

Funnyfingers
&
Cabrito

R. A. LAFFERTY

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Funnyfingers



*—and Pluto, Lord of Hell, wept when
Orpheus played to him that lovely phrase
from Gluck—but those were iron tears.'*

On the Tears of the Great — H. Belloc

"Who am I?" Oread Funnyfingers asked her mother one day, "and for that matter, what am I?"

"Why, you are our daughter," the mother Frances Funnyfingers told her, "or have you been talking to someone?"

"Only to myself and to my uncles in the mountain."

"Oh. Now first, dear, I want you to know that we love you very much. There was nothing casual about it. We chose you, and you are to us—"

"Oh take it easy, mother. I know that I'm adopted. And I'm sure that you both love me

very much; you tell me often enough. But what am I really?"

"You are a little girl, Oread, a somewhat exasperating and precocious little girl."

"But I don't feel precocious. I feel like a rock-head. How can I be a little bit like papa and not anything like anyone else at all? What was the connection between myself and papa?"

"There wasn't any at first, Oread, not like that. We were looking for a child since we could not have one of our own. I fell in love with you at first sight because you reminded me of Henry. And Henry fell in love with you at first sight because you reminded him of Henry. Henry was always the favorite person of both myself and Henry. That's a joke, dear. But not entirely: my husband is so delightfully boyish and self-centered. Now run out and play."

"No, I think I'll run in and play."

"Oh, but it's so dark and dirty and smoky in there."

"And it's so light and unsmoky everywhere else, mama." Oread said, and she ran inside the mountain to play.

Well, the house and the shop of Henry Funnyfingers backed onto the mountain. It was really only a low but steep foot-hill to the Osage Hills. This was on the northwest fringe

of the city. The shop was the typewriter repair shop of Henry the father of Oread. You wouldn't know that from the sign out front, though. The sign said "Daktylographs Repaired Here, Henry Funnyfingers."

The shop part of the building was half into and under the hill. Behind the shop was a dimly lit parts room that was entirely under the hill. And behind this were other parts rooms, one after the other, rock-walled and dark, rockier and darker as one went on, all deep under the hills. And these continued, on and on, as tunnel and cavern without apparent end.

In these places of total darkness, if only one knew where to reach and in which pot, there was to be found every part for every sort of machine in the world: or so Henry Funnyfingers said.

Oread ran through room after room, through passage after passage in the blackness. She drew parts from the pots and the furnaces as she ran. She put the parts together, and it barked remindfully. "What have I forgotten?" Oread asked. "Ah, Rusty, I've given you only one ear. I'm sorry." She took the other ear from the Other Ear Pot as she ran past, and she put it on him. Then she had an iron dog complete. It would run and play and bark after her in the tunnels under the mountain.

“Oh Kelmis, Oh Acmon,
Oh Damnae all three!

Come out of the mountain
and play with me.”

Oread sang that. Sometimes the three Mountain Uncles were busy (they had to make numbers and letters and pieces for the whole world) and couldn't come out to play. But almost always one of them came, and Kelmis came today. Kelmis was the smoky smelly one, but Oread didn't mind that. He was full of stories, he was full of fun, he was full of the hot darkness-fire from which anything can be made. It was great fun there through all the afternoon and evening, as they called out the light. But then Kelmis had to go back to work.

Oread and the iron dog Rusty ran back up the passages towards the house. She took the dog apart as they went back and put each piece into its proper pot. Last of all she put its bark in the Bark Pot and she came up through the shop and into the inside of the house for supper.

“Oh, Oread, however do you get so smoky and smelly?” mother Frances Funnyfingers asked her. “Why don't you play out in the sunshine like other girls do? Why don't you play with other girls and boys?”

“I made an iron boy to play with once,

mama," Oread said. "You wouldn't believe how he carried on or the things he wanted to do. I had the devil's own time taking him apart again. That's the last boy I ever make, I tell you. They're tricky."

"Yes, as I remember it, they are," Frances conceded. "Whatever do you make your stories out of, Oread?"

"Oh, I make them out of iron," Oread told her seriously. "Iron is what everything is made out of first. The pieces are all there in the pots and the furnaces. You just put them together."

"Pieces of stories, Oread?"

"Oh yes."

"Iron stories, girl?"

"Oh, yes, yes, iron stories."

"You are funny-fingers and funny-face and funny-brains," the mother told her. "I think I'll have you eat your supper off an iron plate with iron spoon and knife."

"Oh, may I? I'll go make them," Oread cried.

"Make me a set while you're at it," Father Henry Funnyfingers said.

"No, Oread. Sit down and eat your supper from what we have, both of you." Frances Funnyfingers loved her husband and daughter, but sometimes they puzzled her.

We cannot honestly say that Oread grew up; we can hardly say that she grew older. She finally started to school when she was nine years old, and she looked as though she were four or five. Going to school was only for seemliness anyhow. Oread already knew everything.

She got on well. She was a peculiar little girl but she didn't know it. She gave disconcerting answers in class, but nobody could say that they were wrong answers. What difference does it make which end you start an answer at? She was a strange, smiling little girl, and she was liked by most of her schoolmates. Those who didn't like her, feared her; and why should anyone fear so small a creature as Oread Funnyfingers? They feared her because she said "Be good to me or I'll make an iron wolf to eat you up." She would have done it, and they knew she would have done it.

And she always got her homework and got it right. She had what seemed to her mother an unscholarly way of doing it, though. She would take her books or her printed assignments. She would walk singing through the shop, through the parts room, through the other parts rooms behind that, and down into the passages in the toes of the hills.

“Oh Kelmis, Oh Acmon,
Oh Damnae all three,
Make ready all pots where
the answers may be,”

Oread would sing so. Then she would pick the iron answers out of the answer pots. She'd put them together by subjects. She would stamp them onto her papers, and they would mark all the answers correct in her hand-writing. So she would have the Catechism, the Composition, the questions on the Reading, the Arithmetic all perfect. Then she'd drop all the iron answers back into the answer pots where they would melt themselves down to slag again.

“Don't you think that's cheating?” her mother would ask her. “What if all the other children got their home-work that way?”

“They couldn't unless they were funnyfingers,” Oread said. “The hot iron answers would burn their hands clear off unless they were funnyfingers. No, it isn't cheating. It's just knowing your subject.”

“I guess so then,” mother Frances said. There were so many things she didn't understand about her husband Henry (“He's boyish, like a boy, like an iron boy,” she'd say), and about her daughter (“She's like an owl, like a little owl, a little iron owl.”). Neither Henry nor Oread liked the daylight very

much, but they always faced it as bravely as they could.

One day Oread found her mother in tears, yet there was happy salt in them. "Look," the mother Frances said. She had a valentine, an iron valentine that Henry had given her. There was an iron heart on it and an iron verse:

'When you are dead five hundred
years

Who once were full of life,
I'll think of you with salty tears,
And take another wife.'

"Oh, it's nice, mama," Oread said.

"But of iron?" Frances asked.

"Oh yes, the very first rimes were made out of iron, you know."

"And what of the five hundred years?"

"I think it's considerate that he would wait five hundred years after you die to take another wife."

"Yes, I suppose so, Oread." But Frances wasn't completely at ease with her family.

Henry always made a good living from his typewriter repair shop, or rather he made a good living from his parts stocks in the rooms behind. Other dealers and repairmen, not just of typewriters but of everything, came to him for parts. His prices were reasonable, and

there was never a part that he didn't have. A dealer would rattle off the catalog number of something for a tractor or a hay-baler or a dish-washer. "Just a minute," Henry Funny-fingers would say, and he would plunge into his mysterious back rooms. He had a comical little song he would croon to himself as he went:

"Oh Kelmis, Oh Acmon,
Oh Damnae all three,
Now this is the number,
Oh make it for me!"

and in seconds, with the last word of the song just out of his mouth, he'd be back with the required part still hot in his hand. He never missed. Parts of combines, parts of electric motors, parts for Fords, he could come up with all of them instantly with only a catalog number or the broken piece itself or even a vague description to go on. And he did repair typewriters quicker and better than anyone in town. He wasn't rich, he was fearful of becoming rich; but he did well, and nobody in the Funnyfingers family wanted for anything.

When they were in the sixth grade, Oread had a boy friend. He was a Syrian boy named Selim Elia. He was dark and he was handsome. He looked the veriest little bit as

though he were made of iron; that was the main reason that Oread liked him. And he seemed to suspect entirely too much about the funnyfingers; and she thought that was a reason that she'd better like him.

"When you grow up (Oh, Oread, will you *ever* grow up?) I'm going to marry you," Selim said boldly.

"Of course I'll grow up. Doesn't everyone?" Oread said. "But you won't be able to marry me."

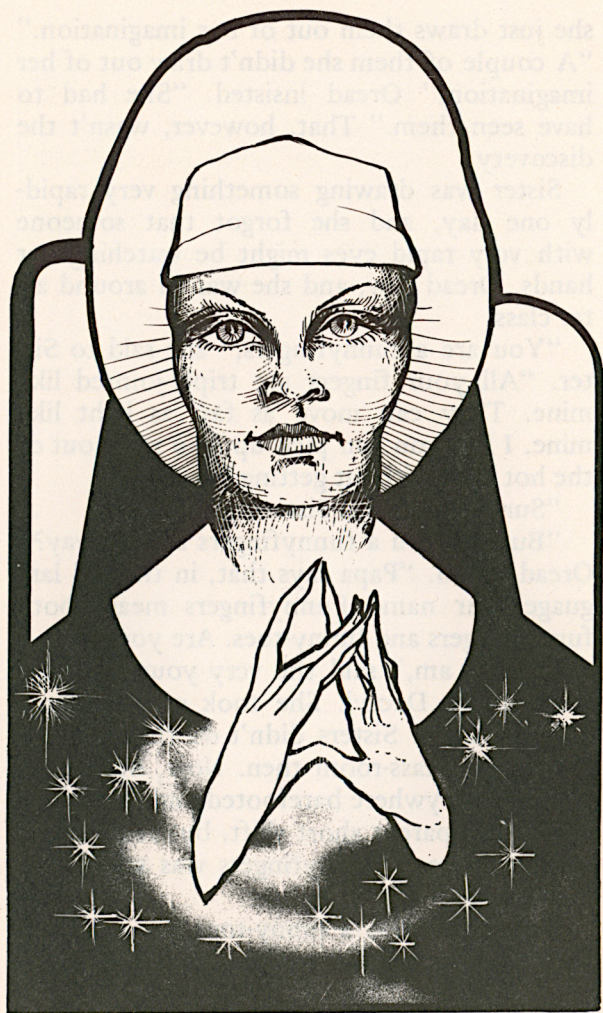
"Why not, little horned owl?"

"I don't know. I just feel that we won't be grown up at the same time."

"Hurry up then, little iron-eyes, little basilisk-eyes." Selim said. "I will marry you."

They got along well. Selim was very protective of little Oread. They liked each other. What is wrong with people liking each other?

When in the eighth grade, Oread made a discovery about Sister Mary Dactyl, the art teacher for all the grades. Sister Mary D seemed to be very young. "But she can't be that young," Oread told Selim. "Some of the mythological things she draws, they've been gone a long time. She has to be old to have seen them." "Oh, she draws them from old stories and descriptions," Selim said, "or



Frolich

she just draws them out of her imagination.” “A couple of them she didn’t draw out of her imagination,” Oread insisted. “She had to have seen them.” That, however, wasn’t the discovery.

Sister was drawing something very rapidly one day, and she forgot that someone with very rapid eyes might be watching her hands. Oread saw, and she waited around after class.

“You are a funnyfingers,” she said to Sister. “All your fingers are triple-jointed like mine. They can move as fast as light like mine. I bet you can pick up iron parts out of the hot pots without getting burned.”

“Sure I can,” said Sister M. D.

“But are you a funnyfingers all the way?” Oread asked. “Papa says that, in the old language, our name Funnyfingers meant both funny-fingers and funny-toes. Are you?”

“Sure I am,” said the very young looking Sister Mary Dactyl. She took off her shoes and stockings. Sisters didn’t do that very often in the class-room then. Now, of course, they go everywhere barefooted and in nothing but a transparent short shift, but that wasn’t so when Oread Funnyfingers was still in the eighth grade.

Yes, Sister was a funny-toes also. She had the triple-jointed fast-as-vision toes. She could

do more things with her toes than other people could do with their fingers.

"Did you have a little hill or mountain when you were young, I mean when you were a girl?" Oread asked her.

"Oh, yes, yes, I have it still, an interior mountain."

"How old are you, sister who always looks so young and pretty?"

"Very old, Oread, very old."

"*How* old?"

"Ask me again in eight years, Oread, if you still want to know."

"In eight years? Oh, all right, I will."

High school went by, four years just like a day. Selim had made a big twisted hammered iron thing that said 'Selim Loves Oread'. He suspected something very strongly about the iron. But he wasn't a funny-fingers, so it took him three weeks instead of three seconds to make the thing. Many other things happened in those four years, but they were all happy things so there is no use mentioning them.

When they were almost through college (Oread still looked like a nine or ten year old, and this was maddening) they were into some very intricate courses. Selim was a veritable genius, and Oread always knew in which pots

the answers might be found, so the two of them qualified for the profound fields. It is good to have a piece of the deep new knowledge as it births, it is good to see the future lifted out of the future pots.

"We have come to the point where we must invent a whole new system of concepts and symbols," said the instructor of one powerful course one day. "Little girl, what are you doing in this room?" he added to Oread. "This is a college building and a college course."

"I know it. We've been through this every day for a year," she said.

"We are as much at a cross-roads as was mankind when the concept of a cross-roads was first invented," the instructor continued. "If that concept (excluding choice pictured graphically with simple diverging lines) had not been invented, mankind would have remained at that situation, unchoosing and merely accepting. There are dozens of cases where mankind has remained in a particular situation for thousands of years for failure to invent a particular concept. I suspect that is the situation here: we have not moved in a certain area because we have not entertained the possibility of movement in that area. A whole new concept is needed, but I cannot even conceive what that concept should be."



"Oh, I'll make it for you tonight," Oread said.

"Has that little girl wandered into the class again today?" the instructor asked with new irritation. "Oh yes, I remember now, you always come up with some sort of proof that you're an enrolled member of the class and that you're twenty-one years old. You're not, though. You're just a little girl with little-girl brains."

"Oh, I know it," Oread said sadly, "but I'll still make the thing for you tonight."

"Make what thing, little girl?"

"The new concept, and the symbol set that goes with it."

"And just what does one make a concept out of?" that man asked her with near exasperation.

"I'll make it mostly out of iron, I think," Oread said. "I'll use whatever is in the pots. but I guess it will be mostly iron."

"Oh God help us!" the man cried out.

"Such a nice expression," Oread told him, "and somebody had told me that you were an unbeliever."

"Actually," said the instructor, controlling himself and talking to the rest of the class and not to Oread Funnyfingers. "Actually these

things often appear so simple in retrospect. So may this be if ever we are able to make it retro. The A. B. C.s, the Alphabet, isn't very hard, is it? Yes Mr. Levkovitch, I know all about those hard letters after C. A little humor, it is said, is a tedious thing. But the alphabet was a hard thing when mankind stood at the foothills—"—*En daktulois*, at the toes of, that's what the original form of the expression was," Oread told him. "Be quiet little girl," the instructor muttered darkly. "—when mankind stood at the foothills of the alphabetical concept and looked up at the mountain, it was hard then."

"Yes, the first alphabets were all made out of hammered iron," Oread told the world, "And they were quite hard."

"The same is the case with simple arithmetic," said the instructor, disregarding Oread with a deep sigh. "It is easy as we look back on it in its ordered simplicity. But when it was only a crying need and not yet a real concept, then it was hard, very hard."

"Sure, it was made out of iron too," Oread whispered to Selim. "Why does he get so mad when I tell him about things being made out of iron?"

"It's just a weakness of the man, Oread," Selim whispered. "We'll have to accept it."

"And so we are probably at an end," the

instructor was ending his class for the day. "If we cannot come up with a new dimension, with a new symbolism, with a new thought and a new concept (having no idea at all what they should be) then we might as well end this class forever. We might as well, as a matter of likely fact, end the world forever. And on that somber note I leave you till tomorrow, if there should be a tomorrow."

"Don't worry, Mr. Zhelezovitch," Oread said. "I'll make it for you tonight."

'The name Daktuloi (Fingers) is variously explained from their number being five or ten, or because they dwelt at the foot (en daktulois) of Mount Ida. The original number seems to have been three—i.e. Kelmis the smelter, Damnameneus the hammer, and Acmon the anvil. This number was afterwards increased to five, then to ten. . . and finally to one hundred.'

*Harper's Dictionary of Classical
Literature and Antiquities*

'In the forests of Phrygian Ida there lived cunning magicians called the Dactyls. Originally there were three of them: Celmis, Damnameneus and the powerful Acmon who in the caves of the mountains was the first to practice the art of Hephaestus and who knew how to work blue iron, casting it

into the burning furnace. Later their number increased. From Phrygia they went to Crete where they taught the inhabitants the use of iron and how to work metals. To them is also attributed the discovery of arithmetic and the letters of the alphabet.'

Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology

'It is also said of the Dactyls (the Finger-Folk inside the hills) that they live very long lives and retain their youthful appearance for very many years.'

Mear-Daoine — Groff Crocker

Just after closing time that evening, Oread Funnyfingers went by City Museum to see Selim. Selim Elia worked as night watchman there to help pay his way through the University. There really wasn't much to do on the job. He sat at a big administrator's desk and studied all night. Studying all night every night is how he got to be a genius. Oread had brought some sandwiches with her.

"Peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches made out of iron," Selim joked.

"No, they're not of iron," Oread said solemnly. "One would need iron teeth to eat an iron sandwich."

"Surely a funnyfingers could manage iron teeth."

"Oh, our third set come in iron, but for me that should be many years yet."

"Oread, I want to marry you."

"Everyone calls you a cradle-robber."

"I know they do. And yet we're almost exactly the same age."

"There's so many people here," Oread said. "Terra Cotta People, Marble People, Sandstone People, Basalt People, Raffia People, Wooden People, Wax People. I will have to find out from my uncles which ones are real. Some of them aren't, you know; some of them never lived at all."

"We have one of your friends or uncles here, Oread, in wax. Over here."

"I know where. You have all three of my uncles here in wax," Oread said. "You might not recognize them from the forms of their names on the plaques, though."

Oh Kelmis, Oh Acmon,

Oh Damnae all three,

Come out of your cases

and play with me.

I don't think they'll come out though, Selim, since they're made out of wax instead of iron. Effigies should always be made out of iron."

"What do their names mean, Oread?"

"Oh Smelter, Oh Anvil,

Oh Hammer all three,
Come out of your cases
and play with me.

No, they won't come out. I'd have to be a bee-brain to evoke anything out of wax."

"Oread, I love you very much."

"No, they won't come out at all. I'll have them come over here themselves some night and make iron effigies of themselves. Then you can get rid of those silly wax ones."

"Little iron-ears, I said that I loved you very much."

"Oh, I heard you. You won't be alarmed when they come out some night to make the effigies? They're kind of funny-looking."

"So are you, Oread. No, I won't be alarmed. Why should a Syrian be alarmed over fabulous people? We're fabulous people ourselves. And if they're your uncles they cannot be dangerous."

"Sure they can. I am. You said yourself that I'd set the flaming ducks after you again. I go home now, Selim, to get my homework made, and also to make that concept-symbol system for Mr. Zhelezovitch the instructor. It's important, isn't it?"

"I'll go with you, Oread. Yes, it's important to Zhelly and to the class and the course. It's true that he might as well end the class forever if he doesn't find it. But it isn't true

that we might as well end the world if we don't find it. It's not quite that important."

"Who will watch the museum if you leave? I want very much to make this correctly and understandably for Mr. Zhelezovitch. I am a Funnyfingers, and making things for people is the whole business and being of the funnyfingers."

"Oh, tell Kelmis to watch the place for me. Will it take long for them and you to make the concept?"

"Oh watch it for Selim,
and watch it real nice,
Oh Kelmis, from rotters
and robbers and mice.

Sure, he'll watch it for you. Even a Waxman Kelmis will be faithful in that. Oh no, they never take very long to make anything for anybody any more." (Time had slipped by, though not much of it; Selim had a sporty car that he drove like a flaming rocket; and it wasn't very far to the northwest side of town. They were out at the Funnyfingers' place now, and into the back, back rooms that turned into tunnels.) "They never take very long to make things anymore," Oread was continuing, "—not since that time, you know, when God got a little testy with them on Sinai when there was a little delay. They first made the tablets out of iron entirely, and

they wouldn't do. They had to make them out of slate-stone with the iron letters inset in it, and the iron had to be that alloy known as command iron. Since then they are all pretty prompt with everyone, and they follow instructions exactly. You never know who it really is who places an order.

"Kelmis has the original all-iron set. I'll get him to show them to you some time."

"Where do you get your stories, Oread?"

"I tell my mother that I make them out of iron."

"And where do you really get them?"

"I make them out of iron."

Selim talked easily with the three uncles while they wrought and hammered the white-hot parts that Oread was to assemble into a symbol-concept.

"How is it that you work inside a little hill in Oklahoma?" he asked them. "Shouldn't you be in the forests or hills of Phrygian Ida? How did you come to leave the Old Country?"

"This is the Old Country, and we haven't left it," powerful Acmon said. "Everything underground anywhere is part of the Old Country. All hills and mountains of the world connect down in their roots, in their toes, and

they make a single place. We *are* in Mount Ida, we are in Crete, we are in Oklahoma. It is all one."

They made the pieces. And Oread, dipping the parts out of the white-hot iron as if it were water, put them together to make the thing. It was a new concept-symbol system, and it looked as if it would work.

And it looked much more as if it would work the next afternoon. Mr. Zhelezovitch the instructor was almost out of his mind with it. The graduate students and the regular students (for this was one of those advanced, mixed classes) crowded about it and went wild. The implications of the new thing would tumble in their minds for weeks; the class would be a marathon affair going on and on as the wonderful new things were put to work to uncover still more wonderful things. The stars were out when Oread and Selim left the class, and no one else would leave it at all that night. But these two had something between them, and it might take another new concept to solve it.

"Oread, give me your answer," Selim was saying again. "I want to marry you."

"Make a wish on a star then. On that one where I'm pointing."

"Triple jointed funnyfingers, who can tell where you're pointing?"

"On that male star there between the several eunuch stars."

"Yes, I see the one you mean, Oread. I make a wish. Now when will you answer me?"

"Within a half hour. I go to question two people first."

Oread left there at a run. She went home. She talked to her mother.

"Mama, why is my father so boyish? Is he really just a boy?"

"Yes he is, Oread. Just a boy."

"After some years would he be a man, really, and not just a pleasant young kid?"

"I think so, Oread, yes."

"Then after some years you two could have children of your own? Being a funnyfingers isn't an obstacle?"

"I'll never know that, Oread. When he is grown up I will be long dead."

Oread ran out of there and ran to the convent that was behind the school she used to attend. She entered and went upstairs and down a hallway. She knew where she was going. One funnyfingers can always find another one. Besides, the eight years was up. She

opened the door and found Sister Mary Dactyl playing solitaire with iron cards.

"How old?" Oread asked.

"Three hundred and fifty eight years," said Sister M D without looking up. "Were I not vowed, I would be coming to the family age now."

Oread ran all the way back to where Selim was still waiting in the street under the stars. She was crying, she was bawling.

"The answer is no," she blubbered. Selim, under the stars, was as white-faced as it is possible for a Syrian to be. But he must not give up.

"Oread, I love you more than you can know," he said. "Maybe we can make a different answer out of iron," he proposed in desperate jest.

"This is the iron answer," she bawled, "and the answer is no." She ran away too fast to follow.

Deep under the hills Oread was crying. She was weeping big hot tears. They weren't, however, iron tears that she wept. That part is untrue.

The tears were actually of that aromatic flux of salt and rosin that wrought-iron workers employ in their process.



Cabrító



The taberna was only as big as a cracker box, but it had full wall mirrors on each end which made it look three times as large. The seven stools had in descending order of importance the Norwegian, the Irishman, a little brown man, a big brown man, two lesser persons, and Anita. Anita on this evening was not being spoken to by any of the other patrons of the bar, so it was as though she was not there.

The Norwegian in the apparent world was known as Airman Lundquist and was stationed at the air base across the river. He had been a sergeant and airman for twenty years, and now, purged of wife and family, was happy in the border town with a twenty-four hour pass every third day. The Norwegian in the real world was a wild Viking with a keen sense of humor and adventure, but no other sense of any kind whatsoever. These seven people

drank slow cold drinks and talked easily for they were all good friends, though they hardly knew each other and had never met outside of that little cracker box.

With the mirror images it was as though twenty-one people were seated there in three only slightly separated groups, and Airman Lundquist was prominent in each of them. An odd thing (hardly worth mentioning) is that, though the images of the other six followed them in precise detail, those of Airman Lundquist did not do so exactly. There were, though nobody noticed it at first, three Airmen Lundquist each telling a different story and drinking a different drink. The story of one was something that happened at Bougainville long ago in those happier days of the great southern war; and the story of another was of a wife in Minnesota who was separated from him, as she was damned if she'd live down here, and he was damned if he'd live up there anymore; and the third one was talking about Elena who had a date with him that night but hadn't showed up. He said he was glad she hadn't showed as he always had more fun on the nights she didn't. And one of the Airmen Lundquists was drinking a Carta Blanca, and one a Gin Fizz, and one a muddy looking Rum drink that was cousin to a Cuba Libre. But except for these little things

Lundquist and his two images were very similar as mirror images always are.

"We will go get some cabrito," said Lundquist, the real and not the imaged or imagined Airman. "We can get it a half block from here and it's real good. Or we can go about twelve miles out and get some that's always burned. That sure is a rough ride out there and it'll take a couple of hours. Let's go get some cabrito."

He left with his companion, the Irishman, and it seemed as if the two images of the Airman also followed, but invisibly. And all the rest of the evening they were following, for these as you have already guessed were fetches.

"Irishman," said Lundquist, "let's get in the buggy and go get some cabrito."

"Norwegian," said the Irishman, "we could walk the half block."

"We will go farther and do worse."

The driver's name was Trevino and the horse was named Jaime. They went out past the end of the town and then they were like a boat in a sea of cactus with only a narrow moon shining on the narrow road. Jaime trotted at a terrific rate, a hundred, then five hundred, then a thousand paces a minute; and after an hour they left the road and went down a wagon road and came to a great barn-

like building in the dark. There were a dozen buggies there and two dozen taxis and cars. They went in and the two fetches of the Norwegian followed them.

There is an idea that only Irishmen have fetches or doubles and then only at the hour of death. This is not so. Only Irishmen can see them, but a great many people have them and the Norwegian had two of the best.

While they waited for their cabrito they drank an old essence of cactus juice that had popped more skulls than it could remember. Rows and rows of cabritos were turned on big spits over the fiery furnace which was almost the only light in the room. And Amata came over to talk to them.

"For a peso I will tell you a story, and if you like it I'll tell you another one for the same price. And if you like that one too (listen closely) the third one will cost you only half as much."

"Mama, tell them the one about las animas," said Paco.

"That is the second story. I can't be telling the second story first."

"Well, tell the first story first."

"All right. Did you ever wonder where all the cabritos come from? See, there are a hundred places just like this one; and all the markets in town have cabritos piled high. But you

seldom see them in the pastures. You may drive ten miles and if you're lucky you may see one old nanny goat, no more. Then where do all the cabritos come from? Once the authorities became anxious and they came out here. They asked Luis, the old modrego: 'You butcher cabritos by the dozen and yet you don't raise goats. Where do you get them?' 'But I do raise goats. What is that yonder but a she goat?' 'But you have only one.' 'When you have a good one that is enough.' 'That isn't possible. If she twinned every time she couldn't have more than four a year, it would be biologically impossible. And you butcher hundreds.' 'Well, because I'm a poor man who doesn't know it's impossible I've become a rich man who sells a lot of cabrito.' So they went away baffled. But this is the real story that he didn't tell them. They aren't cabritos at all, they're dogs. A dog and a kid look just alike when they're skinned. You see all the dogs running around under the tables? Well, we feed them the bones from the cabritos. Then we butcher them and make cabritos out of them. The bones of those we again feed to the dogs so we have a never ending supply and are never at any expense for food in raising them. Isn't that a good story? Give me a peso."

An old lady came over in a fury. "Did you

tell them the dog story? I have forbidden you to tell the dog story. It unsettles some of the customers and they leave without finishing their supper. Believe me, gentlemen, it is a lie. We do not serve dog meat here."

"Is the old lady your mother, Amata?"

"No, she is my grand daughter. I am enchanted so I always stay young and beautiful. But all my daughters aged and died, and then all my grand daughters except that old crone and she's about ready to go too."

"Mama, you know what grandma said she'd do to you if you told that story again."

"O be quiet. She can't even hear us from here. Did you like the dog story? I will tell you another story for another peso."

The Irishman and the Norwegian listened attentively, and the two fetches of the Norwegian were entranced and crowded closer.

"Well, the first story was a lie. But this is the true story. Those aren't really cabritos, they're animas. Did you know that an anima and a cabrito look just alike when they're skinned?"

"I had thought the anima would be naturally skinless."

"Well, it is. When the soul is pulled out of the body it is just like the body only smaller. The same four limbs and all, but only the size of a cabrito, for the soul is the body in minia-

ture. There is a place near here where there is an old volcano and there it is very shallow. There are seven brothers named Ibarra who are devils, and they thought of a way to make money. They take the animas and break their joints so they will look more like cabritos. Then they haul them up and load them on wagons. They take them around and sell them to places like this."

"What do they do with all the money they make?"

"They spend it on whisky and girls. And they gamble a little. Then the next night they go down again and get seven more wagon-loads of souls. Do you like the story? Give me a peso."

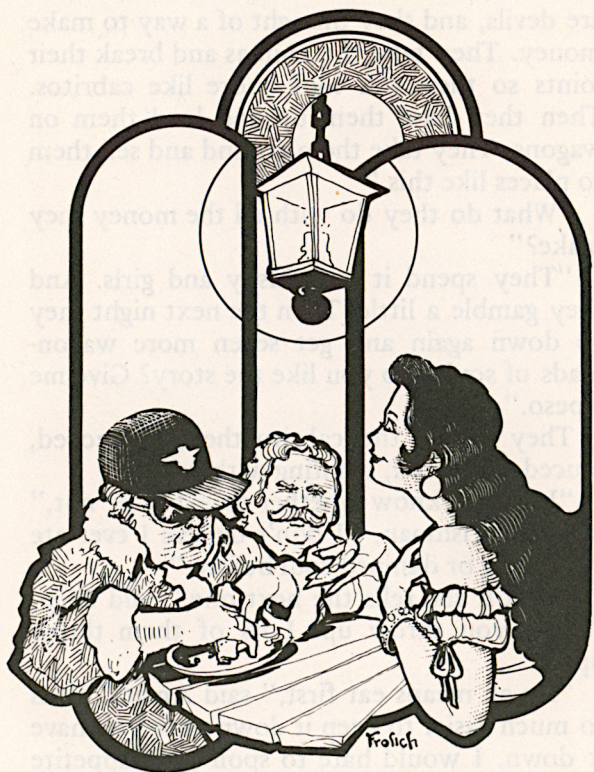
They served the cabrito then, barbecued, sauced, peppered, bursting with juice.

"I hardly know whether to eat it or not," said the Irishman, "I don't believe I ever ate either dog or damned soul before."

"Wait'll she tells the next one," said Paco. "I bet you throw up. Lots of them throw up."

"By all means eat first," said Amata. "It is so much easier to keep it down once you have it down. I would hate to spoil your appetite before you have eaten. But it is an unusual story."

Lundquist, the Norwegian, decided he was



eating damned soul, and gave a small portion to the Irishman who had never tasted it before. And he in turn passed a joint of that wonderful old dog to the airman. And soon they were down to picking the bones.

"The third story as I promised will only cost you half a peso. The first two stories were lies but this is the truth. When you leave here (if you do leave) notice that the ruts as you circle around to drive out are not so deep as those where you came in. This is because fewer people and vehicles leave than arrive. You will also notice a pile of old buggy wheels in the back yard and another pile of old tires. This is all that is left of many who came. The last few parties who leave every night do not leave at all. We calculate just about how much we will need for the next night. And to tell you the truth they are calculating now. If by some accident you do leave you will be the last to go. Los hombres we put in one vat, and los caballos in another. And there we chop them up to just the size of cabritos. You can make six out of a man and thirty-one out of a horse. And this is what we serve our fortunate patrons on the next night. Wasn't that a good story? Give me half a peso, or more if you want to."

"Is it true?"

"The last story is always true until it is

superseded."

They brought them each a piece of bread when the cabrito was completely gone.

"Do not be a barbarian and eat it," the Norwegian explained to the Irishman who did not understand these things, "that would be worse than drinking out of a finger bowl." They wiped their fingers on the bread and threw it to the dogs under the table, who perhaps would be cabritos the next night.

And when they left the old lady bowed them out. "My daughter likes to tell stories to amuse the people and to make a little money. We hope they haven't annoyed you."

And Amata came to them and told them not to pay any attention to her grand daughter, the old crone.

They got in the buggy and Trevino whipped up Jaime and they left. And they noticed that the ruts where they circled around to drive out were not as deep as where they came in; for always fewer people left than arrived.

They got away safely, the last ones to do so that night. But the two fetches of the Norwegian were not so lucky. They stupidly allowed themselves to be caught just before they could jump on the back of the buggy. And despite their screams they were put in a vat and chopped up to the size of cabritos.

They were barbecued and served to the fortunate patrons the next night.



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This is copy

D. A. Lafferty

