**Ménage a Deux**

Despite leaving the office early, the sun was already low in the sky as Lawrence Oakley made his way from Byrdden Spinney station and up Chapel Hill towards his home, a dispiriting two mile trudge away in the outskirts of the market town.

Someone had once told Lawrence that the Cotswolds were “what Americans think England looks like” and that was about right, the autumn light giving a rosy glow to the glib monotony of the [Cotswold] stone of houses tastefully restored by their insufferable owners with their Agas and their wicker log baskets and their season tickets to media jobs in London or whatever the hell it was they all did.

The General Theory of American ghastliness was, no doubt, a grossly unfair generalization, but a solid case could be put forward for the Special version. Wechsler! – the head of the physics department at Tolchester New University, where Lawrence was employed doing post-doctoral research.

Tolchester University was “new” only in the sense of its having been established around seventy years ago in a period of post-war optimism, its infrastructure, research quality and morale having deteriorated markedly since its brief heyday, should it indeed be said to have ever had such a thing. “New” may also have been intended to highlight its closeness to Oxford, while at the same time emphasizing the founding Labour government’s ideals of greater modernity and democracy in contrast to that stuffy, outdated institution. These days it’s physical proximity to Oxford only served to highlight its distance in every other regard.

A round of funding largesse in the early twenty first century had seen Tolchester hubristically aspire to hosting a world-class physics department. To that end they had hired Wechsler – the rumours had it at great expense – from MIT. Made Professor at the age of thirty eight, he had followed up his fantastically promising early research with exactly nothing that Lawrence could see. Now, six years later, his intellectual impotence manifested itself in his holding back the efforts of anyone brighter than himself, and in his trying too hard to play the role of an English academic – the Volvo-driving, tweed jacket-wearing, Guardian-reading ponce.

More to the point, or at least in particular, Wechsler was currently blocking the publication of his, Lawrence’s, paper. It was a good paper. The title, *A New Inequality in Super-Symmetrical Time-Dilation Effects* was just right. Snappy enough to get noticed but at the same time, sober enough to be taken seriously. The research it contained was possibly ground-breaking, though originating from such a low-rent institution as Tolchester, it would be hard to get published in a journal of any self-respect or prestige. Regardless of any of that, it was the only ticket he had out of that dump and away from Wechsler.

After evading him for weeks, Wechsler had found a window in his allegedly busy schedule that afternoon.

“It’s all very well aiming for originality,” Wechsler had begun. He was wearing the darker, and viler, of his two tweed jackets, the material shot through with pink and blue threads in an effort, no doubt, at jauntiness. He had paused and looked at Lawrence, as if trying to remember which of his grand total of two post-graduate researchers he was. “As I was saying, it is a commendable attempt at creativity, errm… Oakley. But I am afraid that the math simply does not add up. Perhaps it might be better to stick to something more solid and mainstream next time?”

Who the hell did Wechsler think he was to tell him that his “math” didn’t add up? Wechsler was a one-trick pony, with his over-reliance on Feynman diagrams, and no ability to see beyond them. Didn’t he realize that time, and maths, had moved on?

The worst of it was that Wechsler was right. The maths did not add up. Lawrence’s instinct, however, was that the theory was fundamentally right. The lack of balance in the equations, he felt, pointed to a genuine inequality in the nature of time-dilation effects. Hence the title of the paper.

He had tried to make this case to Wechsler, who, with a look which could have been interpreted as either disappointment, or an attempt at encouragement had merely said, “Perhaps you could come back to me when you have more than instincts or feelings to go on, Oakley? Even when it does not work out, you may find that you learn something in the process of discovering the mistake in your calculations.”

Hence, Lawrence having left work early in a towering rage.