

WORLD FANTASY AWARD WINNER!

NO.6

CRANK!

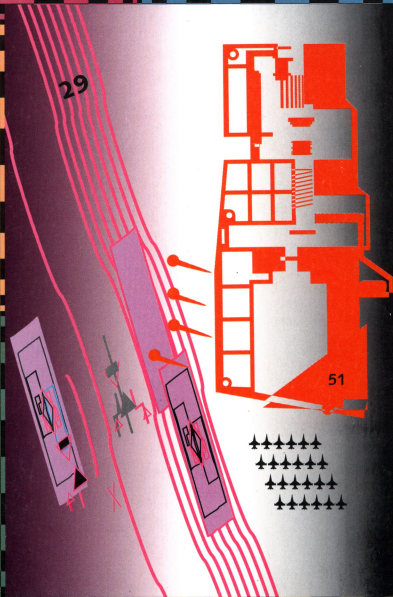
SCIENCE FICTION • FANTASY

KAREN JOY FOWLER

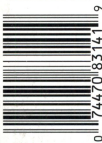
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Issue No. 6

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And Now a Word From Our Sponsor

When I started this magazine, I said there would be no editorials, and it is still true; this is not an editorial. This is more like a State of the Publisher Address.

First thing: you'll notice on the front cover that it says "World Fantasy Award Winner!" in big letters across the top. Strictly speaking, I won the 1995 World Fantasy Award in the Special Non-Professional Category for all of my publishing as Broken Mirrors Press. However, since the bulk of my publishing efforts for the past three years have been towards the establishment of CRANK! as a viable magazine, and what was submitted to the awards jury for last year was copies of CRANK!, and that it many ways CRANK! is my most successful and significant project to date, it does not seem to be too much of a stretch to say that the award was for CRANK! as much as anything else.

The award itself is a post-mortem bust of H.P. Lovecraft designed by Gahan Wilson.

Secondly, if you've been reading CRANK! since the beginning, you've probably noticed that the last couple of issues have been produced on a schedule that can only be described as irregular. The last year or so has brought a number of new demands into my life that has drastically reduced the amount of time I have to do the work needed to put out the magazine. Coupled with the usual difficulties of securing sufficient quality material to publish and sufficient financing to publish it with, this has played havoc with the schedule.

Steps are being taken to improve this situation. By the time you read this, I will probably no longer be working at a full-time day job. Instead, I will be attempting to survive as a freelance graphic designer/typesetter, in hopes that this will allow me to squeeze a few more hours of free time out of the week. So if anybody out there happens to need one, give me a call.

And now, back to our regularly scheduled reading—

—Bryan Cholfin, editor

The Magic Spectacles

James Blaylock

Part one of three

Chapter 1: Pancakes and Autumn Leaves

A curiosity shop appeared in the center of a row of small stores downtown. A painted sign, faded with weather and sunlight, hung over the door. John couldn't remember that the shop had been there yesterday. It seemed to him as if *nothing* had been there yesterday, and yet there was nothing new-looking about the curiosity shop, or about the old sign that swung slowly back and forth in the wind.

John and his brother Danny sat on a bench in the Plaza and looked across the street at the shop window, which was cobwebby and misty with dust. They could see almost nothing through it, except what looked like the skeletons of three fish hung upside down from the ceiling like windchimes.

Two big trees bent over the street outside, shaking bright green leaves in the wind. It looked to John as if the trees were laughing, although what they were laughing at he couldn't say – maybe at the fish skeletons in the window, maybe at his own leafy reflection in the glass.

It was autumn, and there was something uneasy in the air, like Halloween ghosts flitting around lonely and lost on the first thin breath of winter. Sycamore leaves drifted from the big trees overhead, and in the quiet morning air John could hear the creaking of the sign across the street and the scrape and rustle of dead leaves blowing along the sidewalk. The grass in the Plaza had already turned brown, as if it were asleep, and the Plaza fountain barely worked at all, but just bubbled out little spurts of rusty-looking water.

"I heard that the water in this fountain comes from a long way under the ground," John said, picking up a floating sycamore leaf. "Maybe from lakes in the center of the earth."

"Who said that?" Danny asked. "Did you make it up?"

"Dr. Stone said it. He said someone found three fish in it last week, dead."

They both looked at the window of the curiosity shop again. There was a light on inside now, but the shop was still mostly dark, and the light shined back in the darkness like the moon.

Last week a waitress at the lunch counter of Watson's Drug Store complained that the maple syrup went sour almost as soon as it was opened, and so did the milk. And Dr. Stone, who was a veterinarian, said that the sparrows that nested in the Plaza trees were acting strangely. Some of them had been found lying asleep on the brown grass. A cat had eaten one of the sleeping sparrows and had fallen asleep on the grass, too, and wouldn't wake up, and now it was in Dr. Stone's office, asleep on a chair.

There had been a lot of fog lately, and people who worked in the downtown shops began to take long naps on foggy days.

Shopkeepers slept in their chairs, and waiters dozed while their customers waited for hamburgers. The fog smelled of fish and soap.

Maybe because so many people were asleep, things began to disappear from houses and shops. Mostly they were things made of glass, like costume jewelry and eyeglasses and prisms from old lamps. None of it was very valuable, except Dr. Stone's antique pocketwatch, which had been stolen right out of his pocket.

John wondered what Dr. Stone knew about the center of the earth and whether the fish skeletons in the curiosity shop window had come from there. Some people thought the earth was hollow and that you could get to the land inside by sailing through a big hole in the top of the world. The UFOs hid out down there. And that was where the dinosaurs had gone, too, probably in a big hurry when they heard about the comet that was going to make them extinct. John had written it all down in his notebook, very scientifically, under the title "What Happened to the Dinosaurs".

Sometimes he liked the idea of a door to another land, except that he would want to know, before he opened that door, what kind of things lived on the other side. It was sort of like one of those quiz shows where you got to be surprised by whatever was hiding behind curtain number three – a new car or a grinning fat man in a clown suit....

"Look," Danny said suddenly, pointing down into the water of the fountain, "a good luck penny."

On the bottom of the pool, among the skeletons of sunken leaves, lay a small coin. It looked like a round, dark hole.

Chapter 2 : The Moon Penny

"Somebody probably made a wish and threw it in there," John said. "I wouldn't take it."

"I would," Danny said, pulling off his jacket. "Whoever threw it in probably wished that someone would find it. If I take it, then their wish has come true. I'll be doing them a favor." He reached into the water and fished out the coin, drying it off on his pants.

"Let's see," John said, and Danny held the coin out so that the sun shone on it. It wasn't any kind of normal penny. There was a picture of a man's face on one side – a very round face wearing spectacles and with crazy hair. "Wrong door," John muttered. "We got the clown."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Danny asked, turning the coin over. On the tails side was a picture of a fish.

"It means I'd throw it back," John said.

Danny shook his head. "Too late. Once you pick up a penny, you get all the luck out of it, whether it's good luck or bad luck. Anyway, I think this is a moon coin and just dropped out of the sky. So don't tell me it came from the center of the earth."

John looked across at the curiosity shop again and at the fish skeletons hanging in the window. Clearly they were the skeletons of fish very much like the fish on the coin – fat and spiny and with huge round eyes. The shadows and dust were gone from the window now, and the light in the shop shone on a clutter of odd-looking junk.

They ran their bicycles across the street and stopped in front of the shop. Beneath the hanging fish in the window sat an elephant's foot made into a stand for holding umbrellas, and next to that stood an enormous black raven and a big stuffed lizard with a red jewel in either eye. Piles of books tilted against each other, all of them dusty and old. The one on the top was something called *The Wise Fishermen's Encyclopedia*. On its green cover was a drawing of a man wearing a night shirt and cap. He was fishing in a dry riverbed in the light of a full moon. A fish skeleton hung from the end of his line.

Next to that there was a fishbowl full of marbles. In the middle of the marbles, showing up through them, was a pair of old spectacles with brass wire rims.

A gust of wind blew just then, and the trees on the curb rustled and

danced. A great sheet of wrapping paper, all orange and red and yellow, whirled past, end over end like a pinwheel down the center of the street. Behind it rushed a circus of autumn leaves, and the sky was filled with the screech of wild parrots and the cawing of crows. It seemed to John that there was something on the wind, some faint smell, as if someone far away had made a bonfire of tree prunings and the wind was full of invisible smoke.

"Let's eat," Danny said suddenly. "I want some pancakes. How much money do we have?"

"Enough," John said. Although what he was thinking was something more like, "Enough to buy that fishbowl full of marbles in the window." Then he looked at the fisherman on the cover of the book again. He had the same face and hair as the man on the moon coin....

Maybe later they would come back for the marbles. Right now pancakes seemed like a better idea.

At Watson's lunch counter they took a table by the window so that they could see people walk past out on the sidewalk. It wasn't cold out, but it was blustery, and the wind made people clutch their coats around them as if it were going to blow the coats off and sail them over the rooftops like kites. A man raced past chasing a hat, and another man, right behind him, hurried along backwards so that the wind blew his coat shut instead of open. He had the goggly eyes of the fish on the moon coin, and John nearly pointed this out to Danny, but he stopped himself. Maybe he was getting fish on the brain.

Neither of them said very much while they were eating their pancakes, and finally John pushed his empty plate away. He had finished his cocoa, too. There was nothing left in his cup but a sort of brown paste. He took four crumpled dollar bills from his pocket, and Danny dug out two more and a handful of change. They counted out the coins, heaping them on top of the bills, making sure there was enough and with some left over for a tip.

Then Danny took the moon coin out of his pocket and turned it over in his hand, looking first at one side and then at the other. Outside, the wind stopped blowing. Flying leaves drifted to the street. People let go of their coats and pulled their collars straight.

Silently, John picked up his spoon, licked it, and stuck it carefully to his nose, so that the handle hung down over his chin like one of the screwball beards that the Egyptian Pharaohs used to wear. He leaned across the table and waited for Danny to look up....

... and right then he realized that someone was watching him through the window. He jumped in surprise. The spoon flipped off his nose, clatter-

ing down into Danny's half-full water glass. Water splashed on the table, and John had to grab the glass to keep it from falling over.

"Hey!" Danny said, looking up. "What are you doing? I was going to drink that."

"Nothing," John said. With his eyes he gestured toward the street.

Standing just outside the window was a little man in an old green coat. He was about as big as a dwarf or an elf, and there was bundle of sticks in a bag over his shoulder. His face was wrinkled and pinched, like the face of the moon. He took a pointed cloth cap from his pocket and pulled it on. People walked past without looking at him, as if there was nothing out of the ordinary about him at all.

Or perhaps as if they simply couldn't see him.

He winked at John and Danny very slowly, tipped his hat, and turned away.

The wind blew again, harder than ever. It swept a storm of leaves down the center of the street. The little man held onto his hat with both hands, and, as if he were made of paper, the wind whisked him away through the air, straight across the Plaza, past the fountain, and in through the door of the curiosity shop.

Chapter 3: The Window Under the House

As he watched the little man depart in a whirl of leaves, John realized that he had seen him before that morning....

It had been almost two months ago, right at the end of summer, in the week before school started. John and Danny had broken their bedroom window while playing baseball on the front lawn. There had been nothing left of the window but shattered glass all over the bedroom floor. Somehow, even the wooden frame of the window was knocked to pieces, and anyone could see that it wouldn't do just to put in another piece of glass.

That's when they got lucky, and Mrs. Owlswick down the block gave them a window. Mrs. Owlswick lived with her niece Kimberly in a big and very old house. Kimberly's uncle, Mrs. Owlswick's brother, had lived upstairs in the attic room. Everyone said that he had "gone away," which was a polite way of saying he had gone crazy and one day had disappeared. Under the house, in a little cellar, Mrs. Owlswick stored odds and ends of stuff: old pieces of furniture, boxes of glass doorknobs, hinges, picture frames, clock parts, and the window, which was glazed with a ripply sort of pale green glass.

Their father very happily took the window. He said that he was "going to

do the job right." That meant that he was going to do it in the most complicated way he could, and make the job last. "Get me the pry bar," he had said to John, and with it he had started pulling off the wall mouldings and prying out all the pieces of the old window, throwing them out onto the lawn where John and Danny dropped them into a trash barrel.

A couple of times their father had asked if the new window looked "plum", from out there on the lawn, which didn't make any sense at all, and so John said that the window might not look "plum", but that it looked *peachy*. Right then their father hit his thumb with the hammer, and so he didn't think the joke was very funny at all, and John and Danny had to go around the corner of the house in order to laugh.

Finally, late in the afternoon, he hung Mrs. Owlswick's window in place of the old one and put the mouldings back up around it. They all came into the bedroom to have a look through it. The sun was just going down, and because of the ripply green glass, the world outside looked something like a tidepool, as if they were gazing out through shallow sea water.

It had rained the next morning. John sat on his bed, looking out at the street. Water ran in the gutter, splashing over the curb, and windy raindrops splattered against the glass. Someone with an umbrella was coming along down the sidewalk. He was small, maybe a new kid in the neighborhood. When he stopped in front of the house, John could see that he wasn't a kid at all, but was actually a little man wearing a green cloth cap. On his back he carried a bundle of sticks. Rain poured off his umbrella in a curtain of drops.

He had stood on the sidewalk twirling his umbrella for a moment, looking at the house – or more particularly, looking at the new window, maybe looking through it. Then he walked away, past Mrs. Owlswick's house, seeming to grow smaller and smaller as he vanished in the rainy morning air.

Now, two months later, the same little man had been looking in at them through the lunch counter window. *Something* was about to happen. John knew it. Another door was about to open, and there wasn't going to be a new car behind this one either. More likely they'd get the clown again, along with an invitation to the circus of Dr. Wrinkle-face, where they'd be turned into fish or toads or something and kept in a cage.

They went outside and unlocked their bikes, then rode across the street again and leaned their bikes against the brick wall of the curiosity shop. John looked at the fishbowl full of marbles. They were good ones – the kind you hardly ever found. You could buy clear marbles in a plastic net bag at the market. And you could buy solid color marbles like the ones that

come in a Chinese checkers game. Sometimes you found cats' eyes in the dirt of a flowerbed, dropped there years ago by kids who are grown up now and don't care about marbles anymore.

But the fishbowl in the window was full of the sort of marbles you could only find if you were really lucky. With the sun shining on them now, some were like swirls of frozen rootbeer. Some reminded him of tigers, or of a sunlit forest or a rainbow. Others looked like the earth seen from way off in space, as if he were sitting on the moon.

John suddenly wanted to buy them all. Marbles were like any sort of treasure; you needed a pile of them. The bigger the pile the better.

On the sign over the door was painted a picture of a man walking along a road, carrying a bundle of sticks. There was a full moon with a cheerful face in the sky above him. Under the painting were the words, "Come In." So John pushed the door open, and he and Danny stepped through it, into the dimly-lit shop.

Chapter 4: The Fishbowl Full of Marbles

The shop was cool inside and full of odds and ends, all of it dusty. Stuff was piled on old tables and falling in heaps out of open wardrobes and spilling from the shelves of bookcases. Hanging from the rafters in the high ceiling was the skeleton of a giant bird held together with silver wire. There were books everywhere, all of them dark and old. There were stuffed bats and pictures of apes and clipper ships and old houses and serious looking people in bonnets and top hats. There was a jar with an enormous eye in it, and no end of old candles and silverware and crystal glasses. On the counter sat a lamp built out of an iron fish.

The little man in the green cap sat behind the counter on a tall stool. He had a book in his hand, and he peeked at John and Danny over the top of it. His bag full of tied-together sticks lay on the floor in front of the counter.

"What do you need?" he asked them. "Or more to the point, what do you *want*?" They could only see his eyes and half his nose. The rest of him was hidden by the book and the counter.

"Marbles," John said, looking around. There was probably lots of other stuff in there he wanted too, but right now the marbles were enough. They didn't have much money left after the pancakes.

"In the fishbowl," Danny said. "In the window. We don't need the glasses, though."

The little man nodded. The point of his green cap wagged up and down. "You see very clearly, then?"

John shrugged and kicked Danny's foot just to make sure that Danny knew how weird all this was. "I guess we just don't want the glasses," John said. "Just as many marbles as we can buy."

Danny dug the rest of the change out of his pocket. "We have about a dollar," he said.

Slowly the man's head rose over the top of his book, until his whole face peered down at Danny's handful of nickels and dimes. He rubbed the side of his nose and asked, "Do you have a penny with the face of a man on it?"

"Abraham Lincoln," Danny said.

"I was thinking of a different man, actually. The Man in the Moon."

The wind blew so hard outside right then that it rattled the windows, and the air was full of leaves and dust. The sign over the door creaked and banged. The little man pretended to read his book again, but he watched Danny out of one eye.

For a moment John hoped that Danny wouldn't find the moon penny. They shouldn't have taken it from the fountain. It was connected somehow to the wind blowing outside and to autumn leaves and fish skeletons and window and sparrow sleeping in the grass.

But then Danny took it out of his pocket. He held it under the light of the iron fish lamp, and John stepped up next to him in order to get a better look.

The eyes of the moon-faced man on the coin were shut now, as if he had fallen asleep but hadn't taken his spectacles off. John couldn't be completely certain that his eyes had been open before, but he thought that they had been. And now, just as he looked more closely at the face, the eyes seemed to move behind their eyelids, like the eyes of a man dreaming.

The little man put his book down and took a magnifying glass out from under the counter. Except for the sound of the wind, it was ghostly silent. The shadows of leaves danced on the window pane and threw shadows across the floor. Through the magnifying glass the little man's eye was enormous, like a whale's eye.

"This is just what I want," he said, nodding at them. "Moon penny. These are very rare. You don't see one in a thousand years. I had one very much like this but I threw it into a fountain and made a wish. Are you sure you want to spend it?"

Danny didn't say anything for a moment, as if he had swallowed something and was waiting for it to go down his throat. "Sure," he said finally.

"I told you to leave it in the fountain," John whispered.

"Take the marbles," the little man said. "But it's only fair to tell you that they aren't all there; this is only some of them. They used to belong to a

man, but he . . . lost them. Some day maybe he'll want them back, and then you'll have to give them up."

"No problem," Danny said. John nodded. It didn't seem very likely. The little man dropped the moon penny through a slot cut in the top of the iron fish. Several seconds later there was a clank and a rattle of coins, as if the penny had fallen a long, long way, to the bottom of a well, maybe.

"Take the spectacles too," he said. "You've bought the whole package, fishbowl and all. But if you meet the man who lost his marbles, think twice before you give him the spectacles. Don't mean to alarm you, but they can be used for fell purposes. Like water, you know; you can drink it, and you can drown in it. Do you follow me?"

John nodded again. He didn't follow a thing. He didn't want the spectacles, but somehow he had them anyway. Or at least Danny had them. It had been his coin, after all . . .

"No exchanges, no refunds," the little man said. He pointed to a sign on the wall. "All Sales Final," it read.

He picked up his book again and pretended to look at it, but John was pretty sure that he watched them over the top of the pages as they picked up the fishbowl and went out. The wind slammed the door shut, and both of them jumped in surprise. When they turned around to look, the interior of the shop was dark again except for the fish lamp glowing way back in the shadows.

The sign hanging over the door was turned around. The old man painted on it was walking away from them now, carrying his sticks. The moon was asleep overhead. "Closed Up," the sign read.

Chapter 5: The Treasure Under the House

They parked their bikes under the carport in the driveway. It was nearly noon. Across the street old Mr. Skink was raking dead leaves into a pile on his lawn, and Harvey Chickel, who lived at the end of the block and around the corner, was riding his skateboard up and down the sidewalk. Harvey looked bored, like he was having a terrible time. Being bored was his second favorite thing to do. His first favorite was causing other people trouble.

John knew that Harvey had seen them ride up. Harvey hadn't waved because he wanted to let them know how bored he was. That meant Harvey hadn't seen the fishbowl, which was good. Harvey had a problem with stealing things, and he wouldn't look nearly so bored any more if he had seen it.

The fishbowl felt extra heavy, as if John had been carrying it for ten miles instead of ten blocks. When he was sure that Harvey wasn't looking, he

took the spectacles out of the marbles and put them into his jacket pocket. At once the fishbowl felt about half as heavy, as if the spectacles had been too full of gravity. He wondered if that was scientific. Did gravity make things heavy by filling them up? Or did it just sort of sit on things, and mash them down? He would have to start a gravity chapter in his book.

Carefully, he put the fishbowl down on the porch, hiding it behind a potted plant. Across the street, Mr. Skink paused to light his pipe, and just then the wind picked up his pile of leaves and blew it in every direction. Mr. Skink tried to stop them by waving his bamboo rake around as if he was trying catch butterflies in a net. Harvey Chickel burst into loud laughter and fell off his skateboard onto the grass. He rolled around and beat his hands on the ground.

"It wasn't *that* funny," Danny said. Danny didn't like Harvey Chickel at all.

Mr. Skink said something to Harvey then, but John couldn't hear what it was. Harvey stood up and said something back, and then Mr. Skink pointed at him with the stem of his pipe and said, very loudly, "I oughta..." and Harvey rode away on his skateboard before Mr. Skink had a chance to say what he oughta do. When he was half a block farther down the street, Harvey turned around and laughed out loud again, as if he had just then remembered how funny the whole thing was.

A door shut a couple of houses down, and an instant later their friend Kimberly stepped off her front porch. Actually it was the front porch of Mrs. Owlswick's house, Kimberly's aunt. Kimberly was a year older than John. She had long blonde hair and dreamy eyes. Her hair was tied into a pony tail with a red ribbon, and for some reason she was wearing a dress.

"Are you looking at her hard enough?" Danny asked. "Maybe you should take a picture."

"It's you that should take a picture," John said.

Smiling, Danny said, "Right."

Harvey Chickel hadn't turned the corner toward home, but was skating up and down at the end of the block now. He must have seen Kimberly come out. Go home, John thought, but Harvey sat down on the curb as if he was waiting for something. He flipped his skateboard into the air so that it banged down onto the street. Then he pounded it against the curb a couple times, showing off.

Kimberly carried a red metal box about half as big as a loaf of bread. "Look at what I found," she said, walking up to John and Danny and holding out the box.

The lid had a picture of a fountain on it, like the fountain in the Plaza.

Beyond it sat a house on a hill. The house had diamond-paned windows and smoke curling up out of three chimneys. Flowering vines grew across the porch. On the roof stood a weather vane shaped like a fish skeleton. It pointed toward the rising moon, which was coming up between two hills. Under the picture were the words, East, West, Home's Best.

"What a great can," John said, staring at the fish skeleton. "Where did you get it?"

"It used to belong to my uncle," Kimberly said. "I found it under the house, behind where the old window was. Look at all this stuff."

She opened the lid. Inside was a heap of costume jewelry, with big rhinestones that looked like diamonds and emeralds. There were glass prisms and tiny glass perfume bottles and a glass saltshaker shaped like... a fish.

"You found *all that* under the house? It's like a treasure or something," John said.

Kimberly nodded. "My aunt says it's a goblin treasure."

"There's goblins under your house?" asked Danny. "I never heard anything about goblins leaving treasures under houses."

"I never heard about them being under houses at all," John said.

"They live under houses when they have too," Kimberly said. "That's what my aunt says. I mean, where else? They can't just go down to the motel. They'd rather live in the woods, but there aren't any woods around here, so they get under your house through secret tunnels."

"That's a lie!" someone said in a loud voice.

It was Harvey Chickel. No one had heard him come up. He had an unhappy face, as if someone had tricked him into eating brussels sprouts. Usually he looked that way when other people were having fun. Kimberly closed the lid of the box.

"There's nothing under houses but dirt," Harvey said, and he spit on the ground, nearly hitting his own foot.

Kimberly looked straight at him and said, "Some people think that everything is just dirt. But they're wrong."

"They're not as wrong as *you* are," Harvey said, and he looked for a moment like he was going to hit her.

John's stomach felt suddenly empty. He wondered what he was going to do. He hated this kind of thing. Harvey was famous for it. In a second he would start pushing people. He had hit Kimberly at school once. Harvey had hit nearly everyone at school at least once. That was all he could think of to do when he got mad. Kimberly had hit him back, right in the stomach, and she looked like she was ready to hit him again.

"Miss *perfect*," Harvey said. "What are you all dressed up for, a tea party?"

"My aunt's taking me to lunch," Kimberly said. "So what?"

"Your uncle going?" Harvey asked.

Kimberly didn't say anything. She just looked at him.

"I heard he was in the hatch," Harvey said. The men in white suits came to get him with big nets. That's what my dad said. That's where he is right now, I bet – in the hatch. My dad said that your uncle didn't change out of his pajamas for five years. He used to stick a fishing pole out the window and fish in the bushes with junk tied to the end of the line for bait. One time my dad tied this rubber fish to the line and yanked on it." Harvey snorted through his nose. Probably it was meant to be laughter.

"Why don't you shut up?" Danny said.

"You shut up," Harvey said. "He used to live in *your* house. That's who owned this place, a nut case. I heard he went crazy when his wife corked off."

Kimberly didn't say anything. She stood there looking at the lid of the treasure box.

"Where is he then if he's not in the hatch?" Harvey said.

"What do you care?" Kimberly said. Maybe he took a bus to the moon.

"What I think..." Harvey started to say.

"What we think," Danny said, "is that nobody cares what you think."

"You want to make something out of it?" Harvey asked.

Here it comes, John thought. He got ready to grab Harvey's arm. He couldn't think of anything else. This was just what Harvey wanted. All of a sudden he would get going with his fake karate and would start making grunting noises and kicking the air. Danny didn't say anything, but just stood there looking into Harvey's face.

Harvey spit again and shook his head. "I'll tell you so what," he said to Kimberly. "I bet you *stole* all this junk."

"Who asked you?" Danny said. "We don't care what you think, remember?"

"Nobody has to ask me *nothing*," Harvey said, giving Danny another hard look. What he said didn't make any sense, and John hoped that Danny wouldn't point that out. Maybe if no one said anything he would just leave.

Instead of leaving, he spit again, but some of the spit ran down his chin, and he made a slobbering noise with his mouth when he tried to suck it back in. His face got red. "You wait," he said, probably to Danny. Then he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He wouldn't look at anyone now, but rode away on his skateboard, really fast, as if he was going someplace important. "Wimps!" he yelled over his shoulder.

"That was really gross," Kimberly said when he was gone. "How come boys spit?"

"I don't spit," John said.

"Boys just spit," Kimberly said. "I don't understand it. Harvey Chickel's head must be full of spit or something. He's like a squirt gun."

"He's a hoSER," Danny said.

"He didn't used to be that bad," John said. "I remember a couple of years ago when he gave me two jelly doughnuts, just for no reason at all."

"That must have been before I knew him," Kimberly said.

"They must have been poisoned," Danny said.

"He used to like to do all kinds of stuff," John said. "Hide-and-go-seek, climbing trees, riding bikes, whatever."

"Now he's too tough," Danny said.

"Right," Kimberly said. "I bet that's why he spits, because he's so tough."

"I was over at his house," John said, "on the day he gave me the doughnuts. His father was supposed to come and pick him up. They were going to the mountains or something for the weekend. He only gets to see his father every once in a while. Anyway, Harvey was all packed and everything. He was waiting around for hours, and his father never came.

"Ever?" Kimberly asked.

"Not for a couple weeks. He just forgot, I guess. He was always doing that. Later Harvey tried to tell me his father had showed up late, and they went anyway, but I knew he was lying. He never went anywhere.

"Did you call him a liar?" Danny asked.

John shook his head.

"He would have called you one."

"Yeah," John said. "I guess that's why I didn't."

Kimberly opened the treasure box again, and they sat down on the porch to look through the stuff. John didn't want to say so, but he knew that Harvey might be partly right. The jewels in the box might be part of the stuff stolen from the shops around the Plaza. Of course Kimberly hadn't stolen any of it...

And right then she pulled Dr. Stone's pocket watch out of a tangled string of blue glass beads.

Danny looked at John, but didn't say anything.

"I wonder if it's real gold," Kimberly said.

"I think so," John said, having a look at the watch. The initials A.W.S. were engraved in the back of the watch case. "I know so."

"How?" she asked.

"Because he knows whose watch it is," Danny said, looking over John's shoulder at the engraved letters.

It was the stolen jewelry, or at least some of it. Kimberly set the box

down on the porch and pushed it away from her, as if there were bugs in it. They told her about Dr. Stone losing the watch and about what he had told them about the stolen things. Then, as if he had gotten an idea, Danny suddenly jumped up and ran around the corner, into the carport. A moment later he shouted.

When John and Kimberly arrived, he was pointing at the crawlspace under the house. It was a square hole, just big enough for a person to creep through. There was a screen door covering the hole in order to keep cats and possums out. The door was unlatched and pulled partly aside.

Someone, or maybe some thing, had been under there.

Chapter 6: Fish Bones and Rat Shoes

The police came shortly after that. No one knew who had called them. It seemed like half the neighborhood was standing around in the carport. When Kimberly got back, John and Danny's parents were talking to the police. Their dog Ahab wandered around sniffing the ground, smelling out clues. A man in brown coveralls and carrying a flashlight was just then climbing through the crawlspace, disappearing under the house like the wicked witch of the east.

Kimberly told John that she hadn't gone to lunch with her aunt after all. Instead, her aunt had taken her around to the downtown shops in order to see if any of the treasure in the box actually *had* been stolen. Shopkeepers claimed about half of it. She gave the pocket watch back to Dr. Stone and then went to the police station with the rest of the treasure. The police kept it, just in case somebody should claim it, and Kimberly was left with an empty box.

"What's supposed to be hidden under there?" John's father asked, nodding at the crawlspace.

"Probably costume jewelry," one policeman said.

"Glass junk," the other one said. "Somebody's been stealing it from local antique shops and ditching it under houses."

"Why would anyone do that?" John's mother asked.

The first policeman scratched his head. "Nobody knows," he said. "Probably it's just a nut."

"A nut," their father said. "That would explain it. It's probably the same nut that stole the fish out of our refrigerator. Three trout just vanished from the freezer yesterday afternoon. Someone's been stealing potted plants off the porch, too. Probably it's a gang of nuts."

Both policeman looked at him as if *he* was the nut, and John wished that

his father wouldn't talk like that, especially around people like teachers and policemen, who usually didn't know he was trying to be funny.

There was a shout from the man in the coveralls, and a few moments later his head appeared in the crawlspace. His face was streaked with dirt. "Got it!" he said, and pulled himself through onto the driveway carrying a canvas bag full of stuff. He dumped it out in a pile and raked through it with his fingers. Mixed in with the glass jewelry and marbles and prisms were a scattering of bones, mostly fish skeletons, as if someone had been having a fish picnic under there. One of the other bones, maybe from a rat, had a hole drilled into it, like a flute.

By now, more neighbors stood around out on the sidewalk and watched. The wind blew leaves across front lawns, and the sky was full of racing clouds. Across the street, Mr. Skink was asleep on the grass, and six or eight crows hopped around him, picking up fallen walnuts. More crows dropped the walnuts from telephone lines into the street, and still more crows hopped around on the street eating the broken nuts.

Harvey Chickel rode his skateboard up and down the sidewalk, edging around people and shoving his way through. Whenever he could get John's attention he nodded his head slowly, as if to say, "I told you so." Once or twice he drew his finger across his throat and pretended to drop dead.

John wondered if Harvey Chickel had been the one that called the police. It would have been a rotten thing to do.

"They'll think it's us that stole it," Danny said to John.

"No they won't," John said. "They're finding stuff all over the place."

There was a shout from the man who lived next door to the Skinks. *His* crawlspace had been meddled with too. Everyone moved across the street, including John and Danny and Kimberly. The policemen checked the neighboring houses. The Skink's crawlspace was nearly hidden by bushes. Although it was closed, there was a heap of fish skeletons lying just inside the screen.

The man in the coveralls didn't look very happy, but one by one he climbed under each house and came out again with more treasure and more skeletons. He smelled like dead fish. Under Mr. Skink's house he found the skin of two rats. The heads and tails were still attached, as if someone had taken the guts and bones out in order to turn them into a pair of bedroom slippers.

Mr. Skink was still asleep on the lawn, but his wife woke him up to show him the rats, and he told her to leave him alone, that he didn't want to see any rats. "It's the cats," he said, shaking his head darkly. "Too doggone many cats. I oughta..." Then he fell asleep again with his head on a pile of leaves.

Each time another treasure was found, the mystery grew.

"Must be pirates," John's father said to a policeman. "They used to bury treasure all over the place instead of spending it."

The policeman blinked at him, as if what he said was gibberish. But it didn't sound like gibberish to John. How else could you explain it. Even Harvey Chickel, who sometimes seemed to do things for no good reason at all, wouldn't have stolen the stuff and then left it lying around under other people's houses.

That was crazy – nearly as crazy as all the fish skeletons.

There was only one way in which the fish skeletons weren't crazy. The morning had been *full* of fish skeletons. Downtown Orange seemed to have become the fish skeleton capital of the world. One or two fish skeletons didn't mean anything. But here in one morning there was about a million of them, hanging in windows, drawn on the covers of books, painted on the lids of decorated cans, scattered under half the houses on the block.

There was no use mentioning any of this to the police, who clearly didn't care as much about rats and skeletons as about stolen jewelry. Rats and skeletons only confused things, and, like Mr. Skink, the police were happy enough to blame all that on cats. What would really confuse things would be to bring up marbles and moon coins and goblin tunnels, even though John was certain by now, even though he didn't know why, that all of them were connected. And whatever they were connected to didn't have anything to do with cats. . . .

Just then Harvey Chickel hit Mr. Skink in the head with a walnut. He woke up looking mad and rubbing his forehead. Immediately he pointed at Harvey and started yelling. Everyone was leaving by then, walking away across the street. But they turned now to watch.

Harvey put his hands out to his side and opened his mouth, as if he couldn't believe that Mr. Skink would accuse him of such a terrible thing as throwing a walnut.

"It was a crow," Harvey said, pointing to the birds on the wire overhead. "I swear!"

"It was *not* a crow," Mr. Skink said. "You deliberately hit me in the head with a walnut!" He turned to the two policemen, who were standing by their car now. "Arrest this boy for assault," he said.

"Honest!" Harvey said. "I didn't do anything, did I, John?" He looked at John and winked.

John stood there silently.

"Did I?" Harvey said. He made a pleading face.

"I think it was a crow," John said after another moment.

He waited. If anyone else had seen Harvey throw the walnut, then they were both done for. It was bad enough to lie, but worse to be caught lying.

Mr. Skink gave him a dirty look, and that was worse yet. There was nothing really wrong with Mr. Skink; he was just a little bit gruff, and he didn't like Harvey. John didn't want to be disliked, even by Mr. Skink, but that's what had happened. It only took an instant.

Nobody else noticed or seemed to care. Even Harvey didn't care. He started riding up and down on his skateboard again. Tomorrow, even Mr. Skink probably wouldn't remember. Only John would.

Everybody went home. The police left. The street was nearly empty. Harvey rode past on his skateboard as John was walk-in up the driveway toward the porch.

"Told you so," Harvey said, and pushed John on the back. Laughing, he rode away down the sidewalk and around the corner.

John stood there watching him go.

"The jerk," Danny said. "You should have pushed him off the skateboard." He walked away toward the porch.

John shrugged. Maybe he *should* have pushed Harvey back. But why? The only thing that would come of it was more trouble. He hated trouble. He hated pushing and fighting. He hated it when people were mean for no reason at all. What he couldn't understand, ever, was why people like Harvey Chickel *liked* it.

Suddenly John thought that if he could invent one thing in his life, just one, it would be a giant eraser. The first thing he'd do with it would be to use it to erase the last few minutes. That's what the world needed, a fat rubber eraser that you could carry in your pocket and use to get rid of your mistakes. He decided to write it down in his book along with his gravity ideas.

Chapter 7: The Magic Spectacles

It was impossible to divide the marbles up. They flipped a coin to see who would chose first. There was no problem with that. But there was no way to separate them into two piles. The marbles kept running back together, as if there was dip in the floor. They tried putting them into jars, but there was something wrong with that, too. The little puddles of marbles in the jars were too small, for one thing. In the fishbowl the marbles had looked like a collection. Now they looked like a collection cut in half. Then one of the jars fell over, and Danny tried to grab it, and accidentally knocked the other jar over too, and the marbles ran together again like two rivers flow-

ing into a lake.

They tried again, switching marbles back and forth and being careful with the jars, but it still wasn't any good. When they were done, the fishbowl sat there empty on the floor. Full of marbles, it had been almost magical, like a treasure chest in a cave. But now, empty, all the magic had gone out of it.

Then Ahab came into the room and walked straight through the jars, knocking them over again. Maybe thinking they were bugs, he began to push them around with his nose. The sound of their rolling was loud on the wooden floor as they disappeared behind the dressers and toybox, bumping into the wall rolling away again along the floor mouldings until they all ended up under the bed. Danny crawled underneath and rolled them back out, and John caught them and dropped them back into the fishbowl, all except the last two.

One of those was white, with a red and green swirl through it like a piece of Christmas candy. John put it into his pocket. "I want this one for a good luck charm," he said. "It's all I want. You can have the rest."

"Let's just leave the rest in the fishbowl," Danny said, holding one last marble in the palm of his hand. "I'll keep this one." It was pink and blue, the color of an Easter egg or of a springtime sky at sunset.

The wind blew harder than ever outside, making a moaning noise around the window. It was a cold wind, and the sky was full of clouds. In the western sky, the sun shone from beneath the clouds like an orange half-hidden by a china plate. That morning it had seemed to John that something unusual was about to happen, something big. But now, late in the afternoon, the wind had scoured most of the mystery out of the day.

There was nothing left to do but clean up their bedroom. That, for some reason, had to be done every Saturday, no matter what. It would be easier just to shut the door, so that no one could see in, but somehow that wasn't good enough for their parents. The room had to be cleaned because it had to be cleaned.

Danny put books away on the shelves while John picked up toys and tossed them into the toybox and into baskets lying around on the floor. They found a pile of old, dried-out banana peels behind the toy box along with an empty carton that had once held frozen fish sticks.

"That's not *my* trash," John said, pointing at it. "What was this, some kind of midnight snack?"

"Don't look at me," Danny said. "I'm sure I eat frozen fish sticks out of the box."

"Then who put it there? Dad?"

"You tell me and we'll both know," Danny said.

John picked all of it up anyway. The banana skins were as stiff as cardboard. He smashed it all down into the trash can and then shoved a lot of old scrap paper on top of it, stomping it flat so that the can was only half full and didn't have to be emptied. He pitched a few dirty clothes out into the hallway, and the room was nearly clean except for a couple of things that were hard to put away but that fit just fine under the bed.

"Watch me do a trick," John said finally.

There was a certain amount of dust and sand and shreds of paper and who knows what-all kinds of tiny stuff left on the wooden floor. John held his jacket by the neck, gave it a flourish like a magician's cape, and whipped it back and forth through the air, a couple of inches above the floor. As quick as winking, dust and debris swirled into the air, sand and craps shot away under the bed and dressers. Like magic, the floor was clean. He bowed, dropping his jacket onto his bed.

There were three books that wouldn't fit into the bookcase, so Danny stuffed two of them into his shirt drawer and said that he was through too. "I'll read this one," he said, and then flopped down on his bed and opened the third book.

John sat down on his own bed and stared out the window. Someday someone would invent a robot to clean bedrooms. Once he and Danny had built one out of tin cans tied together with string, but it wouldn't stand up. Because of that they had called it "the sleeping robot" for a while, but then Harvey Chickel had stepped on its head and smashed it. After that they called it "the dead robot" until it was left outside in the rain and got rusty and their father threw it away.

The house was quiet now, with only the sound of the wind whispering outside. It was a late-afternoon sort of quiet, lonesome and still, and it reminded John of being in the curiosity shop that morning. The whole room was washed in underwater colors from the sunlight shining through Mrs. Owlswick's window.

The spectacles lay on the windowsill where John had put them an hour ago. He had forgotten all about them. The watery light shone through them, too, and reflected from the wooden floor in green, over-lapping circles.

Something seemed to be moving through the spectacles light, like dim pictures on a movie screen. There were leafy tree waving in the wind and the shadow-shapes of distant hills. Specks of dust floated through the light like drifting autumn leaves. Then clouds moved across the sun outside, and the green light dimmed and was gone.

John picked the spectacles up and put them on in order to look out the window. And what he saw through the window was curious – as curious as anything that had happened so far that day.

The wall of their bedroom seemed to be gone. The toybox, the desk, the window curtains had disappeared, and there was only Mrs. Owlswick's window floating in the air. The bedroom had vanished around it. He could still catch a glimpse of it out of the corner of his eye if he looked sideways past the edge of the spectacles. But *through* the spectacles there was nothing but the window, floating there.

And beyond it, as if the window were a framed picture, was a meadow full of wildflowers. The whole street had disappeared: the front porch, the lawn, the sidewalk, Mr. Skink's house – all of it was gone. Instead, on beyond the meadow, there was a woods with a stream running out of it. The sky was blue, with only a couple of clouds drifting through it like windblown fog, and the full moon sailing among the cloud like a ship at sea.

A house with three chimneys sat above the woods and the meadow on a distant, lonesome hill. John could just make out the weather vane on top. It was shaped like the skeleton of a fish....

Chapter 8: Through the Bedroom Window

John took the spectacles off, blinked his eyes hard, and looked carefully at the lenses. Maybe there was something painted on them....

There wasn't. They were the pale green color of water in a sunlit well, but they were perfectly clear.

He put the spectacles back on and took another look through the window. Beyond the far-off house were mountains, bending around and falling away toward a big wash of blue-green, that might be the sky or might be the sea. The moon hung in the sky over the house, and smoke from one of the chimneys rose past it like cloud-drift. The world through the window was almost round, as if it sat on the inside of a very clear marble or on the wall of a fishbowl.

This is it, he thought suddenly, although he didn't really know what he meant. But what he saw didn't surprise him at all, not like it would have yesterday. He was ready for it. It was what the coin and the fish skeletons and the windy morning had been pointing toward all along, like signs along a road.

He flipped the catch on Mrs. Owlswick's window and pushed it open.

"What are you doing?" Danny asked, putting down his book. "Let me try the glasses. Ahab woke up at the sound of Danny's voice. He stood up and

stretched then walked over and looked out through the window at the front porch.

"I'm opening the window, John said. "There's something funny outside. Hold on."

"There's nothing funny outside." Danny looked past him through the window. Penny, the next-door-neighbor's cat, was asleep on the front porch swing. But besides Penny, the porch was empty. "Let me try them," Danny said.

John shook his head. "Wait." He looked again. It didn't matter whether the window was open or closed. As long as he wore the spectacles he could see the meadow and the woods and the house. He took them off and handed them to Danny, and there was the front porch again, with Penny leaping on the swing.

"What is it?" Danny asked, looking through the spectacles. "It's like a movie on the glasses or something."

"I don't think so," John said after a moment. "I think it's real."

"I'm going to find out," Danny said.

"Wait," John said when Danny unhooked the window screen.

"You can wait here if you want to," Danny said. He pushed the screen open.

"We're not supposed to climb out the window," John said, suddenly scared of what they might find out there. But Danny had already leaned across the sill and started to crawl through.

"We can if there's a fire," he said.

"There isn't any fire."

It was too late. Danny slid from the windowsill. And in that instant he vanished. Ahab put his paws on the sill and stuck his head out, sniffing the air.

Then a strange thing happened. Danny's arm, all by itself, shoved in through the open window, past Ahab's head. It stayed there, sort of hanging for a second, floating in the air and holding onto the spectacles.

John took them and put them on, then put his head out the window. There was his brother again, standing in the high grass of the meadow.

"Send Ahab," Danny said to him. John put the spectacles on Ahab and boosted him up onto the window sill. "Jump!" he shouted, and Ahab jumped, vanishing suddenly in the air, just as Danny had vanished.

A moment later Danny looked in at the window again, wearing the glasses. "C'mon," he said to John. "What are you waiting for? Ahab wants to chase rabbits. I'm holding on to his collar."

"Are there rabbits out there?" asked John. He wanted a good reason to

go, unlike Danny, who almost never needed a reason to do anything.

"Sure there's rabbits," Danny said. "And a creek, too. You saw it."

"Yeah," John said. "Maybe..."

"Forget maybe," Danny said. "Only for a second."

"I'm going to bring some stuff," John said.

"What stuff? We don't need any stuff. We aren't going anywhere far."

"Just some Halloween candy," John said, picking up a backpack from behind the bedroom door. "We'll need a snack." He turned around and started out of the bedroom. He wasn't really interested in the candy; he just wanted another minute to think up a reason not to go. And yet he knew that he *would* go. Clearly he and Danny had been bound for the land beyond the window all day long, almost falling toward it, like Alice down the rabbit hole.

Their mom was busy upstairs. He could hear the vacuum going. Their father was in the garage, cutting up wood to build a bookcase. They would think he and Danny were out playing around in the neighborhood. There wouldn't be any problem. Nothing would go wrong.

There were two cherry pie baking in the oven, and the smell of them was wonderful. John wished that he could take one along, but of course that was impossible. In an hour they'd be eating dinner anyway, and he could have all the pie he wanted, or nearly so. For now he grabbed a couple of handfuls of Halloween candy from each of their bags, and then searched around through the leftover candy until he found two Mars Bars, and he took those too. They were full-sized Mar Bars, not the little kind that come in a plastic sack.

Just then he heard a scraping noise, followed by a sound like muffled laughter. The vacuum cleaner shut off. He shoved the candy into the backpack and zipped it up, then went back out into the living room. There was his mother, just then coming down the stairs.

She didn't look as if she'd been laughing. "Have you seen my green Christmas pin?" she asked. "The one with all the red jewels, like holly berries? I had it out to wear it tonight, but now I can't find it anywhere."

"No," said John. "I haven't seen it. I'll watch out for it. Danny and I are going out for a while."

"Is your room cleaned up?" his mother asked.

"Yeah," John said, heading down the hall and into the bedroom. He snatched up their jackets, putting his on and then slipping on the backpack. At least she hadn't asked where they were going. He would have told her the truth, and that would have been it. She wouldn't have let them go. Danny leaned in through the window to take the jackets from him, and

then disappeared.

There was his hand again, holding the spectacles, waving them around. John put them on and climbed straight out through the open window, pushing the screen out behind him and hurrying so that he wouldn't change his mind and chicken out. And just as he jumped down to the meadow and let go of the window sill, he suddenly thought about the fishbowl full of marbles, and he glanced one last time at the dresser where they had put the fishbowl.

The top of the dresser was empty. The marbles were gone.

Their bedroom window, Mrs. Owlswick's window, hung in the air like a picture hanging on an invisible wall. Their house had vanished and everything else with it, and the air was full of the musty smell of oak trees and the sweet smell of wildflowers.

"Can you see the window?" Danny asked.

"Yes," said John. "And I can see the bedroom through it, but not around it."

Danny nodded. "I know," he said. "I can't see the window at all, not without the glasses on."

John took the spectacles off, and the window vanished. Immediately he put them back on. "What did you do with the marbles?" he asked.

"What?" Danny asked. "What do you mean? They're in the fishbowl."

"Huh uh," John said. "The fishbowl's gone too."

"You're crazy," Danny said. "Let me see the glasses."

John started to hand them to him, but just then Ahab barked like crazy and ran off down a little path that led toward the woods. A big, long-eared rabbit ran along in front of him, straight into the bushes that grew along the edge of the creek. Ahab followed it into the leafy darkness.

Danny ran down the path after him, shouting Ahab's name, and John ran behind him, holding the spectacles in his hand. He was more worried about Ahab than about the window. If Ahab got lost, especially in a strange land...

An old wooden footbridge lay across the creek, and their steps echoed on the loose planks. Beyond the bridge lay the woods, which were dark and dense. A path of weedy sand led between the trees. It was quiet and cool in the shade, with just the sound of leaves rustling and the sighing of the wind. Here and there was a patch of what appeared to be old pavement, as if maybe a street had run through the woods ages ago and was slowly being crumbled and buried by the forest. The oak trees around them were old, with long, tangled limbs, so that only a little bit of sunlight shined through to the forest floor.

Suddenly they could hear Ahab crashing around ahead. He barked once, then growled, then fell silent. They walked along carefully, looking into the shadows and listening hard. Soon they found themselves in a circular clearing. There was a stone ring in the middle of it, cracked and old and partly covered with vines.

It was a fountain, very much like the one in the Plaza at home, but ruined by time and weather. A trickle of water gurgled out of a rusty pipe in the center of it, filling the ring about a foot deep before the water seeped out through a crack and soaked away into the muddy sand. A few fish skeletons lay in a heap nearby. They listened, peering into the trees.

"Ahab?" John said. Then, louder, he shouted, "Ahab!" and Ahab came leaping out of the bushes and bounced straight into Danny, wagging his tail.

Danny stumbled backward into John, and John fell straight over onto the path, sitting down hard. The spectacles flew out of his hand, spinning through the air and smashing against the stone ring. John jumped to his feet and snatched them up from where they had fallen.

One of the green lenses was gone. Where it had been there was nothing but an empty circle of brass wire.

Chapter 9: Goblins

They searched through the high grass and in the bushes around the fountain, but found only a few old fishbones and a dead rat that was dried up like cardboard. Ahab sniffed back and forth, barking into the bushes every time there was a rustling noise.

"That's just rabbits," John said to him. He hoped that was true.

They crawled around on their hands and knees and poked into the sand with their fingers. They parted the grass a few blades at a time. They looked under bushes, then shook the bushes and looked under them again. Finally they looked for it in the clear water in the fountain, but they couldn't find anything, not a single chip of green glass.

While they searched, the sun went down beyond the trees, and the woods fell slowly into shadow. There was the wet smell of fog in the air, and the sky overhead was gray and misty. The moon shone faintly through the mist, and wind blew the branches high overhead.

John pushed through some bushes, kicking at the grass with his feet. It was useless. The lens *couldn't* have flown this far. They were wasting too much time searching for it. One of the lenses was still whole, anyway, and that ought to be enough to see the window again...

There was suddenly the sound of laughter, something like the gobbling

of a turkey. John looked up, and there, just beyond a pair of enormous old oak trees, was the dark mouth of a cave. It was partly overgrown by bushes, just a ragged black circle leading downward into the side of a rocky hill. The laughter had come from the cave. John was certain of it.

Danny came up behind him, holding onto Ahab's collar. "Did you hear it?" he whispered.

John nodded. Ahab growled. From out of the cave came the echoing sound of a flute. There was no melody to it, just a scattering of crooked, off-key notes.

They backed away toward the fountain. John thought about their bedroom window; it seemed suddenly to be a long way off. The flute stopped and the woods were silent. "C'mon," he said, and Danny didn't argue. The three of them set out through the woods, down the path to the meadow. John patted his jacket pocket. He could feel the spectacles frame inside.

They were halfway to the meadow when a tiny man, not much taller than John's belt buckle, stepped out onto the path and stood there grinning. For a moment John thought he was the little man from the curiosity shop, but he wasn't. He was too ugly. His skin was wrinkled and green like an old dollar bill out of someone's pocket.

The top of his head was bald, and the hair around his ears was thin and wispy and it stood away from his head as if it were electrified. Clearly he hadn't washed in about a year. His clothes were stitched up out of the skins of bats with the heads left on, and his shoes were just like the rat slippers from under Mr. Skink's house. The long rat tails were tied around his ankles like the straps of sandals.

"Goblin," Danny whispered, and just then came the sound of giggling from among the foggy trees on either side of the trail. There were more of them, hiding in the shadows. The goblin held out his open hand.

"What does he want?" Danny asked.

"Money, maybe," said John, reaching into his pocket. He pulled out eight cents – three pennies and a nickel. It wasn't much, but what did goblins know about money? He turned his pockets inside out then, to show the creature that it was all he had. Then he held out the coins, and immediately the goblin slapped them out of his hand, into the weeds along the trail.

Three more goblins jumped out onto the path and scrambled after the fallen coins. They had skinny little arms and fat bellies. One of them grinned, put a penny into his mouth, and swallowed it. His teeth were filed to points like cannibal teeth. He had a fishbone tuck in his hair like a comb. The goblin next to him wore a piece of fishing line tied around his neck with old glass prisms hanging from it. The third had a jeweled pin stuck

like a badge to his raggedy shirt. It was a green Christmas wreath, with red rhinestones among the green, like holly berries.

"Hey!" John said to Danny. "That's mom's pin! That's the one she lost!" And then he realized that it hadn't been lost at all; it had been stolen, just like the fish out of the refrigerator and – what else? The marbles? He remembered the laughter he had heard, the noise in the living room....

The first goblin shoved out his hand again. Then he made circles of his thumbs and fingers and held them over his eyes. The other goblins nodded their heads and made turkey noises, and one of them, the one with the prisms, made circles of his fingers and thumbs too, but poked himself in the eye by mistake.

One of the other three laughed, and the one with the poked eye reached across and yanked the Christmas pin off the other's shirt. The third goblin snatched it away and poked the prism goblin in the ear with his finger, and suddenly the three of them were yowling and hissing and poking and scratching and pulling at prisms and pins and hitting each other on the nose. The first goblin ignored them. He held out his hand again.

John knew what the goblins wanted. And he knew now where the lens must have gone. The goblins had taken it. Now they wanted the rest of the spectacles.

Ahab yanked loose from Danny's grip just then and barked straight into the goblin's face. The three that were wrestling on the ground looked up in surprise. Ahab barked again, and the goblin with his hand out took a step back, treading on the hand of the goblin with the filed teeth, who bit him on the back of the leg. Ahab leaped forward, and the goblins jumped up together and ran down the path, howling and gobbling and waving their arms. One by one they ducked away into the woods, disappearing from view. There was a crashing and rustling for a moment, and then silence again. Ahab stood barking at the place where they'd left the path, but he didn't follow.

"Quick!" John shouted, running toward the meadow. Danny and Ahab ran behind him. The woods began to brighten a little. The trees were farther apart, and the fog wasn't as heavy out along the edge of the trees. John could see the moon overhead again. Just before them lay the bridge over the creek, and beyond that lay the empty meadow.

As he ran across the footbridge, John pulled the spectacles out of his pocket and put them on, closing his right eye so as to look only through the lens. The moon turned green in the sky like a piece of old cheese, and the meadow stretched out before them like an emerald sea – utterly empty.

There was nothing but wind-swept grass and wildflowers. The window was gone.

Chapter 10: The Fog from the Kettle

It was easy to find the place where the window had been. The grass was still smashed down beneath it, and there was a little trail of flattened grass leading toward the bridge. But through the broken spectacles, John could see only empty meadow, and it was hard to imagine that there had ever been a window there at all. The quiet breeze stirred the flowers and the tall grass, and the afternoon was lonesome and strange. Even Ahab stood still and looked around uneasily, listening to the airy piping of goblin flutes way off in the woods.

Maybe the window had moved. Maybe the wind had blown it somewhere – off toward the woods or across the meadow or down toward the sea....

But there was no window to be seen in any direction. And through the broken spectacles everything looked flat, like a painting on a piece of glass. The magic had gone out of them; the window had vanished.

"Let me try them," Danny whispered, and John handed him the spectacles without saying anything, even though he knew they wouldn't work. Leaves drifted past on the wind. The eastern sky was shadowy gray, and the evening was getting cold.

"I don't know why you had to go and drop them," Danny said after a moment. He handed the spectacles back to John. "You should have had them in your pocket."

"It wasn't my fault that they broke," John said, putting them back on. "You were the one that knocked me over. Why didn't you watch out? And I told you not to crawl through the window anyway, didn't I? I knew it was a bad idea."

"I didn't *make* you come," Danny said. He picked up a rock and threw it hard, right at where the window had been.

"Don't!" John said.

"Why? There's nothing there anyway, now that you broke the glasses." He threw another rock.

"The problem was you picking up the coin from the fountain," John said. "I told you that's bad luck, taking coins out of a wishing well. That's what got us here."

"Yeah," Danny said, reexcept that it wasn't a wishing well. And besides, the glasses would have got us home again anyway, if they weren't broken."

John said nothing. There was no use. They couldn't argue the glasses back together again. And the mention of home reminded him that on Pine Street the streetlights would just be coming on. There would be lamps

glowing in people's livingrooms and fires in fireplaces. He remembered the cherry pies that had been baking in the oven, and he wondered if his mother and father would eat any of the pie if he and Danny didn't show up by dinnertime. Maybe they wouldn't eat at all. They'd be out in the neighborhood, going door to door. Probably they would call the police....

A big sycamore leaf blew past just then, nearly bumping John's nose. Something yanked on the spectacles, and they were jerked around sideways. He grabbed the brass frame and swatted at the leaf with his other hand. The leaf went spinning away, and he heard the hollering of a very small voice, like a radio with the volume turned too far down.

"Look!" Danny shouted, pointing at the leaf.

John saw it at the same time: there was a tiny man riding on it, holding onto the stem as if it were the tiller of a boat. He wore a hat the size of a pea. More leaves sailed toward them in a long line out of the woods. They were shaped like dried stars with the points turned up and were painted autumn colors. On each leaf sat a man about the size of a water beetle.

One of the leaves swerved toward John's face again. The little man riding on it grabbed at the spectacles, and John stepped backward and out of the way. This one didn't have a hat on. He was bald on top, like the goblins, and he wore a vest and striped pants. Under his arm he had a tiny fishing pole, and between his crossed legs there was a heap of colored glass chips.

More leaves blew past, maybe twenty in all. Most of the leaf sailors carried fishing poles and chips of glass. And as was true of the goblins, all of the little men looked very nearly alike. They were all plump and had funny sprouts of hair and worried looks on their faces. They followed each other in a curvy trail across the meadow, rising and falling on the breeze, flying away in the direction of the cottage on the far-off hill. Finally they were just specks in the distance.

"Did you see what they were carrying?" Danny asked. His eyes were wide, as if he couldn't quite believe any of it.

John nodded.

"Do you think it was pieces of our spectacles?"

"Maybe," John said. "How do I know?" He was still mad because of what Danny had said about him breaking the spectacles. A curtain of fog had fallen over the woods, and the trees were nothing but black shadows now. Just then a drum began beating, very low like a heartbeat, or like someone pounding on an iron kettle with a big wooden spoon. A light blinked on, back in the woods. The light leaped and died and then leaped again, like a bonfire flaring up. It made a streaky orange light through the fog.

Ahab walked back and forth restlessly, then stopped and barked, then ran

off in the direction the leaf men had taken, up toward the house on the hill. He stopped, barked, looked back at John and Danny, and then ran a little farther.

John looked one last time for the window. He stood beneath where it was supposed to be and felt the air. Maybe it was there and they just couldn't see it....

The bonfire blinked out and the woods were dark. Then, just as suddenly, the fire blinked on again, burning right at the edge of the meadow now. A great, black cauldron hung over the fire, and fog billowed out of it, pouring over the edges of the cauldron and onto the ground like seafoam. The shadow-shapes of goblins danced around the fire, and the dark fog whirled out in a steamy rush, as if the night-time itself were leaking out of the cauldron.

John and Danny took off running, following Ahab, across the meadow toward the house on the hill. They didn't slow down until they struck a narrow, dirt road where the going got steeper and the meadow fell away behind them. When they looked back, the bonfire had vanished. There was no sign of goblins, no sound of laughter or drumming or flute music. The meadow was empty again, and night had fallen.

Ahead of them, the light of the full moon shone on the road. There were thick trees along either side. The house atop the hill was nearly invisible behind the trees now, and they could just see one of its windows, aglow with lamp light.

"Did you bring any candy?" Danny asked suddenly.

"Yeah," John said, opening up his belt pack. "All kinds.

Danny held out his hand. "Licorice," he said. "Anything licorice."

"I didn't bring any licorice," John said. He unclipped the pack and held it open in the moonlight. There were peppermint and butterscotch candies wrapped in plastic and two or three purple bubblegums. Most of it was the kind of candy sold by the pound, out of bins at the grocery store.

"Let me see." Danny took the pack from him. He pulled out the two chocolate bars. Both of them had been smashed flat. "They're dead," Danny said. Chocolate oozed out of the ends of the wrappers, and there was lint and sand stuck to it. "They smell like fish, too." He dropped the candy back into the open pack.

"I don't think it's the candy that smells like fish," John whispered.

All was silent. Except for moonlight, the night was dark, and there was no sound but the wind rustling the trees. Then they heard a twig snap and the sound of dry leaves crackling underfoot. Then there was silence again, and the night was deadly still.

Ahab growled and took a step forward, cocking his head to the side. Danny reached down and grabbed his collar. Moonlit fog drifted out of the dark trees, and right then, in the blink of an eye, the bonfire sprang up again, glowing through the trees, and there was a rustling and crackling of things moving swiftly in the leafy darkness.

"Go!" John shouted, and the three of them took off running again, up the hill toward the house, into the misty darkness where the roadside trees blocked the light of the moon.

Chapter 11: The Fight on the Road

Goblins swarmed out of the darkness ahead of them, twenty or more, running silently in their rat shoes. Ahab leaped straight into the middle of them, nearly pulling Danny over onto his face and knocking the little men this way and that way into the dirt. John yelled, trying to scare them off, and Danny let go of Ahab and swung the backpack at the closest goblin. Halloween candy flew out onto the road, and one of the backpack straps caught around a goblin's neck.

The goblin jerked away, yanking the pack out of Danny's hand. Four other goblins began pulling on it, trying to reach inside. Others crawled on the road on their hands and knees, picking up fallen candy and shoving it into their mouths.

"Run!" John shouted. But Danny didn't run. He chased the goblin with the pack and grabbed one of the straps. Immediately a goblin climbed onto his back like a smelly little ape. Another clutched his leg. Their hands snaked into his pockets. The goblin still holding the pack acted as if he were playing tug of war until Danny pulled him straight over onto his face.

John pushed goblins aside, trying to help his brother, and Ahab ran back and forth, chasing goblins up the hill and into the trees. Within moments the same goblins leaped back down onto the road and went charging after the candy and the backpack again, fighting madly with each other, poking and gouging and wrestling.

In the thickening fog, the trees were dark ghosts along the roadside. Goblins appeared and disappeared. John hit and kicked at goblins. Maybe the spectacles were broken, and didn't work, but he wasn't going to give them up. He grabbed a goblin that held onto Danny's back and yanked it off, throwing it sideways into three more goblins just then coming down out of the trees. All four were knocked sprawling, but then were up again, capering forward, their eyes whirling and wild.

Then there was an explosion. Someone was running toward them down

the road – not a goblin, but a man waving some kind of weapon. The goblins stopped fighting and stood still. There was another explosion, a kind of a whoosh, like a firecracker going off in a bucket of water, and the man ran out of the tree shadows and into the moonlight.

He was pretty fat, and he ran heavily, but he looked as if he meant business. He threw the gun to his shoulder and shot into the trees, and a spray of misty bubbles flew out of the gun. The breeze caught the bubbles and blew them across the road. A couple of the goblins slunk away into the trees. The rest hesitated, as if making up their minds.

"I'll shoot!" the man with the gun yelled. "Back away!" Two or three goblins started laughing, pretending to be fat men shooting guns.

"Here now!" the man yelled, "Go on now!"

When one of the goblins made a sort of raspberry noise with his lips, the man's eyes flew open. "Well!" he shouted, suddenly furious. "I've decided to shoot! It's time for a *bath!*"

The sound of the word "bath" seemed to put the fear into them, and suddenly, as if they were all thinking with the same brain, they ran howling away into the woods. The fog seemed to lift right then, and the bonfire blinked out. Once again the woods were dark and silent.

The man turned to John and Danny and bowed, although he couldn't bow very far. "Allow me to introduce myself. . ." he started to say, but before he was finished he stopped and looked behind Danny, where one last goblin sat in the dust of the roadway, eating Halloween candy.

He shoved a piece into his mouth, not bothering to unwrap it first. He smelled as if he had been wrestling with dead fish and hadn't taken a bath afterward, and his hair was like spider web. There were sticky candy smears all over his face. He looked around sorrowfully. Then, screwing up his eyes, he shoved a long, bony finger into his mouth and pulled out a drooly piece of plastic candy wrapper. He looked at it for a moment and then ate it.

"My heavens!" said the man with the gun. He shut his eyes for a moment, as if the goblin's manners were so bad that he couldn't bear to watch. "Stand aside," he told John and Danny, and then threw the gun to his shoulder, pointed it at the goblin, and pulled the trigger.

Chapter 12: Mr. Deener

There was a sound like sand being poured through a pipe, and a "bump, bump, bump, whoosh!" that nearly knocked the man over backward. The air was filled with mist that was wet and cold and smelled like soap.

The goblin shrieked, leaping to his feet and shaking like a wet dog.

When the misty air cleared, the goblin stood there with a clean face, his hair neatly slicked down along the sides of his head. He looked at his clean hands in wonder, and then, as if he were trying to eat a carrot stick, he bit himself on the finger. He yowled, shaking his hand and looking surprised. Then he turned around and slouched away down the road to the meadow.

"And don't come back!" the man with the soap gun yelled.

Right then a woman with a lantern appeared from around the bend in the road above them. She was gray-haired, very tall and neat and elegant. She looked incredibly like Kimberly's Aunt, Mrs. Owlswick. Danny and John looked at each other, and Danny nodded, as if to say, "I told you so."

The man with the soap gun bowed again. The hair above his ears stuck up into the air as if a heavy wind were blowing out of his coat collar. He wore a vest and a pair of walking shorts and high socks folded down at the tons with ribbons at the folds. His coat appeared to be very comfortable and well-worn, and although he looked a little too much like an overgrown goblin, he seemed altogether pleasant and well-fed.

"I'm *Mister* Deener," he said, putting peculiar emphasis on the *Mister* part. "At your service."

"I'm John," John said, "and this is Danny and Ahab. We're at your service too." He bowed, and so did Danny.

"And this," said Mr. Deener, gesturing at the woman with the lantern, "is Aunt Flo. She's Polly's Aunt Flo, which is what everyone calls her. You might as well call her that too."

John and Danny both said hello and that they were glad to meet her. She looked just like the sort of person who would be called Aunt somebody.

"Your soap gun worked exceedingly well, Artemis," she said. Then to the boys she said, "Mr. Deener is an inventor. He fell upon the notion that a goblin would fear soap more than almost anything, and so he built this weapon, which he's just now gotten a chance to use for the first time. Very successful, I'd say."

Mr. Deener nodded happily. "I put the fear into them," he said. "I'm working on a device to blow them up like balloons. I'm going to float them away, all of them together. Maybe to the moon." He looked at John and Danny out of one eye, as if he was going to ask them a trick question. "I suppose you two are the Kraken brothers?"

"No," said Danny, speaking up. "We came here through a magic window that we found by looking through a pair of spectacles, and we can't find the window now because the spectacles are broken."

A look came across Mr. Deener's face. His eyes opened wide and he scratched his head. Clearly he was thinking hard about something, and for

a moment John almost expected him to make the glasses sign with his fingers and thumbs.

"Spectacles," Mr. Deener said finally. He shook his head slowly. "I don't care anything about these spectacles. Did someone tell you that I wanted a pair of spectacles? I make it a habit never to buy anything from door-to-door salesmen."

"No," Danny said. "Actually we didn't come here to sell them. We just came by accident."

"Well," Mr. Deener said, "I don't believe in accidents. Not that kind anyway. I assumed you were the Kraken brothers, come to help. I've been expecting them." He looked confused for a moment. "I... I'm sorry," he said. "I thought... for a moment I thought..." But he didn't finish his thinking. He stood there looking sad now, remembering something, or maybe trying to remember.

"You'll just have to go on expecting them, Artemis," Aunt Flo said to him, "because this isn't them."

"Then allow me to say that it *looks* very much like them." He started walking up the road, as if his interest in John and Danny had ended.

Aunt Flo leaned over and whispered to them that Mr. Deener had been waiting for the Kraken brothers for a long time. No one was sure that *were* any Kraken brothers, not really. They were probably Mr. Deener's imaginary friends. "I'm one of his imaginary friends," she said, "and so is my niece Polly." Then she touched the side of her head with her finger and winked. "He's lost some of his marbles," she said. "He's forgotten... too much."

They all followed along after Mr. Deener, who soon forgot that he was sad. He started humming and singing to himself, and then laughing at the song when he came to what must have been the good parts. Twice he stopped, and said, "Hark!" and pointed the soap weapon at the woods. But there was no sign of any goblins, and in a few minutes they arrived at a cobblestone carriage drive at the top of the hill.

"Which of the brothers are you again?" Mr. Deener asked Danny, very abruptly, as if to catch him off guard.

"I'm Danny," Danny started to say, but he was interrupted by Aunt Flo, who said,

"These are *not* the brothers, Artemis."

"Are they due tonight, then?"

"No," said Aunt Flo, "they are not." Then she stopped for a moment to think about something, and said finally. "Maybe these are the brothers after all." She turned to Danny and John and said, "Do you mind being Mr. Deener's imaginary friends?"

"No," John said. "I guess not. How imaginary do we have to be?"

Mr. Deener looked instantly happy. "Now that you've come, you don't have to be imaginary at all," he said. Then he looked puzzled again, and asked, "Why have you come? That's what I'm wondering. I can't quite recall it."

"We don't know either," Danny said. "We just came."

"But the wife..." Mr. Deener started to say, and then stopped, as if the mention of "the wife" had wrecked his thought. He smashed his eyes shut, pushing his cheeks up toward his forehead, so that all the feelings that were in his eyes and on his face got squashed out of it. When he opened his eyes he looked entirely pleasant again.

"I believe that this is them," he said. "I'm a stinker if I don't." Then he looked at them all and said, "Which of you calls me a stinker?"

"None of us calls you a stinker," Aunt Flo said, as they set out toward the house again. Flowers bloomed in flowerbeds, and the limbs of oak trees cast a tangle of moon shadows onto the cobblestones. Through the trees John could see a broad valley below them, sweeping down toward the meadow. The valley was cut by a dry river. Moonlight shone on the white stones of the riverbed far below them and on the wooden timbers of an old, broken-down dock. The ribs of a rowboat sat like a skeleton beneath the dock, as if it had been ages since there had been enough water to float it.

Although it was a long way away, John could see that someone dressed in white, in a nightshirt maybe, sat at the end of the dock, just like the man from the cover of the book in the curiosity shop – *The Wise Fishermen's Encyclopedia*. Bats darted through the air above him, and the moon cast the shadow of his fishing pole across the dry, bone-white bed of the river.

Chapter 13: Mr. Deener Has a Fit

The house had a big front porch with white-painted chairs on it. Rose bushes covered with dark red flowers climbed on wooden trellises at both ends of the porch. Lamplight shone through the front windows, which were made of old, watery glass, just like Mrs. Owlswick's window. Through them John could see a cheerful fire burning in a stone fireplace. Nearby, a table was set for dinner. A girl sat in a chair in front of the fire, sewing doll clothes. She must be Polly, the other of Mr. Deener's "imaginary friends". She looked just like Kimberly.

Ahab pushed in past all of them and headed for the fire, just as if he lived there. He wagged his tail at the girl as he went past, then curled up in front of the hearth and went straight to sleep. The girl went over and patted him

on the head. "What's his name?" she asked.

"Ahab," Danny said.

"It sounds like the name of a king," she said.

"He behaves just like a king," Mr. Deener said. "He was the scourge of the goblins out there on the road tonight. And this, by the way, is..." He gestured at John. "What was your name again?"

"John," John said. "And this is my brother Danny."

"I'm Polly," she said, and she curtsied in an old-fashioned way. Her hair was shorter than Kimberly's, and there was something else about her... Perhaps it was that she was dressed a little bit old-fashioned too, in a blue dress with lace. Her skin was pale, like a delicate china plate, and, maybe because of the strange, flickering light from the fireplace, it seemed to John that he could very nearly see through her.

"The soap gun was a great success," said Aunt Flo.

Polly said, "I knew it would be," and she kissed Mr. Deener on the cheek. He sat down in the chair that she had been sitting in.

Just then a woman who looked like an unhappy ghost walked into the room. She was round and short, like a barrel, and was dusty-white. Even her hair was white. She carried an enormous wooden spoon.

"I've spilt the flour," she said.

"Bother the flour," said Aunt Flo. "Scoop up what you can and sweep the rest into a box. We can make cakes for the squirrels with any that's got dirty."

She wasn't a ghost; she was just covered with flour. She wiped her face clean with her sleeve.

Mr. Deener looked worried all of a sudden. "Cakes for the *squirrels*?" he said. "What about *my* cakes? Do *I* get a cake?"

"You'll get a dusty old clod," said the woman, evidently still mad at having spilled the flour. But just then the smell of something baking – a pie, maybe, or a tray of cookies – came sailing out into the room, as if someone had opened an oven door.

Mr. Deener put his hand on his forehead and stood up. Then he moaned and sat back down, sinking low into his chair, so that his chin was pushed down into his chest and his eyes were squished into his cheeks again. "A dusty *clod*," he said. "It's what I deserve!"

"Best not to start him up, Mrs. Barlow," Aunt Flo said to the flour woman. Polly put a hand on Mr. Deener's shoulder. "You won't have to eat clods," she said to him. "I'll find you something nice. We'll find him something nice, won't we?"

John said, "Of course we will."

And Danny said, "Sure."

"Cake?" Mr. Deener asked.

"Of *course* there'll be cake," said Aunt Flo.

"And pies, I don't doubt?" Mr. Deener sat up straighter, cheering up at the idea of pies and cakes.

"He's starting up!" cried Aunt Flo. "Catch him!"

Mrs. Barlow rolled her eyes and slapped the wooden spoon into her open hand, as if she were about to conk him on the head with it. Then she turned around and tramped away toward the kitchen.

Mr. Deener's fingers drummed on the arms of his chair. His face was suddenly wild, like the face of a starving man looking in at a restaurant window. "Cookies!" he said. "And bread and cupcakes and honeycakes and curli-que rolls. And cinnamon twists and puffo-sweets and doughy delights and chocolate pinwheels!"

He got up and began to walk around the room, stiff-legged, like a sleep-walker in a cartoon. He looked straight ahead of himself, as if he could see a thousand desserts in the air and was eating each one in his mind.

"Meringues," he said. "Jelly rolls, cinnamon rolls, sugar rolls, milk-doggies, monkey bread, popovers, pollyannas, pinky winkys, polliwogs, popinjays, poppolumps..." His voice rose like a tea kettle going off.

"Stop him, quick!" shouted Aunt Flo.

Polly clutched Mr. Deener's arm and tried to steer him back to his chair. It was no use. He was crazy with the idea of food, and he wouldn't sit down or keep still. He tried to rush toward the kitchen, but Polly still had hold of his arm, and Aunt Flo grabbed the tail of his coat and yelled, "Hurry, Mrs. Barlow!"

Mr. Deener picked up a doily from the back of a chair and stuffed it into his mouth. He tried to chew it up. "Salt!" he shouted. His eyes blinked open and shut and he waved his arms, knocking a vase off a table. He began to shake, and the house shook with him.

The dinner plates jumped and clanked. Glassware rattled in the cupboards and plaster dust fell from the ceiling where the hanging lamp swung back and forth. Rubble fell into the fireplace. Doors and windows banged open and shut. Danny and Polly scrambled under the dining room table. John ran for an open doorway, braced himself in the middle of it, closed his eyes, and held on. Mr. Deener's eyes were mashed closed now. His hands groped in the air.

There was a terrible creaking noise that grew louder by the moment, maybe from deep in the earth. The wind moaned and howled outside the windows, and there was the crash of thunder from the sky. It sounded as if

the whole house, the whole hillside, the whole strange land, was shaking and blowing apart and in moments would collapse in a heap like a house of cards.

Chapter 14: Glazed Doughnuts

"Excuse me," someone said to John, and tapped him on the shoulder. The house still swayed crazily and the air was full of a roaring sound. Holding on, John turned around, and there was Mrs. Barlow carrying a long wooden dowel strung with glazed doughnuts. "Coming through," she said. John moved out of her way and she charged into the room, hurrying toward Mr. Deener, who was tottering back and forth and making loud smacking noises.

Mrs. Barlow waved the doughnuts back and forth under his nose. Slowly he quit shaking. The roaring faded. The dishes in the cupboard clattered one last time and grew still, and the pictures on the wall quit swaying and righted themselves. The lamp in the ceiling swung slowly back and forth. John let go of the doorway, and Danny and Polly crawled out from under the table.

"When the Deener is in one of his fits," Mrs. Barlow said, "there's no one but me who can settle him down. It's doughnuts that does it – glazeys only. No cake doughnuts."

"I'll just have one of those," said Mr. Deener, opening his eyes. "Two of them, maybe." He slumped in his chair. "The pup will need one too," he said, whistling for Ahab, who looked out from behind the table where he had gone to hide during the shaking. "And some for the brothers, of course."

But then Mr. Deener took the whole line of doughnuts away from Mrs. Barlow and began to eat them all himself, in two bites each, gulping them down and sort of wheezing, as if he were catching his breath. In a moment there were only two doughnuts left, which he held over either eye, looking through them at John and Danny.

"This is a doughnut scope," he said to them. "You can see things through a doughnut. Windows and doors." After saying this he ate both doughnuts at once, piled on top of each other and smashed together, like a doughnut sandwich.

"Well!" said Mrs. Barlow. "Aren't we a pig!" She set the water glasses upright on the table again.

Mr. Deener breathed heavily. His hands twitched on the arms of his chair. "I am ashamed," he said. "I was..."

"Overcome," said Polly helpfully. Then to John and Danny she said, "He can't help himself when the fit comes over him. He has to have doughnuts, quick."

Danny whispered, "Won't he eat anything else?"

"Not when the fit's on him," Polly said. "When he has the fit, it's got to be glazed doughnuts. Aunt Flo says it comes from remembering. Uncle Deener is what she calls a sufferer."

"Have we got any more?" Mr. Deener asked the cook. "Not for me, of course. I don't want them. I've eaten plenty. You couldn't *make* me eat another one. Not if you tried." And with that he stopped talking and looked around, as if waiting for someone to make him try. "I mean for the pup," he said. "And the brothers. Look at them, skinny as sticks. The goblins have eaten the candy that they were bringing for me. It's a filthy shame. We *must* have another rod of glazeys, Mrs. Barlow!"

"We know what your little game is, Deener," said Mrs. Barlow, giving him a look. "You'll snatch them up and eat them too, and the rest of us can go starve."

Ahab trotted over and licked Mr. Deener's hand, which was all sugary from the doughnuts. Mr. Deener sighed deeply and said that Ahab understood him. And then Polly said that she understood him too. And Danny and John said that they did too, although actually John didn't understand him at all.

Mrs. Barlow went back into the kitchen and came back out with another stick of doughnuts, which Mr. Deener tried to snatch out of her hands.

"Clods!" she shouted at him. "Dirt clods and muddy water!" Mr. Deener collapsed into his chair, squishing up his cheeks and eyes again.

Mrs. Barlow passed out the doughnuts. Just for luck, John looked through the holes in the doughnuts, hoping that Mr. Deener's "doughnut scope" wasn't just nonsense. Maybe it was something he could write up in the science section of his book. . . . He couldn't see anything unusual through them.

"Save two for . . . for the Sleeper," said Mr. Deener, rising sadly from his chair.

"He won't eat them," said Mrs. Barlow. "You know very well he won't. They'll sit by his bedside and dry out. I say we tie the Sleeper up and *make* him eat one."

Aunt Flo said, "Never mind that. When he comes in from fishing he'll need his sleep. The squirrels will eat the doughnuts right enough if the Sleeper lets them dry out. Nothing will be wasted. Mr. Deener is quite right."

"Fishing!" Mrs. Barlow said, as if she didn't like the word. "Hmph!"

"I'll take them to his room," said Polly, and she slipped the two glazed doughnuts off the dowel and hurried away toward a wooden stairs that angled up toward a second floor. Mr. Deener looked very sad again. "One day he'll catch his fish," he said, "and then maybe things will change."

For a moment nobody spoke, although Mrs. Barlow looked like she wanted to. Then, cheerfully, Aunt Flo said, "Time for dinner."

The idea of dinner seemed to brighten Mr. Deener up even more. He shook John's hand. "Which of the brothers are you?"

"John."

"Pleased to meet you," said Mr. Deener. "I've been waiting for your arrival, you know. You have such a preposterous last name – Kraken. Do you know what a Kraken is?"

"No, sir," John said.

"It's a giant sea creature – a squid or an octopus or some kind of nautilus. It pretends to be an island, and people come along on boats and pitch tents on it and eat picnic lunches, and then, in the middle of their sandwiches, it rises up and eats *them*. Very funny, eating your lunch on a squid's back. Why didn't they just name you squid?"

John didn't know what to say to that, so he smiled and shrugged, and just then Polly came back downstairs and said, "He's back. Sound asleep."

Mr. Deener sighed very heavily. "Fish?" he asked.

Polly shook her head, and Mrs. Barlow came in carrying a platter with a roast beef on it and potatoes and carrots heaped around. She laid it on a table set for all of them, herself included, and with one plate at the head of the table where no one sat. It was clearly intended for "the Sleeper," whoever he was. Mr. Deener plucked up a big serving spoon and began to shovel potatoes and slices of roast beef onto his plate, filling and filling and filling it until he had a sort of mountain of food. Then he looked up, surprised, and said, "For you, my dear," and reached the plate across toward Polly, who shook her head politely.

"I couldn't eat half that much," she said. "You have it, Uncle Deener. You look hungry."

"I *am*, and that's the truth," Mr. Deener said. He started to eat, wrinkling up his forehead and chewing very steadily through the whole-plate of food. Then he served himself another, and then called for pie when it was done, and ice cream for the pie, and coffee to go with it, all of which Mrs. Barlow brought in great quantity, telling him that she had a mind to serve him dirt cutlets or worm sandwiches or some other awful thing if he didn't quit pigging the food up.

"He eats for two," Aunt Flo said, as if to explain Mr. Deener's tremendous appetite.

"I'm through," said Mr. Deener. "I'm full up." And he fed all the scraps to Ahab in a big heap. Then he said, "I'm going in to work," and he nodded to everyone, saying to John and Danny, "I'm building a device for the purposes of exploring the moon."

"A telescope?" asked Danny.

"No, a ladder," said Mr. Deener, and he walked out with his hands clasped across his stomach and a toothpick in his mouth.

"And you ought to go up to bed," Aunt Flo said to Polly. "You can show the boys to their room." Then she said to John and Danny, "We'll get down to the business of helping you find your way home in the morning. Mr. Deener will see the way, if you'll help him to see it. We're all hoping that Mr. Deener will see the way."

So they followed Polly up the stairs, passing the half-open door of the room where Mr. Deener worked. He was dressed in an apron now and was twining holly leaves and ivy vines onto the rungs of a rope ladder. Heaped on the floor were old books and a ribby old umbrella with all the fabric pulled off and a scattering of globes made of colored glass, like fishing floats, all of them the size of oranges.

"You know the clothes you were sewing?" John asked Polly.

"Are those for the little leaf men?"

"Yes," she said. "They're called henny-penny men, actually."

"Where do they come from?" Danny asked.

"Uncle Deener makes them," Polly said. "He makes them up out of 'spare parts'. That's what he says. I told him I'd sew their clothes."

"Doesn't he make any henny-penny *women*?" John asked.

She shook her head. "He can't. He tried once, but something went wrong and he had a terrible fit. You saw how he got tonight. It was like that, only worse."

They climbed the second flight of stairs to the third floor, where yet another set of stairs angled away into a sort of tower. Somewhere above them lay the Sleeper, with his glazed doughnuts beside him on a plate.

Their bedroom had a fireplace of its own and was very cheerful with wood paneling and books and a big painting on the wall of two apes sitting in a tree, watching a crocodile go past on the ground below.

After Polly left, Danny fell asleep right away. It had been a long and tiring day. John lay awake, watching the fire burning low in the grate and Ahab asleep in front of it. The curtains were drawn back, and leaves drifted past it on the night wind, maybe carrying henny-penny men. The sky was full of stars.

They had been lucky to fall among friends instead of among goblins. But John missed his bedroom and his mother and father. He knew they would think that he and Danny were lost, and that they wouldn't get any sleep that night at all. If only he could call them on the telephone and tell them that the two of them were safe and that Ahab was there with them.

Thinking that way made him grow more and more sleepy and he began to dream about being home again. He and Danny were playing marbles in the backyard with Kimberly – or was it Polly? He dreamed that the back gate scraped open. It was Mr. Deener coming in, as if he lived there, as if it were *his* back yard. Only it wasn't Mr. Deener all of a sudden; it was a great fat goblin, wearing rats for shoes.

The Elizabeth Complex

Karen Joy Fowler

"...love is particularly difficult to study clinically..."

– Nancy J. Chodorow

"Fathers love as well. – Mine did, I know, – but still with heavier brains."

– Elizabeth Barrett Browning

There is no evidence that Elizabeth ever blamed her father for killing her mother. Of course, she would hardly have remembered her mother. At three months, Elizabeth had been moved into her own household with her own servants; her parents became visitors rather than caretakers. At three years, the whole affair was history – her mother's head on Tower Green, her father's re-marriage eleven days later. Because the charge was adultery and, in one case, incest, her own parentage might easily have come into question. But there has never been any doubt as to who her father was. "The lion's cub," she called herself, her father's daughter, and from him she got her red hair, her white skin, her dancing, her gaiety, her predilection for having relatives beheaded, and her sex.

Her sex was the problem, of course. Her mother's luck at cards had been bad all summer. But the stars were good, the child rode low in the belly, and the pope, they had agreed, was powerless. They were expecting a boy.

After the birth, the jousts and tournaments had to be cancelled. The musicians were sent away, except for single pipe, frolicsome, but thin. Her mother, spent and sick from childbirth, felt the cold breath of disaster on her neck.

Her father put the best face on it. Wasn't she healthy? Full weight and lusty? A prince would surely follow. A poor woman gave the princess a

rosemary bush hung all with gold spangles. "Isn't that nice?" her mother's ladies said brightly, as if it weren't just a scented branch with glitter.

Elizabeth had always loved her father. She watched sometimes when he held court. She saw the deference he commanded. She saw how careful he was. He could not allow himself to be undone with passion or with pity. The law was the law, he told the women who came before him. A woman's wages belonged to her husband. He could mortgage her property if he liked, forfeit it to creditors. That his children were hungry made no difference. The law acknowledged the defect of her sex. Her father could not do less.

He would show the women these laws in his books. He would show Elizabeth. She would make a little mark with her fingernail in the margin beside them. Some night when he was asleep, some night when she had more courage than she had ever had before, she would slip into the library and cut the laws she had marked out of the books. Then the women would stop weeping and her father would be able to do as he liked.

Her father read to her *The Taming of the Shrew*. He never seemed to see that she hated Petruchio with a passion a grown woman might have reserved for an actual man. "You should have been a boy," he told her, when she brought home the prize in Greek, ahead of all the boys in her class.

Her older brother died when she was a small girl. Never again was she able to bear the sound of a tolling bell. She went with her father to the graveyard, day after day. He threw himself on the grave, arms outstretched. At home, he held her in his arms and wept onto her sleeve, into her soft brown hair. "My daughter," he said. His arms tightened. "If only you had been a boy."

She tried to become a boy. She rode horseback, learned Latin. She remained a girl. She sewed. She led the Presbyterian Girls' Club. The club baked and stitched to earn the money to put a deserving young man through seminary. When he graduated, they went as a group to see him preach his first sermon. They sat in the front. He stood up in the clothes they had made for him. "I have chosen my text for today," he said from the pulpit. "I Tim 2:12. 'I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but be in silence.'"

Elizabeth rose. She walked down the long aisle of the church and out into the street. The sun was so fiery it blinded her for a moment. She stood at the top of the steps, waiting until she could see them. The door behind her opened. It opened again and again. The Presbyterian Girls' Club had all come with her.

She rode horseback, learned Latin and also Greek, which her father had never studied. She had, they said, a pride like summer. One winter day she sat with all her ladies in the park, under an oak, under a canopy, stitching, with her long, beautiful, white fingers. If the other ladies were cold, if they wished to be inside, they didn't say so. They sat and sewed together and one of them sang aloud and the snowflakes flew about the tent like moths. Perhaps Elizabeth was herself cold and wouldn't admit it, or perhaps, even thin as she was, she was not cold and this would be an even greater feat. There was no way to know which was true.

Perhaps Elizabeth was merely teasing. Her fingers rose and dipped quickly over the cloth. From time to time, she joined her merry voice to the singer's. She had a strong, animal aura, a force. Her spirits were always lively. John Knox denounced her in church for her fiddling and flinging. She and her sister both, he said, were incurably addicted to joyosity.

Her half-brother had never been lusty. When he died, some years after her father, long after his own mother, hail the color of fire fell in the city, thunder rolled low and continuous through the air. This was a terrible time. It was her time.

Her father opposed her marriage. It was not marriage itself, he opposed; no, he had hoped for that. It was the man. A dangerous radical. An abolitionist. A man who would never earn money. A man who could then take her money.

Hadn't she sat in his court and seen this often enough with her very own eyes?

For a while she was persuaded. When she was strong enough, she rebelled. She insisted that the word *obey* be stricken from the ceremony. Nor would she change her name. "There is a great deal in a name," she wrote her girlfriend. "It often signifies much and may involve a great principle. This custom is founded on the principle that white men are lords of all. I cannot acknowledge this principle as just; therefore I cannot bear the name of another." She meant her first name by this. She meant Elizabeth.

Her family's power and position went back to the days when Charles I sat on the English throne. Her father was astonishingly wealthy, spectacularly thrifty. He wasted no money on electricity, bathrooms, or telephones. He made small, short-lived exceptions for his youngest daughter. She bought a dress; she took a trip abroad. She was dreadfully spoiled, they said later. But spinsters are generally thought to be entitled to compensatory trips abroad and she had reached the age where marriage was unlikely. Once men had come to court her in the cramped parlor. They faltered under the grim gaze of her father. There is no clear evidence that she ever

blamed him for this, although there is of course, the unclear evidence.

She did not get on with her step-mother. "I do not call her mother," she said. She, herself, was exactly the kind of woman her father esteemed – quiet, reserved, respectful. Lustless and listless. She got from him her wide beautiful eyes, her sky-colored eyes, her chestnut hair.

When Elizabeth was one year old, her father displayed her, quite naked, to the French ambassadors. They liked what they saw. Negotiations began to betroth her to the Duke of Angouleme, negotiations that foundered later for financial reasons.

She was planning to address the legislature. Her father read it in the paper. He called her into the library and sat with her before the fire. The blue and orange flames wrapped around the logs, whispering into smoke. "I beg you not to do this," he said. "I beg you not to disgrace me in my old age. I'll give you the house in Seneca Falls."

She had been asking for the house for years. "No," Elizabeth said.

"Then I'll disinherit you entirely."

"If you must."

"Let me hear this speech."

As he listened his eyes filled with tears. "Surely, you have had a comfortable and happy life," he cried out. "Everything you could have wanted has been supplied. How can someone so tenderly brought up feel such things? Where did you learn such bitterness?"

"I learnt it here," she told him. "Here, when I was child, listening to the women who brought you their injustices." Her own eyes, fixed on his unhappy face, spilled over. "Myself, I am happy," she told him. "I have everything. You've always loved me. I know this."

He waited a long time in silence. "You've made your points clear," he said finally. "But I think I can find you even more cruel laws than those you've quoted."

Together they reworked the speech. On towards morning, they kissed each other and retired to their bedrooms. She delivered her words to the legislature. "You are your father's daughter," the senators told her afterwards, gracious if unconvinced. "Today, your father would be proud."

"Your work is a continual humiliation to me," he said. "To me, who's had the respect of my colleagues and my country all my life. You have seven children. Take care of them." The next time she spoke publicly he made good on his threats and removed her from his will.

"Thank god for a girl," her mother said when Elizabeth was born. She fell into an exhausted sleep. When she awoke she looked more closely. The baby's arms and shoulders were thinly dusted with dark hair. She held her

eyes tightly shut, and when her mother forced them open, she could find no irises. The doctor was not alarmed. The hair was hypertrichosis, he said. It would disappear. Her eyes were fine. Her father said that she was beautiful.

It took Elizabeth ten days to open her eyes on her own. At the moment she did, it was her mother who was gazing straight into them. They were already violet.

When she was three years old they attended the silver jubilee for George V. She wore a Parisian dress of organdie. Her father tried to point out the royal ladies. "Look at the King's horse!" Elizabeth said instead. The first movie she was ever taken to see was *The Little Princess* with Shirley Temple.

Her father had carried her in his arms. He dressed all in joyous yellow. He held her up for the courtiers to see. When he finally had a son, he rather lost interest. He wrote his will to clarify the order of succession. At this point, he felt no need to legitimize his daughters, although he did recognize their place in line for the throne. He left Elizabeth an annual income of three thousand pounds. And if she ever married without sanction, the will stated, she was to be removed from the line of succession, "as though the said Lady Elizabeth were then dead."

She never married. Like Penelope, she maintained power by promising to marry first this and then that man; she turned her miserable sex to her advantage. She made an infamous number of these promises. No other woman in history has begun so many engagements and died a maid. "The Queen did fish for men's souls and had so sweet a bait that no-one could escape from her network," they said at court. She had a strong animal aura.

A muskiness. When she got married for the first time her father gave her away. She was only seventeen years old, and famously beautiful, the last brunette in a world of blondes. Her father was a guest at her third wedding. "This time I hope her dreams come true," he told the reporters. "I wish her the happiness she so deserves." He was a guest at her fifth wedding, as well.

Her parents had separated briefly when she was fourteen years old. Her mother, to whom she had always been closer, had an affair with someone on the set; her father took her brother and went home to his parents. Elizabeth may have said that his moving out was no special loss. She has been quoted as having said this.

She never married. She married seven different men. She married once and had seven children. She never married. The rack was in constant use during the latter half of her reign. Unexplained illnesses plagued her. It was the hottest day of the year, a dizzying heat. She went into the barn for Swansea pears. Inexplicably the loft was cooler than the house. She said she

stayed there half an hour in the slatted light, the half coolness. Her father napped inside the house. "I perceive you think of our father's death with a calm mind," her half brother, the new king, noted.

"It was a pleasant family to be in?" the Irish maid was asked. Her name was Bridget but she was called Maggie by the girls, because they had once had another Irish maid they were fond of and she'd had that name.

"I don't know how the family was. I got along all right."

"You never saw anything out of the way?"

"No, sir."

"You never saw any conflict in the family?"

"No, sir."

"Never saw the least – any quarreling or anything of that kind?"

"No, sir."

The half hour between her father settling down for his nap and the discovery of murder may well be the most closely examined half hour in criminal history.

The record is quite specific as to the hours when Bridget left the house, she looked at the clock. As she ran, she heard the city hall bell toll. Only, eight minutes are unaccounted for.

After the acquittal she changed her name to Lizbeth. "There is one thing that hurts me very much," she told the papers. "They say I don't show any grief. They say I don't cry. They should see me when I am alone."

Her father died a brutal, furious, famous death. Her father died quietly of a stroke before her sixth wedding. After her father died, she discovered he had reinserted her into his will. She had never doubted that he loved her. She inherited his great fortune, along with her sister. She found a sort of gaiety she'd never had before.

She became a devotee of the stage, often inviting whole casts home for parties, food, and dancing. Her sister was horrified; despite the acquittal they had become a local grotesquerie. The only seemly response was silence, her sister told Lizbeth, who responded to this damp admonition with another party.

The sound of a pipe and tabor floated through the palace. Lord Sempill went looking for the source of the music. He found the queen dancing with Lady Warwick. When she had become queen, she had taken a motto. *Semper Eadem*, it was. Always the Same. This motto had first belonged to her mother.

She noticed Lord Semphill watching her through the drapes. "Your father loved to dance," he said awkwardly, for he had always been told this. He was embarrassed to be caught spying on her.

“Won’t you come and dance with us?” she asked. She was laughing at him. Why not laugh? She had survived everything and everyone. She held out her arms. Lord Semphill was suddenly, deeply moved to see the queen, at her age, bending and leaping into the air like the flame on a candle, twirling this way and then that, like the tongue in a lively bell.

Yellow Sport Coats

Robert E. Rogoff

What was that big, wet sound? Never mind, ever since that disaster last year, I get nervous. Can't be too careful at my age, you know. Everyone's after my tail anyway. I'm well known as a mischief maker. But you had enough brains to seek out this mad genius of a wise man, so I'll do my best to answer you, kid. Is that a tape recorder?

Okay, let me think.

So...let's just say once there was this guy who, for some reason or other, hates yellow sport coats. Not saying it's me, mind you. He goes about his business, but one day somebody wearing a yellow sport coat moves into the apartment next door. They chance to meet in the elevator.

"You have some kind of nerve," says our yellow sport coat hater, obviously annoyed.

"I beg your pardon," says the yellow-clad person, on guard.

"Wearing a bright yellow sport coat like that in public," replies our heroic rebel.

Well, kid, this isn't the first time the coat has been discriminated against. The yellow sport coat wearer is prepared with a haughty reply. "First of all, sir, this is *not* a yellow sport coat," says he. "It's a suit jacket. The pants just happen to be in the cleaners right now."

Heroic rebel retorts: "Without the pants, there is no suit. To my way of thinking a yellow suit jacket with no pants is no suit jacket at all. It's a *sport coat!*"

"No need to use that tone of voice," replies the conformist, "and let me get to the second point. Even if this *were* a sport coat, what gives you the right to persecute it?"

"Gimme a break," declares rebel. "Shall we call the ACLU or *Details* Maga-

zine? Once a sport coat, always a sport coat."

"One thing's for sure," sniffs the yellow-coated one. "You'll never wear a yellow sport coat!"

And the rebel laughs, misinterpreting the statement as merely a wet-behind-the-ears, albeit bilious, left-handed insult.

And the elevator reaches the fourth floor, and that seems to be a fitting end for the two polarized individual's interactions.

But let's follow our yellow sport coat hater into his apartment. As he is hanging up his raincoat, we find his closet is overflowing with – you guessed it – yellow sport coats. There are pants and even vests to go with some of them, but there are a hell of a lot of sport coats that are 100% yellow sport coat.

"What – what are all these things doing in here?" sputters out yellow sport coat hater. His flabbergasted outburst brings his wife from the kitchen.

"For Chrissakes, Harold," she says. "If you hate yellow sport coats so much, why don't you get rid of them?"

"I guess I could do that, but then what would I fill the closet with? What would I wear?"

"You can buy other things."

"Not at the store I shop at – all they carry is yellow sport coats!"

"Then why don't you change stores?"

"Because the prices at the other stores are twice as high, that's why."

"It's crazy, Harold. There is simply no reason why you should be buying those dreaded yellow things, especially given your feelings about them. Why do you hate them so much anyway?"

"I prefer not to talk about it."

"Well, just don't buy them anymore. It's simple."

"Yeah, that's what I thought at first. But listen smarty pants. I'm not the only guy with a closet full of yellow sport coats. They're all over the place."

"How do you know?"

"That's what the salesman at the clothing store keeps screaming at me."

"And what was he wearing at the time?"

"Come to think of it – very funny. Look around you, Edie. These yellow sport coats are everywhere."

"Well, might as well tell you the truth: I have noticed a lot of people wearing them lately."

"And you'll be seeing more and more on the streets as time goes by," declares Harold, defiant, yet apparently without any real cause.

So Edie says: "Could be. But what does that prove? Maybe there are just a

lot of good salesmen pushing yellow sport coats these days. Maybe it's just a fad that'll blow over in a month."

"The reason behind it doesn't matter. All that matters is: one day, more people will be wearing yellow sport coats than anything else. Eventually *everyone* will. And when that day arrives, I'll wear one, too. At first, I'll probably wear the pants and the vest also. But eventually, it'll just be the sport coat. I mean, Edie, you *gotta* wear something out there in the world!"

Edie sighs and goes to watch some TV show. She really doesn't understand all this. The ramifications, kid. Harold sits down in his favorite chair and rubs his hand across his tired features. He understands what's going on, all too well. This yellow sport coat business. And it is a business, literally. God damn yellow jackets, thinks Harold. He hates them and everything connected to them. But damn it, he's ready. He won't get caught with his pants down – or rather his sport coat off, I should say. He won't get stung. Not this time.

You see, kid, he wants in. And he'll play the game. But play someone else's game?

So, to answer your question, yes, I think you're going to end up making trouble for yourself. For one thing, you might end up mixed in with a lot of people who don't actually wear the coat on the outside, but scratch 'em, and they're coated beneath the surface. Dyed in the wool. Dyed in the wool, kid. They're playing their own game.

You came here to ask me if I thought it was worth it living my life as a rebel, an outcast, someone who never stopped asking questions at the risk of his very life. Was it a mistake holding all the little pebbles up to the sun? Maybe I didn't learn everything, but now you're my student.

Take this hint: try wearing the coat on the outside, but pretend you're actually buck-naked.

Now, here's a quiz: Do you agree with me? By the way, speak into the microphone.

Nixon In Space

Rob McCleary

On July 20, 1969, or so I am told, after forty-eight hours of hellish labor, Leigh was born and some guys walked around on the moon. Leigh had red hair, and was a girl. The people who walked around on the moon were all male, that is to say they had penises. Due to zero gravity, they had erections the entire trip. Even when they blasted off they had hard-ons. The roar of the rocket engines excited them. "It was better than sex," they said afterwards.

The whole deal started like this: some guys looked up at the moon and said "Hey, let's go there." And so they did. They dreamed it up like some forgotten oriental city and put it into action (they had the money to indulge such fantasies in those days). The Americans made it to the moon first, because they had the most cash. Also, they had captured Nazi rocket scientists.

The only other people who were in the race with the Americans to get to the moon were the Soviets. The Soviets lived in a country that was founded by Vikings that sailed up the Volga River, enslaving everyone they met. Those they didn't enslave, they killed. Eventually, a bald guy named "Lenin" overthrew the Vikings. Then came the Nazis.

All the same: the Soviets and the Americans both wanted to be the first on the moon. They both wanted to see it was made of green cheese, which all the best scientists agreed it was. Also, they wanted to get up there and drop atomic bombs back on the other side on earth.

So they saw the moon and said "Let's go!" and that's exactly what they did. Kennedy made a speech that got everybody fired up and it was decided right then and there that somebody had to go to the moon. Men with crew cuts made the journey possible. They used slide rules.

There were rumors of cities on the moon.

So while the men were walking around on the moon, looking for cities made of green cheese, Leigh was being born, red hair and all.

Everything was coming together.

Later, it would be claimed she kept stretching out her tiny hand, as if reaching for something in the air above her, but eventually it would come out that this was merely dreamed up by one of the nursing staff in an attempt to get Leigh's mother interested in the tiny, bloody being she had just spent the previous two days and nights trying to force out of her body.

"There are men on the moon," said the nurse as she brought Leigh in for her mother to see. She had seen it on television in the doctors' lounge and was repeating her observation. The nurse said it as a simple statement of fact, with the same enthusiasm she might've said "there are men on the roof." Fantastic events like that were pretty common back in the days when the money still held out. First they were making radar, then splitting the atom, then putting guys on the moon. The list goes on and on.

The nurse let Leigh's mother hold her baby for a while, and they talked about the guys who were on the moon. A sign in Times Square, New York said "SOME GUYS ARE UP THERE ON THE MOON!" and everybody cheered. When they came back they rode down the streets in big cars and everybody threw paper at them. This sort of thing went on and on for days: another city, more cars, more paper flying around their heads. They learned to live with it.

"What a lucky baby to be born on the same day as man walks on the moon," said the nurse, and then she took Leigh away from her mother to take her back to the nursery.

"Look at the way she keeps stretching out her hand, like she knows what's going on up there." Leigh's mother looked bleary-eyed at her daughter. Leigh wasn't doing anything. She was sleeping.

"You just missed it," said the nurse. "She's a moon baby. That's what they're calling all the babies that are born today." And then the nurse said the words again with a magical lilt in her voice, in contrast to the deadpan delivery she had used to inform Leigh's mother that there were guys in the process of hanging out on the moon: "Moon Baby..."

The nurse took Leigh and put her back in the nursery with all the other moon babies. Then she picked up another moon baby and took it to another moon mother and tried to convince the moon mother that her moon baby was reaching out for the heavens in a gesture of strange, sympathetic magic for the guys bounding around on the moon with hard-ons. Nobody believed her.

Later on, after an early childhood spent attempting to paste her unruly curls of red hair to her head with an eclectic collection of combs, plastic barrettes, and even degenerating at one point to rubber bands (culminating in a tearful watershed moment of frustration and realization that would pave the way for her masses of curled hair to flow freely) we would meet and discuss her birth and the events leading up to it: the Second World War, her parents meeting at a kitchen table littered with empty beer bottles after a party and Leigh's eventual conception, but neither of us could make much sense of it.

My earliest memory is of Nixon resigning on television. That was back when my family lived in the Yukon. After Nixon came the fire which burned our house to the ground, the tall orange flames playing off the rippling waters of the deep, cold lake full of huge pike we used to catch from a wooden motor boat.

The Yukon of my memories is composed of grays, whites, and red clay, gravel roads, pine trees, and mountain ranges ground into submission by ancient glaciers. All that disappeared in the orange glow reflected in the cold Autumn waters of the lake.

But first, more about Nixon. My father told us to be quiet so he could watch Nixon resign. We saw it all, through the miracle of television. Nixon, in his pale blue sharkskin suit, black hair plastered to his face by sweat, a good three-day growth on his face, his prodigious sweat having soaked through his suit jacket leaving immense stains under each arm. He said his piece: all about truth, justice, and the American way, and then he left. He walked right out of the White House, down Pennsylvania Avenue, and just kept walking. He removed his tie and threw it in the Reflecting Pool. A little kid fished it out to use as a memento of the historic occasion. Nixon kept walking, and the television people played all kinds of sentimental music like "Amazing Grace" and "Kumbaya."

Nixon walked right down the middle of the street, waving to people, accepting mock-salutes from old soldiers who had served with him in the Pacific, and shaking hands with the rank and file. Several people offered him jobs, but Nixon declined them all. He did try to get into the space program, but they didn't want any ex-presidents. They told him he didn't have enough of a science background. Nixon countered saying that they had offered Walter Cronkite a ride in the spaceship, a charge that left NASA without reply. Nixon left, embittered, and ended up selling his garbage to souvenir hunters to pay the bills. The real reason NASA didn't want him was that

they were afraid his known tendency to sweat like a pig would short circuit the electrical system in the space capsule.

"All the same," Nixon would later say, after the truth had come out through the Freedom of Information Act, "they should've let me ride in the spaceship. Every ex-president should have the right to go to the moon."

After the show was over the Yanks went crazy. They all cried and pulled their hair and wanted him back. Those responsible for his impeachment were dragged from their homes and strung up from telephone poles. Entire cities were razed. Finally, the next day, everybody calmed down and order was restored. The papers all cried out that Nixon should come back, but he never did.

"This bull has died too big a death," he said when the news crews found him living in South Carolina growing yams and writing his memoirs. Everybody agreed that those were pretty much the truest words they'd ever heard spoken by an ex-president, and that they should throw their support behind his successor: Gerald Ford. When Nixon found out they had taken his refusal seriously he became distraught and said he was only kidding, that he would gladly resume the duties of the Chief Executive. But his withdrawal came too late, as they had already changed the locks on the White House. That same week, Nixon got his rejection from NASA, so it was pretty rough on him.

After our house burned down, we gave up on living in the Yukon and moved to Ontario. My father got a job as an electrician, and I met Leigh. She was the first Moon Baby I ever met.

She had red hair, and then one day a barn on our concession burned up, the orange flames lighting up the night sky for miles around. It got us both so excited we copulated right then and there in the darkness, with the mosquitoes biting our bare skin, the sirens of the emergency vehicles wailing in the late summer breeze. It was the beginning of the later stage of our relationship, and after we finished we had no idea why we had done it.

"Must be the moon," said Leigh.

Although I wanted badly to believe it, the only trouble with this convenient explanation was that there was no moon in the sky that night.

Every time her birthday would roll around, Leigh would receive a pair of silver earrings in the shape of a crescent moon. When I came to visit her they would be hanging all over the room, jingling as the wind moved them, reflecting the early morning light. They were all in the shape of a crescent moon, never a full moon, usually with the face of a woman inside

the crescent. By the time the twenty-fifth pair of earrings arrived, everybody had pretty much given up on getting back to the moon. It cost too much. The Americans had spent billions of dollars getting a few guys up there so they could play golf. What did they bring back as souvenirs? Like little children on their first trip to the beach, they brought back rocks. They toured the rocks around all over the place, told everybody about how they had come from the moon in an attempt to drum up more money so they could go back up.

"There may be cities on the moon," they hinted broadly. They had no shame. They had moon fever. Their entire lives, body and soul, had become devoted to one cause: getting back up on the moon and playing golf. The problem was, everybody had already paid for the show once. The astronauts had already been up there and made it back. People weren't interested in getting to the moon, they were interested mainly in the danger. To most people, it was a sort of glorified drag race, and everybody knows that the best part of drag racing is watching the cars blow up. The problem with the space program was that they kept trying to make it safer and safer. Also, only a few special people could go up in the capsule every time. Nixon was the loudest voice against the elitist space program:

"If I used to be president, and they won't let me go up in their capsule, think how long it will be before you, the common man, can go to the moon."

He said this at every public speaking engagement. NASA fired a few guys on the launching pad in a capsule fire to try and prove the program was still a life and death matter, but nobody bought it. The public rose up:

"We want to go to the mooooooon!" they said.

A "Put Nixon On the Moon" committee was formed. The public felt that if they got Tricky Dick up there, it was only a matter of time before the average Joe was up there hitting a few rounds. Dick was to be their watershed candidate.

Soon the public was on fire with moon mania. Popular magazines ran in-depth stories with step-by-step plans about how the moon would be colonized. Newspapers ran headlines like "Let's Get One Of Ours On the Moon!" The forest fire had been ignited.

Time wore on.

The Moon was on everybody's mind. Leigh and I would often sit and look at it, wonder about it, just like the old days before some guys went up there and desecrated it with stupid sports. Moon watching, instead of drag racing, became America's number one pastime. You would see people all over the place just sitting serenely, looking up at the moon. Artists painted pictures

and wrote poems about it. People of all ages, sexes, and races were putting aside their differences to join together and put somebody from the rank and file on the moon. Everything was becoming good and sound and pure.

Everybody looked at the moon and agreed it was the most beautiful thing in outer space, and that people must go there when they die to live in great, glorious, silver castles and dress in silk. This idea, proposed by a member of the great Pacific Northwest Moon Watchers, won immediate acceptance by the vast majority of the population. It was comforting for everyone to think that up there on the moon were all their friends and relatives, and that someday they would join them. Also, it got everybody even more fired up to go to the moon. People got so excited that they tried to build their own spaceships. Each group of moon watchers came up with a plan, pooled their resources, and built rocket ships. These efforts were outlawed after only a few tries. Gravity, always a jealous lover, was reluctant to share her inhabitants with any other planetary body, and sent one ship crashing down into a crowded suburb of Jersey City. In a farewell speech, the pilot said, "I'm going to get to the moon, one way or another," and he had meant what he said. His body was never recovered, but the crater his impact created was dedicated as a national memorial to everyone's efforts to get off the planet, everywhere. Delegates from moon watching clubs all over the world came for the dedication ceremony. The keynote speaker, good old Tricky Dick, made an impassioned plea to governments around the world to put ordinary people in space:

"Let not another brave soul fall like Icarus from the sky," he said, emotion choking his voice. "For although you may fetter us here in fear and ignorance, as surely as the sun which also rises, and the majestic Moon, mother of all things, waxes and wanes, the spirit of mankind will soon soar in the heaven!"

The speech was well received, even though most people didn't know who Icarus was, and was reprinted in newspapers all over the world. People started comparing it to Kennedy's inaugural address. Soon everybody was rioting in the streets and calling for the scientists and their slide rules to be handed over to the public. The government made a token gesture of handing over the slide rules, but of course without the scientists they were useless. This made the public even angrier. Leigh and I watched the rioting on television. It was now well over two decades since the original astronauts had landed on the moon.

"There has to be an easier way to get to the moon than launching somebody in a big tin can," said I.

On television, a man, who for some reason was buck naked except for a

pair of black combat boots, was running through the flaming streets of Munich with a microwave oven hoisted over his head, an insane look of glee on his face. In Vancouver, people had gathered in Stanley Park to burn a dummy across the front of which was pinned a sign saying GRAVITY written in a scraggly hand.

"I think it's the idea of getting to the moon that people like," said Leigh. "It's the challenge of the unreachable goal. Like Everest. It has to be tried."

On television, a London mob had somehow gotten the statue of Nelson off his dizzying column in Trafalgar Square and were committing unspeakable indignities on it.

The chaos in the streets continued for several days. The armies of the various nations were called out to put down the insurrections. Unfortunately for the powers that be however, their ranks were filled with closet moon watchers who joined in the disruptions as soon as they were deployed. Just when things seemed on the verge of descending into total anarchy, a lunar eclipse cowed everybody, and most people showed up for work the next day. The Soviets took advantage of the confusion to launch an orbiting space station they called "Mir." Onboard Mir was a woman about to give birth. The Commies wanted to see what would happen to a baby born in space. They tried to make out like she was just a regular woman, trying to steal world approval for their program, but then some journalist uncovered that she was in fact a KGB Colonel, and the USSR was forced to give Gary Powers back to the United Nations.

The Space Baby was born perfectly normal, and was raised in total isolation by specially trained chimpanzees until he was twenty-one. Me and Leigh sat up on the roof of my parents' home to watch his spacecraft go over the night he was born. It looked like a moving star.

"Wow," said Leigh, looking up at the little blip, "somebody's being born in that thing. That's gotta be a first."

"Do you believe in astrology?" I asked

"You mean like 'what's your sign?'"

"Sort of. Do you think your parents planned it so you would be born on the day of the moon landings?"

"Don't be gross!"

"Well?"

My only answer was a cold stare from Leigh. Obviously she was not eager to combine the subjects of parents and sex. I decided to continue my line of questioning anyway.

"They must've planned it for a certain time. Why not the moon landing?"

"Because I doubt they planned it for a specific day. Besides, I was born late. My dad had to take my mom for a ride in his father's truck to induce labor."

"Maybe you wanted to wait until the moon landing."

I arched my eyebrows suggestively. The Space Baby and his mother streaked silently above us in the firmament. I went over the equation in my head: moon landing, Leigh's birth, Nixon resigning, Nixon trying to go to the moon. I could come to no firm conclusion. Nonetheless, I could tell that watching the spaceship up in the night sky was getting Leigh excited, and before long we would make love for the second time in our relationship. When it was all over, we still couldn't figure out why we had done it.

Then, in August, the unthinkable happened: it was announced that Richard Nixon was going to the moon. The announcement was greeted with a stunned silence by the general population. The entire world, faced with the prospect of the event which they had worked decades towards with no serious belief it would actually happen coming to fruition, was flabbergasted. Without the glue of common purpose, the population's unity began to dissolve. The different moon watching organisations battled for control of the world's faithful. Instead of huge riots, the various factions engaged in pitched battles in every major city, fighting tenaciously for territory in street by street battles. Nixon appeared on television, calling for calm, but the situation was beyond repair. The "Put Nixon On the Moon" committee (formerly the most powerful of the plebian moon race organisations) was torn apart by infighting, and was unable to induce a peaceful end to the hostilities. Finally, after days of impassioned pleas for calm, Nixon appeared for one last time on television and said:

"Fuck you all, I'm going to the mooooooon!"

The population grew dejected, and then, like any mob worth its salt, turned on their leader. Nixon's name, henceforward, would be "mud." Contracts were put out on him. He was burned in effigy. NASA had to conceal where Nixon was going to be launched into space from. The day of the launch, Leigh and I watched as a clean shaven and powder dry Nixon made his way to the capsule, flashing his trademark "double victory" at everyone he passed. Inside the capsule, Dick tried to come up with witty things to say, but the best he could muster was: "This is gonna be better than sex!"

"Why do men always say that?" Leigh asked me.

The final countdown began, Nixon pushing buttons and smiling insanely. But then, when they reached zero hour, nothing happened. Instead, NASA flashed his location on the screen. Nixon was sitting on top of a fake space craft. He tried the hatch, but found it locked. He pulled fran-

tically, without effect, sweating madly. The picture then flashed to the real spacecraft lifting off with real astronauts and real golf gear. It then flashed back to Nixon's decoy craft, which was being rocked back and forth by an enraged mob. Luckily for Nixon, they couldn't get the hatch open, so the different factions took turns rolling him around in his dummy capsule to try and make him sick. Then, the "Put Nixon on the Moon" committee, having put aside their differences, came to his rescue, driving off the enraged mob with pepper spray.

That evening, me and Leigh watched the guys who had been on the real launch make their way to the moon in their tiny capsule. The following evening, we lay on the roof of my parents' home and listened to their broadcast from space on the radio. One of the guys was making a speech that started like this:

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth..."

Then he went on about how good the earth looked from out in space, and how it didn't really matter exactly who was going into space, because they represented everyone on earth. It was a real good speech, well put together. Dmitri, as the Space Baby born on Mir came to be named, was working as a commentator with some American network, and he said he'd never heard what it was like to be in space expressed so eloquently, but mostly everybody thought it was bullshit. Then the other announcer smacked Dmitri in the mouth because there was no way Dmitri could remember what it was like in space because he had only been a baby at the time.

The asphalt shingles on the roof still retained the warmth of the day's sunshine. Looking up at the night sky, I knew we would make love before long, and maybe this time we would figure out why.

"What if your mother unconsciously held back labor until the moon landing?" I asked.

"Don't be ridiculous. She was in labor for forty-eight hours. Nobody would choose that, consciously or unconsciously. Give it up. The moon landing has absolutely nothing to do with my birth."

I decided not to bring up the question anymore, even though I still wanted to know the answer. The technological cuckolding of Nixon had thrown my calculations into confusion. The space capsule kept going on through space, and the people in some city in Australia turned on all their lights to let the guys in the capsule know they didn't want them to get burned up like those other astronauts. Me and Leigh made love, and although we still couldn't come to any firm conclusions as to why it happened, we finally had to concede that the moon, which was that night in full phase, was partially responsible.

The astronauts returned safely to earth, with more rocks. Nixon was spirited away by his followers, and we didn't hear about him until a couple of years later when he was caught trying to sneak into the White House through a basement window. The Secret Service threw him out in front of the place where an enraged mob tore him to pieces with their bare hands and some broken bottles.

Although Leigh continued to receive silver moon earrings every year on her birthday, there were no more moon landings, as the Americans had run out of money.

Make It New

Carter Scholz

Down corridors, between buildings, under abominably blue sky, through crowds of besotted citizens and simulacra, streets filled with fancies and empty of meaning – there strides Newton, pompous in his wig and long-defunct verities; there John Dee, ears pricked to the bandwidths of angelic intelligences; there sits Einstein on a bench, casting seed to pigeons – all with the telltale grain of false images – through this cloud of maya I walked with a heart of fragile ash: offshift, and seeking truth in the guise of distraction.

So punched for Cambridge and went again to The Penguin Poets, where I was halted at the door by some cousin of the Tin Man wearing the corporate uniform of breastplate and winged cap.

–What’s this supposed to be then, Hermes god of thieves?

–Never mind that, what do *you* want?

–See here, I’m offshift, my credit’s sound. Let me pass.

–What for?

–I’m here to see old Tom.

I thought that would give him a laugh, and it did.

–Never learn, do you? All right then, a hundred down, and if you damage the model you’ll be back in the composting hold for good.

So he took my credit chit, and I went to the back. Most of the booths were empty, though there was a piece, thirteen she looked, trying to undo Wittgenstein’s pants. Some laugh, I thought, recalling how I’d once groped fat Amy Lowell.

The old gent sat like a Saville Row dummy, arms folded, eyes shut, jowls pendant, still as nirvana. He was on, though; I could hear the hum.

–Old Possum, what joy? I commenced.

He winced and raised his head. –You again. Can’t you learn?

I smirked at him and waited. He adjusted his wirerims and looked down at his hands. Their false grain.

–I seem to have changed, he said.

–Some day you’ll exhaust your program and I’ll catch you in a groove. Aren’t you ashamed, to pass yourself off as a man?

A bit of the old fire lit his orbs. –And yourself?

–I came to ask after old Ez.

–Why not go to him?

–He’s not a Penguin, and you know I’m strictly class.

–Oh, really. Which?

–Untouchable, you lapsed democrat. Lowest of the low, yet able to command, with libation of credit, your attention, Tom, here in the House of Hades.

He groaned. –On, then. Let’s get on with it.

–You know the Earth is gone? Your bones are less than dust now. You and yours in that long ago critical century damned us. We journey now, no ends, no beginnings, only the ravening void around us. You know where you are, what you are?

I grasped his hand and forced back the wrist till it cracked. He gazed incuriously at the separated skin, the circuitry within. Then he resealed the gap and shot his cuff to cover it.

–Who knows which way perception runs? he murmured. –To him I might seem the counterfeit.

–Bet your sallow Anglican arse, I said, getting warm. –Speak of counterfeits, what bank were you serving while Ez was lancing usury? That’s why he’s not here, he’s anathema to all this. He tried to prevent what the world became, a trough for profiteers. Unholy alliance of science, industry, politics did us all in. What help were you to him, ever? He wrote *The Waste Land* for you and what thanks, “il miglior fabbro” and hold the “miglior”, eh?

–Ezra was my friend. His literary judgment was superb. But in politics he was a child. He supported Fascism. You can’t possibly understand that. I did my utmost for him. After the war I got him out of the madhouse, I and Archie.

–And Frost, eh? Good farmer Bob, friend to Presidents.

–God, no. Bob was famous then. He lent his name. I made allowances.

–Too many.

–Have you no ounce of compassion? Can’t you see...

–I see too well, you fraud. Centuries since such kind milk flowed from the dead paps of mother Gaia. Centuries of flight have withered your excuses. Some of us know when the turning point came, know better than to blame

the scientists. Were you so blind to the world beyond your dooryard?

–Not blind. Lord, no. But I was a poet, for heaven's sake.

–Unacknowledged legislator of the world.

–Would it were so. But the reality...

–O yes, Tom. Do speak to me of reality.

–I no longer pretend to pretend. *Sub specie aeternitatis*...

–Don't give me that! Your eternity is ash. Your world is ash. What of ours?

–Your world? What world is that?

–This one! This benighted counterfeit of, of...

–Of what? Do you even know?

At that the rage came up in me, the nausea of mind that scattered my thoughts; in truth, I did not know where we were, or what our world was, this maddened labyrinth we, or was it only I, inhabited.

He said, as if to himself, –O dark dark dark. Fare forward. If all time is eternally present, all time is unredeemable...

–Shut it! I screamed. –I'll bloody murder –!

The bouncer got me from behind, and my strength left me. He dropped me winded on the walk. The light there was fierce as sun. I got up and walked, fearing to rest, fearing what might overtake me. On my way, wonders and affronts beset me: a red rose lunged at me from a trellis, cursing in Sanskrit; illegible graffiti bloomed on walls in everchanging palimpsests, and cold geometries of light chased dust devils down the throats of gutters. I saw red sullen faces in the doors of houses: fellow citizens, fellow prisoners, madder than I, for they accepted it all at face value, went without protest through their daily rounds of sex without issue, love without death, aspiration without accomplishment, and I thought, I must, I must end this, and punched desperately, at random, over and over.

Through an unknown, remembered gate – had I been here before? – I came to the still point, the control room, vacant and pilotless. Across the high dome, past which surged the blackness of this final excursion. I thought I saw stars, but they were false, droplets perhaps of condensation catching the light from within. I looked round the vacancy for controls – consoles, levers, knobs, sliders, gloves and goggles, maps, memes, methods, verbs, ways, songs – but of course there was nothing; the true controls were hidden, as always, or worse, could it be? nonexistent; could it be that those in command were no wiser than I, that they tolerated my questions because they knew no answer could be found? But even an answer of no-answer was certainty; and even that I lacked.

Finally I did nothing, returning to my cubicle chastened and diminished,

where I took a handful of the blue pills, and the consoling bewilderment, warm surcease, descended and the universe presented to me, like facets of a boundless black stone, all its aspects in all their numbing sameness, till I did not know if I were in some great vessel crossing superluminal void, or in some hermetic waste land or dream paradise gone wrong, in a recess of time beyond the reach of history, in some inquisitor's cell, or adrift in the vortex of my own or of some other mind. My very self might be the creature of some vast unknowable system, a self annihilated and made new each time I approached the system's edge, a system so omnipresent and unknowable it could well be called God. But what did such distinctions matter to me while my being, regardless its fabric and situation, was continually impaled upon the spike of my consciousness?

In this abyss, if God or the system could speak to me, it would speak thus: I will atomize your soul. You will hurt in a million ways with a million hurts. I will scatter your soul among humanity, so that you will be the cause of pain in millions. You will not resist, for you will be small and scattered and without being. And I reply: break me. Scatter me. In each atom of my soul is my resistance. The pain I cause will drive others to challenge you. But indeed no such voice entered my dreams; no such reply was needed. I slept as one dead.

And wakened in the atrocious light of another false morning, a seedy bearded chap at bedside, peering at me, records all about.

–Doctor Freud? I asked.

–Close enough, he said. And the charade begins anew.

Neanderthals All Along

Michael Kandel

Glen Fanshaw was surprised to see Neanderthals in derbies, bow ties, and wing tips. Nothing in the fossil record indicated such modern apparel. He had expected skins, furs, hairy nudity.

When he stepped from the chromium time machine, one of the Neanderthal group noticed him and approached. It was a male – swarthy skin, a slanted forehead, a thick ridge above wide-set, deep-set eyes, and an enormous protruding mouth and jaw. The technical word is *prognathous*. If the male looked apish, however, there was nothing at all of the ape in his speech. He spoke clearly, enunciated well, and it was English that he used, American English.

“That’s a time machine,” observed the Neanderthal.

Glen was taken aback but still able to put two and two together. “You’ve had visitors from the future before,” he said. This accounted for the clothes and the English, and the fact that a Middle Paleolithic hominid had recognized the gleaming, still-humming vehicle that sat at a slight angle in a clump of what looked like laurel shrubs, *Kalmia latifolia*, but couldn’t have been, because this was the wrong continent, for that matter the wrong hemisphere.

Yet it made sense, when you thought about it: If there was time travel in Glen Fanshaw’s present of 2067, then there surely would be time travel in his future, after 2067, and no doubt better time travel, since technology always marches on. By now the whole past could be littered, contaminated. He looked around for cigarette butts, Styrofoam cups, and used condoms but didn’t see any.

“Do you have pictures of your wife and children?” asked the Neanderthal, thereby revealing a knowledge of photography not to mention the

institution of marriage.

"I didn't bring them," said Glen. He hadn't thought he would need family snapshots in prehistoric southern France.

"Let me show you mine," said the Neanderthal with pride, as if Glen had traveled across the many centuries and millennia for the sole purpose of being handed, one by one, wallet-sized photos, in color, of this Alley Oop's ridiculous mate and offspring.

The adult female wore a yellow-blue polkadot dress with frills and puffed shoulders, and favored the camera with an ear-to-ear, gap-toothed grin, not unlike one of those Chimpanzee grimaces you see at zoos.

"Betty," said the Neanderthal fondly, and paused for Glen to say something like "Very nice."

"Very nice," said Glen.

Another picture of Betty followed, with a Neanderthal tyke in front of her, waist-high, the mother and child both mugging for the camera in the same idiotic-rictus way. This subspecies of *Homo sapiens* was certainly not sophisticated when it came to posing for pictures. They were simple creatures. Perhaps that was the reason they went extinct, unable to cope with Cro-Magnon savoir faire.

"Betty with Little Bobby," said the Neanderthal.

Glen nodded and smiled, wondering with an inner groan how long this social ritual would take. He thought of the Pedersens, Clarence and Mabel, old friends who went back to the Fanshaws' days at Willoughby, when Fiona was teaching elementary school part-time and having babies. Clarence was a short, retired rheumatologist who chewed on a briar pipe and wore bow ties. A nice couple, the Pedersens, but it was torture when they came back from their trips and invited the Fanshaws over for an evening of slides. As the slide projector went click-click, Glen would squirm in his seat on the paisley sofa and fight down groundswell yawns.

"Betty with Baby Mary," said the Neanderthal, holding out a photo of his mate with a thing in her arms that looked more like a dog than a baby, perhaps because it was so solemn.

"Mmm," said Glen.

"But where are my manners," said the Neanderthal. "I haven't even introduced myself. I should have introduced myself first, and asked for your name, and then invited you in for a cup of coffee and a piece of strudel."

"Thanks, but I'm really full." Glen didn't care for strudel: the crust was usually too greasy. Still, an odd coincidence: the Pedersens always served strudel. Mabel boasted that she made it from scratch, from her Bavarian grandmother's own recipe, and it was so greasy, it left a scum on your teeth.

Names were given, and then came the handshake, which was painful, extremely painful. Glen yelped. Actual cracking sounds came from his knuckle area. The Neanderthal – Arthur – had a grip of iron.

Glen was introduced to the other Neanderthals, who wanted to shake his hand too, but he hurriedly put it behind his back and flashed a toothy smile to indicate that he was friend not foe.

“Nice to meet you, Glen,” said the Neanderthal whose name was Larry. Apparently they didn’t have last names, or else they did but were keeping to the American custom of informality.

Their body odor, also, was strong, Glen noticed when the wind shifted. A gamy smell. Evidently the new-found civilization of the Neanderthals didn’t extend yet to such amenities as roll-on antiperspirants. Glen flexed the fingers of his right hand slowly, hoping that nothing was broken. One’s hand contained all these little delicate bones.

Arthur led him to a hut, a primitive, thatched affair but with quite up-to-date appurtenances, such as a door bell, a Casablanca fan, and, in the kitchenette, a Cuisinart. Where did the Neanderthals get their electricity? Was there a generator out back? Or perhaps a small hydroelectric plant on a river nearby serving the whole village (though Glen hadn’t actually seen a village)? And did they have postal service too? And garbage pickup?

What impact, Glen wondered, would this massive contamination of the past have on the future? Or even on his own present? Would Fiona still be there when he got back? And his children, Rebecca and Scott, would they be all right? Would the school curriculum be unaffected? If American history changed, a child might get the wrong answers on a test. Such a thing – not knowing when the Declaration of Independence was signed, for example, something as basic as that – could not only be disorienting but humiliating too.

And Glen had read some hair-raising things lately about temporal paradoxes. Runaway loops of cause and effect that could make you unwittingly commit incest with very close relatives.

The Neanderthal-named-Arthur handed him a cup of steaming mocha java and asked him what he thought about grain as an investment. Glen was nonplussed. Surely agriculture hadn’t been invented yet. Anyway, weren’t the Neanderthals all hunters and gatherers? Berry pickers, mushroom pluckers, forest foragers? Arthur explained that he didn’t mean grain literally but contracts to buy or sell on a commodity exchange, in other words grain as in grain futures. Glen was on shaky ground here but said (clearing his throat) he thought that that sort of thing was a little too speculative.

“If you have young children and not much discretionary income (of

course I don't know what your situation is)," he told the hominid, who was listening to him carefully, "you might be better off in blue-chip stocks and in bonds rated at least triple-A. My wife and I did all right in conservative no-load mutual funds."

Arthur sighed and took a sip of his coffee. "It's a tough world out there. So much uncertainty." The Neanderthal spoke in a low voice, as if half to himself.

Glen thought that maybe that was the reason they went extinct. Too indecisive. As opposed to the Cro-Magnon, who just forged ahead aggressively and didn't look back. He had read somewhere that the Neanderthals, despite or because of their ample brain cases, were Hamlet types who sat on the shores of lakes and brooded while other branches of the higher primate tree, less introspective, went about the nine-to-five business of survival.

Decision-making. Look at Glen's Uncle David, who always did well in the stock market. Never hesitated on the phone, talking to his broker: it was always buy this, sell that. There was a man who knew how to make a decision. Who knew how to elbow aside frail old ladies when the papers announced a clearance sale in a department store or a rush on tickets at a stadium box office. Uncle David died of a heart attack two years ago. And died penniless, but that was entirely because of his second wife, the cha-cha woman from Cuba.

Arthur was right: the world was a tough, uncertain place. Even successful evolutionary strategies didn't always work.

The Neanderthal whistled (Glen made a mental note of that: they are able to whistle), and the family pet sailed in, a Labrador. It struck Glen that there was more than one impossibility (or anachronism) embodied in this beast. First of all, you didn't have domestic mammals this early – no *Canis familiaris* yet, selectively bred out of jackals and wolves. Secondly, Labrador retrievers were from a stock of dog that originated in Newfoundland, which like the laurel shrubs beneath and around Glen's parked time machine was simply in the wrong hemisphere. Thirdly, dogs didn't fly, lacking wings, and yet this Lab – a friendly, good-natured animal, by the look of him – was easily a foot off the ground, banking as if on an aerial skateboard.

"Blackie has an antigrav collar," Arthur said, seeing Glen's eyes widen.

"You have antigravity?" Glen asked, incredulous. In 2067, antigravity wasn't even on the drawing board.

"Yes," said Arthur, "and mind transferal, too." To demonstrate, he switched minds with Glen by fingering a device at his belt that looked like a beeper.

Glen stared at himself. An eerie experience, to do this without a mirror. The face was older than he thought. The weary wrinkles of care, the sagging skin at the throat.

"Mind transferal is very entertaining," Arthur said out of Glen's mouth, "particularly, you know, in the bedroom." And the Neanderthal blushed. But since it was his face blushing, Glen's face, Glen could not be sure that the Neanderthals, in their own Neanderthal bodies, that is, were capable of blushing. So he didn't make a mental note.

Blackie the Lab sniffed at one of Glen's hands as he hovered, wagging. The dog, going by scent, didn't seem aware of the switch. Didn't know that he was actually sniffing a stranger's hand – though it wasn't a stranger's hand, was it? It was his master's hand, physically. The wagging of the thick, pointy tail made the dog drift back and forth a little like a black balloon in a breeze.

"Arthur," Glen began, and was surprised at how deep his voice was. "I have a question."

"Yes?" The Neanderthal was all attention, though on the outside it appeared that Glen was all attention.

"This mind transferring, do you do it also with... other kinds of men?" An idea was beginning to form. An audacious, breathtaking idea. An ominous idea.

His question, he realized immediately, was unnecessary. Hadn't Arthur just performed the transferal with him, who after all was no Neanderthal?

"You guessed," said Arthur. "Good for you." And with a wand that resembled a slender keychain flashlight he zapped Glen with some nerve ray that immobilized him. All Glen could do was breathe, blink, and occasionally swallow, while the Neanderthal turned with a chuckle and left.

It was obvious: the Neanderthal, in Glen's body, would take the time machine back (that is, forward) to 2067 and usurp his place in the Fanshaw household. Rebecca and Scott would never notice the difference, because they were of that age where children pay as little attention as humanly possible to their father. Fiona would know something was wrong but would not be able to put her finger on it. She would probably conclude that her husband was working too hard again at the Institute or else had some private trouble on his mind. She would be especially nice to him, therefore, bake him her special chocolate cream pie. Not for him, of course, not for Glen, but for that treacherous Neanderthal, Arthur. And Fiona would be especially nice to Arthur-disguised-as-Glen also in the bedroom, to cheer him up, wearing her black lace teddy and indulging him in the special foreplay she reserved for occasions like birthdays.

It took about an hour for the paralysis to wear off while Glen thought these dark thoughts. A bunch of Neanderthals came into the room, and Blackie greeted them with happy barks: a female and two children. Glen recognized all three from the snapshots. Betty, Little Bobby, and Baby Mary, who was a toddler now and appeared to have a load in her diaper.

But these were probably not really Neanderthals. They could be normal people, maybe even Americans from 2067, displaced in Neanderthal bodies and trapped here in the Middle Paleolithic just as he was. Or they could be – another possibility – contemporary Cro-Magnons. Yes, Glen thought, the Neanderthals hadn't gone extinct, it was the Cro-Magnons who went extinct, though nobody knew it because the Cro-Magnon bodies instead of the Neanderthal bodies survived in the cruel, patient course of Mother Nature's Darwinian biological evolution. And not one anthropologist in recorded history ever stopped to think that the body is one thing, the unseen mind another.

What an ingenious subterfuge: survival of the fittest not through the soma but via the psyche!

Then another piece of the puzzle clicked into place. The piece that was Clarence and Mabel Pedersen. His bow tie. Her strudel. Their social gaucheness. But of course. They were Neanderthals all along. No wonder Clarence was so insufferable with his slides and Mabel had never got the knack of finessing in bridge.

An enthusiastic Labrador tongue came out of sudden midair and gave Glen a big wet slurpy dog kiss full of doggy love right in his prognathous snout, and Baby Mary laughed.

Holidays

Jonathan Lethem

New Year's Eve

Dress the cat in bags and break out the plankton sandwiches! Another year is come and gone.

The first child born after the toll of midnight will frequently bear miniature antlers. They recede in the first six months and rarely reappear.

Tocog

Tocog (or 'Gocot') celebrates the arrival of the meatloaf clans. They come to the table dressed to the nines in their formal jacket of glazed pastry of glistening aspic. Who will be named the unrivaled queen of the traditional mixtures?

St. Sebastian's Day

There are explanations for the association of St. Sebastian's Day with gunplay. I am afraid no single explanation will be sufficient. It is inadvisable to go outdoors during St. Sebastian's Day.

April Fool's Day

April fools are no worse than October or March fools, yet we hang them in effigy from lampposts, and children construct tissue paper voodoo dolls of April fools to stain with food coloring and flush down the toilet. As recently as the 1930's living fools were still being lynched in maddened towns in the isolated parts of the midwest.

The Death of Toyland

Toyland was America's first Utopian community. The characteristic spires and gazebos of Toyland are now taken very much for granted, but were

unprecedented in their day, and struck some observers as profound, others as terrifying. Surrounded on three sides by hostile savages, isolated from other settlers by their strange beliefs and unusual practices, the citizens of Toyland took to the sea in rafts in 1822 and were never seen again. Though the Toylanders are little missed, the gradual death of Toyland was an inevitable consequence of their disappearance. Toyland was declared dead in 1956.

Auteur's Day

Directors are recognized as the true authors of films on Auteur's Day.

Arbor Day

George Washington Arbor and Jonathan Livingston Appleseed fought their famous duel on Arbor Day, in 1785. Arbor's words echo whenever lies are told. "I cannot tell the truth," he said. "I hated the man who died beneath the tree, but it was not my bullet than killed him."

Phone Day

Do you have any idea how many phone calls I already make on any given morning? I have no need of Phone Day.

Easter

Each year the warm-blooded species hold a week-long festival to honor the passing of the giant lizards who ruled the Earth for so many thousands of years. Voles and raccoons attack nested eggs in a reenactment of the original trauma. Will our guilt ever be appeased?

The proponents of Ash Wednesday, alternately, offer a theory that it was a gigantic volcanic eruption that exterminated the dinosaurs. In my view this belief is an indulgence.

Halloween

When the children appear at my door I invite them inside. I offer them plankton sandwiches and glasses of tea. Most of them leave quickly, but a few are still living with me, quiet as cats. They sleep in the loft rafters, and sometimes share in the housework and gardening.

Zeno's Day

Zeno's Day grows shorter every year, but it will never completely disappear.

Thankstaking

The vacuum cleaner has replaced the cornucopia in most traditional Thankstaking ceremonies.

Horizon

For seven nights the beehives are moved inside the house. The youngest child will be responsible for asking the bees the ritual questions, the eldest for hiding the honey. No fax machines are to be operated during the week of Horizon.

Christmas

Christmas holds us in its deathly grip. The dictionary defines it as 'the state of one who has committed an offense, esp. consciously' but I do not believe small children who experience Christmas are aware of their culpability. I ask, at what point does Christmas truly live in us? Is it when the men burst in to smother the flaming tree? Is it during the shaping and dressing of the tar baby? No one knows.

We all tremble in the grasp of Christmas. It is unsafe and unfair. We should not have to endure it. There should be a single Christmas, held at a previously agreed location, by a family of actors. It could be broadcast, safely mediated by the information handlers. Christmas ought to be enacted by astronauts, on the moon, or deep under the sea.

Perhaps the men who don the Santa suit understand Christmas, but they are never permitted inside the house. They gather in tribes under bridges and highways to build fires and eat plankton sandwiches, and their laughter stops when anyone comes close enough to hear.

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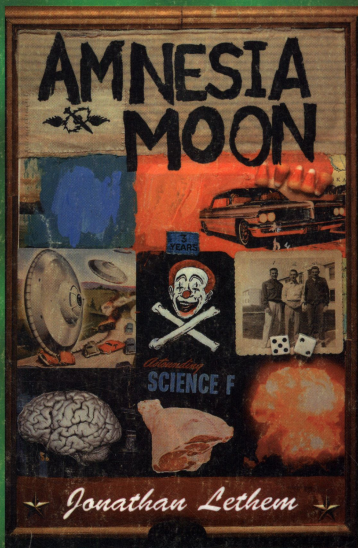
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