes. I have not seen him recently.”

Just then a balding old man in a clean suit and high-top shoes approached them.

“May I?” he asked politely for Brazil to dance.

She obliged the man, as did almost all the young women present. After a time in the Newcomer’s abode, he directed the gathering to Wheaton where, unexpectedly, the group was able to carry a tune.

He is sweet upon the cities.

He drops to the boulevard from the
running packs.

He wears the blessed skin of drab-olive; hunts the wild
homotherion and kills it.

He delights in street flesh.

He runs to the swamped cities, to the cities of *Homotheria* he runs!

He is *Pedai* who leads us!

Pedai! Pedai!

With crude the city flows! It flows with wine!

It runs with the blood of mercury!

Like charred amber in its scent
is the blaze of the torch he bears.

Flames rise from his trailing staff
as he runs, as he dances,

kindling the idlers,

spurring with cries,

and his black curls stream to the wind!

And he cries, as they cry, *Pedai!*

On, *Pedai!*

On, *Pedai!*

Follow, glory of *Pedai*,

hymning the other

with a tumble of drums,

with a cry, *Pedai!* To the industrialized god,

with a shout of vacant cries,

when the blessed lute like honey plays

the sacred warbling of those who go

to the cities!

to the cities!

EPILOGUE

An unremarkable man of around forty-five years of age was not witnessed by anyone making a phone call because almost everyone was talking on the phone. He wore non-descript clothing, plain, and his hair was cut and fashioned in the current style. He carried only one, small suitcase, and he walked with the confidence and ease of a man whose life meant more than others. He carried with him an exquisitely crafted passport that sported the name “John Bush.” He was not rushed, and he waited patiently and smiled at the security guards. Everything he needed was already waiting for him in Europe.

“Hello, it's done.”

A pause.

“Yes.”

Pause again.

“Yes.”

A final pause.

“Tell Mr. Dareios it has been a pleasure.”