

Cassiopeia's Quest – Revelation;

■ Story Headers, Excerpts, and Images



Intro and Purpose:

This document is an abbreviated 52 page version of a larger 358 page collection of 10 short works of Historic fiction. This abbreviated promotional collection contains a story line header, an image of the story's female protagonist and a narrative excerpt selected from each of the 10 stories.

The larger collection, by Juneau painter, writer and science enthusiast Jerry Smetzer, is titled: ***Cassiopeia's Quest – Revelation***. The published collection was first released for sale at a local public market in Juneau, Alaska on November 29, 2019.

Copies are available at local book seller outlets in Juneau, and internationally as a download to a Kindle eBook reader or as a shippable Paperback from Amazon.

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INTRODUCTION

CASSIOPEIA: QUEEN OF AETHIOPEIA

Queen Cassiopeia has come down steadily and in something close to her present narrative form from her origins in the deep and swirling mists long before in the time described today as prehistory, she may have been a real queen.



By one account her story as embodied in her namesake constellation - as recorded in human history as a recognizable object in the night sky - has origins in Babylonian Astronomy perhaps five thousand years before the present day.

The events from which the story of the title character may have been taken could even have occurred much earlier. Perhaps around the time that upright, two-legged, ground-bound homo sapiens humans had begun to learn ways of expressing themselves beyond the grunts, shrieks and animal mimicry more typical of their tree-bound ancestors.

Perhaps when they began to look up toward the night sky they began to wonder, with the members of their clan or tribe in their primitive way, if there is some meaning in the patterns of the pinpoints of light above them that might explain their mysterious world to them.

The first story in this collection, *Savanna*, describes an incident in the lives of a small clan of hunter-gatherers. In their evenings they may have struggled to describe the images they might have seen with the more intense long-distance vision

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needed in the grasslands or as they might have imagined when they tried to fill in the gaps between the stars and other bright objects in the night sky 100,000 years ago.

By the time of our first story those hunter-gatherers may have been desperate in their quests for a greater understanding of all aspects of their world. Their world had begun to take shape for them by the expanded senses and memory that came along with their evolutionary descent from a life and a world lived mostly enfolded in the tops of trees to a life and a world lived mostly on the open mostly treeless grasslands of the savanna.

The story of Cassiopeia and her royal Aethiopian family is a simple one though horrific in some of its mythic details. It is mostly consistent from the beginnings of Greek mythology as it evolved from roots in oral storytelling and singing carried by minstrels from town to town in ancient times.

These oral stories evolved into the writings of one or more writers now known to us as the one Greek writer, Homer, in the stories of the Illiad and the Odyssey; stories that became known to us almost 500 years before the time of Alexander the Great of Macedon, a character in the third story, here, titled: ***Empire***, and 800 years before the time of Jesus of Nazareth, a character in the fourth story, here, titled: ***Faith***.

END

SAVANNA



Spring, 100,000 BCE. The East African Savanna. Ah'-Oom, A Talented Hunter, Will Lead An Expedition Along A River Toward A Herd Of Beasts; At Least One Of The Beasts Must Be Taken For The Meat, Fat, Bone, Hide, And Sinew Needed By The Members Of Her Small Clan Of Hunters And Gatherers.

====

Ah'-oom has taken the leg bone from him and put it in the strip of hide around her waist next to her father's ax. This way, she hopes it will look less like a weapon. Ar-gah' thinks grimly that he might have to quickly take the bone, fit it to his spear, and throw it with precision if their interaction with the strangers goes bad. Ah'-oom walks to within a few paces of the strangers and stops. She gives two soft barks of greeting in their direction. She notes that there are less of them than the fingers on her two hands. All carry spears, but they do not seem to be threatening. Two of the strangers, males, carry a piece of hide wrapped around several long pieces of wood. The two males also carry a long, thin piece of wood with a thin strip of hide tied to both ends, forming a bow. She does not know what to make of this.

There are three women in the group. Two carry branches, which she imagines they use to build shelter when necessary. The third woman carries a hide slung over her shoulder that appears to be used to carry food stuffs. One thing about the group of strangers is very peculiar to Ah'-oom. All of them except the oldest have very little

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hair on their bodies. She touches her own bare arm and feels comforted by this similarity.

Stranger still, when the other group speaks to each other, they move their mouths in ways that Ah'-oom feels she cannot. The others in her group are even less capable of making the sounds the strangers were making.

The strangers speak among themselves in very measured, rhythmic ways, almost like they are singing to each other as birds sing to each other. Ah'-oom becomes fascinated with their speaking. She steps forward to more closely watch the way their mouths work as these sounds come out.

As she does, the beautiful sounds stop. She halts and looks up in time to see the two males stretching the bow and hides to aim the sharpened long sticks at her. Ar-gah' is by her in a flash, but she stops him before he can reach for the legbone. She motions for him to stay behind her. Ar-gah' continues to reach for the legbone, though, and Ah'-oom grabs her stone hammer from her belt and taps at his foot. He grunts in pain and bends to rub his foot where the hammer had hit.

With Ar-gah' calmed, Ah'-oom turns back to the strangers. She puts both hands in the air, palms out, and bows her head to the ground in an act of submission. She kneels, still with her hands in the air, her head bowed. She can hear the bowed hide stretch, and she hopes that this will show the strangers that they mean no harm. She grabs Ar-gah''s leg and rubs downward to indicate that he must follow her lead. Ar-gah' understands the need to show submission, but he only bows his head and opens his palms toward the strangers. He suppresses his anger enough to put one of his hands on Ah'-oom's shoulder to show solidarity.

The oldest of the strangers is white-haired. He motions for his men to

Savanna

put down their bows and arrows. He approaches the hunters and invites Ah'-oom and Ar-gah' to rise. They do so and look into the eyes of the old man. He puts his hands on both their upper arms in turn, with Ah'-oom the first to receive his ministrations.

The old stranger motions to one of the women in his party carrying food. He picks some succulents out of her basket and offers them to Ar-gah' and Ah'-oom. The two hunters accept them and eat them hungrily. The old man then bids them all to sit and share their meager store of food. Ah'-oom tries, by pointing, to convey the existence of Bo-nah' and Bo-nee', and her need to rejoin them.

END

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COMMERCE



Late Summer, 3000 BCE. Memphis Is A Trading Center Between The Southern Valley And The Northern Delta Of The Nile River In Egypt. The River Is Crossed By The Overland Trade Route Connecting Western North Africa And Mesopotamia. Hesina, Daughter Of A Successful Commercial Warehouseman, Awaits A

Caravan Arriving From An Oasis In The Western Desert. The Caravan Carries Leather Goods, Dates, Fruits, And Other Goods

====

Memphis, my heart murmurs. Home.

Akar catches sight of me and calls to me as he climbs down, disappearing from view behind the curtain. “Hesina, I hope I’m not prevailing on you and your friend too much, but with two men down, I need your help rowing.”

My heart already has felt too full, and now it is bursting. I am proud to do so, and I look forward to telling my father of my active role in returning us safely home. I nod. “We will do what we can.”

Nena is awake, too, and is getting some food before beginning her turn at the top of the mast. Suddenly there is whistling in the air and

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a loud sharp cry from Nena. I turn from my conversation with Akar to gape at my friend, where she lies collapsed to the deck, with an arrow through her thigh. I cannot help screaming. I stopper my mouth with my hands to stop myself.

Paru, luckily, has a more even head than I. "Thieves!" he hisses. He moves immediately to his cache of weapons and motions for everybody on deck to stay down and get out their own weapons from their hiding places without showing them until he issues his orders. I stare in blind fright at my friend, who lies, biting back a yell, on the deck.

This is the worst thing any of us could have imagined. I believe that even Paru did not wish to command our vessel, but now, my friend is pierced by a marauding arrow and we must defend ourselves. Even I, who only feel at home with tablets and styli, must now defend my life with a spear.

Paru raises his head up above the lip of the deck until he can see and assess the threat. "A boat," he whispers. "Two archers."

"Can we capture it?" Akar asks hoarsely, from Paru's other side. "Take it as a prize?"

"No," Paru says. "They are moving too fast down the river." He turns to look over his shoulder and makes a motion to two men. They nod.

On his command, they rise with him and loose their arrows toward the hostile boat. All three arrows find their marks. I peek over the lip of the deck. The two archers on the hostile boat have fallen. None take their place.

Paru and I rush to Nena's side. Serenen brings a knife to cut the arrow away and a cloth to bind her wound and stop the bleeding. Paru is not yet sure whether the arrow has hit one of the vessels in the leg that carry a lot of blood, but he assures me that Serenen is the most

Commerce

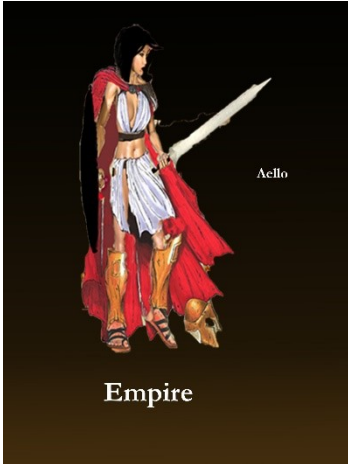
experienced healer on the boat.

Paru motions to Akar to get the men working on freeing the boat from the silt of the slough; Nena's life may depend on how fast he can get us to Memphis. The morning has suddenly gone terribly wrong. I fear for my friend, but I remember my promise to Akar. Nena is in good hands with Serenen. Along with all of Akar's guests and crew, I bend my back to help with the task of freeing the boat and rowing hard to get us to Memphis before nightfall.

END

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EMPIRE



Midwinter 330/329 BCE. Aello, A Young Woman, Is A Skilled Armorer With The Army Of Alexander The Great Of Macedon. Alexander Is Moving His Army Of 50,000 Soldiers And Camp Followers Into Southwestern Afghanistan Near Present-Day Kandahar. Aello Sees The Rugged Peaks Of The Hindu Kush Mountains, Far To The Northeast, Shrouded In Dark Storm Clouds.

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On the night before our departure, Kallias finally manages to get everyone together for the presentation of the sword. It will be a fairly small, fairly quiet gathering among some trees in a shadowed copse next to a stream. The presentation of a new sword hammered for a Pharaoh requires dignified simplicity rather than excess.

Petros has told me there will be no speeches, no formal introductions. The Pharaoh walks up to a small stage under a tent and takes his seat. He is dressed casually, though he does wear a bronze cuirass and his belt holds a short sword. His sun-darkened skin contrasts sharply with his curly, sun-blond hair. He is a handsome man, very sure of himself, though he sits as though he may need to jump into action at the slightest provocation. He is very young, as I observed on the cliffs of Lake Mareotis— only twenty-four years old. Petros and Kallias walk behind the Pharaoh, and to his right. A four-man detail of soldiers in full armor and weaponry spread themselves along the rear of the small audience of favored officers and senior staff.

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We stand in front of the short platform that Alexander has now ascended. Barak, Nikola, and I are in clean white robes, with jewelry and headdresses suitable for an audience with the Pharaoh. Tabu stands at the center of the gathering, his forearms extended in front, his two huge hands cradling the sword waist high, a piece of white cloth draped over it.

Kallias whispers something in Tabu's ear, and Tabu, clearly overwhelmed with the dignity of the ceremony and his place in it, steps forward, approaches the Pharaoh, and kneels with his head bowed down, the sword extended toward the Pharaoh in presentation.

Alexander rises from his seat. "Please stand, Tabu. I am told you are a maker of fine steel swords. To a soldier like me, such a man deserves to stand eye to eye, even though your height puts your eyes a ways above mine. What do you have for me?"

Tabu seems afraid to open his mouth in response. He cradles the sword with his left arm and takes the cloth away from the sheathed sword with his right. He drops the cloth, but keeps his head bowed while he extends the sword to the Pharaoh. Alexander clutches the hilt with his right hand and pulls the sword from its sheath. Tabu drops his arms to his side. His eyes remain downcast as he backs away.

Alexander puts the sheath aside and turns to his left away from Kallias and Petros, swinging and twirling the sword with his wrist as he steps off the platform and moves away from the gathering. Suddenly, he swings the sword hard, first left, then right. He walks to a tree as big around as his forearm.

He swings the edge of the sword, hard, at the trunk. The tree top falls. Before anybody can react, he continues in the same motion by swinging at the tree again backhanded. Another piece of the trunk

Empire

falls. He tosses the sword in the air and catches it with his left hand. In one sweeping motion he turns and aims his thrust at another tree. The top of the other tree falls. Again, he swings in a single backhanded motion, and another piece of the second trunk falls.

He turns and calls out to Kallias, “come face me my brother and friend. Be ready to fight.” Kallias does as he is bade by his King. He is an excellent swordsman, and I am told that Alexander often uses him as a sparring partner in swordplay. I imagine that these kinds of intense matches are how they keep themselves in fighting trim.

They are also important in testing personal swords. The bronze, wide-bladed kopis held by Kallias is a personal killing sword, a standard design distributed among some of the mounted infantry and all of the officers of the Greek army. By contrast there is this new sword hammered, personally, by Tabu into sharpened steel.

Alexander walks back toward the group, again lightly swinging and twirling the blued steel while he examines the length of it. He reads the engraving aloud: “Plato is dear to me, but dearer still is truth.” He gives a smart grin. As he returns the sword to its sheath, he says, “A fine statement by my teaching master, Aristotle; a fine statement for a fine weapon. Thank you, Tabu. I hope you and your master will agree to join us on our campaign to the east.” As Alexander turns back to face the approaching Kallias, now armed and armored, Tabu speaks. “Thank you, my Pharaoh. It is my great honor to serve you.”

Alexander’s first thrust to the chest is easily parried by Kallias, who then moves to block Alexander’s next killing thrust low toward his belly. My breath is drained away. I sense my open mouth and think to myself that I must close it. These two men are closely matched and well aware of the many practiced and usually successful thrusts and parries that they have had to both execute and also protect against.

After a few minutes of intense swordplay, Alexander suddenly strikes,

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hard, at Kallias' kopis. The bronze blade breaks under the power of Alexander's stroke. The broken blade falls to the ground and lays there. Alexander's theatrical nature breaks through as he thrusts his sword against Kallias' now undefended neck. He stops within a finger's width of raw flesh, and then lays the flat of the blade against the skin of Kallias' neck.

Alexander bends to pick up the broken blade of the kopis. I can see that there are several dents in the cutting edges, and, ultimately, a break where the cutting edge of the steel blade connected dents on the opposite sides of the bronze blade. I share an excited look with Tabu. Our weapon is clearly superior. "An excellent test, my brother and friend," Alexander says. "This tells me all I need to know about this steel blade that our new friend Tabu has crafted for us."

After thanking Tabu once more, Alexander departs quickly with his four bodyguards and Kallias. Tabu seems embarrassed, but very pleased with Kallias' attention.

He joins my family, and we walk back to our quarters feeling great pride in the fine piece of work Tabu has made.

END

FAITH



Spring, 20 CE. In Jerusalem, The Impetuous Gila And Her Older Sister, Ziva, Meet Jesus Of Nazareth On A Quiet Street Corner Near The Lower Market. Later, Under Clandestine Circumstances, The Girls And Their Family Are Taken Into Domestic Slavery In The Family Home Of A Roman Centurion.

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Quintus waits to continue speaking until after Tribune Theodorus has left the room. “You have done very good work on this, Decanus Kanutus, but I think your work has only just begun. I want you to somehow arrange for me to get a closer personal look at Avraham and his family. Since you are now acquainted with him on a personal level, a chance meeting in the market might serve my purposes very well.”

“This is a surprise request, sir. If I may inquire, what are those purposes “You have told me that Avraham has spent many months plying his leather trade in Galilee and is probably better acquainted with Jesus than most other Jews here. I’m thinking it might be good to get a man like Avraham and his immediate family back to Rome to help us educate ourselves and our superiors about these Jews and their beliefs.”

He pauses and grows thoughtful. “You don’t need to discuss this with anybody else, but I believe that their belief in one god will corrode the foundations of our faith, and our beliefs in our many

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gods.

Eventually the Jewish faith in one god will replace them. Rome needs to understand the political force these Jews represent, and must begin preparations for dealing with the consequences of their use of Jewish power.”

“You may count on me, sir,” Kanutus says. “Despite what we faced in Rome last year, I have to admit to a certain admiration for the Jewish faith, and the persistence of it among people who have little else of value that they can claim, though among my fellow legionnaires, sir, those beliefs and the threats they pose to their personal gods do not usually sit well.”

The day that Quintus Caecilius and Avraham meet dawns warm and sunny. Quintus is in a corner of the open-air square just off the crowded market. He sits at a table near a large shade tree, sipping a small mug of wine. His uniform is casual, designed to show that he is a field commander in the legion, but with no obvious insignia of rank. Except for a short sword in his belt, he is unarmed.

He tears off a piece of bread and dips it into a shallow dish of chopped olives, oil, and spices. Quintus takes note of a group of ten or twelve ravens hopping around a piece of bread on the street a few steps away. One of the ravens, an odd-looking fellow with a white feather on top of his right wing, looks up to take note of Quintus, and hops sideways toward him. Once able to secure a piece of bread from the table, the raven hops off.

Decanus Kanutus appears at the edge of the square. With him is the subject of the previous evening’s conversation: Avraham, the father of Gila and Ziva. Quintus motions them over to his table. Decanus Kanutus approaches and offers a formal Roman salute.

Faith

“Good morning, sir. May I present Avraham.

Avraham was working with the leather smiths this morning. At my invitation, he has agreed to come with me to meet with you.”

“Very good, Decanus.” Quintus motions Avraham to a chair at his table. “Please sit down, Avraham. You may return to your duties, Decanus. I will find my own way back to the Mount of Olives.”

“Very good, sir.”

The other man looks wary, so Quintus says, “Please relax, Avraham. This is not an interrogation. Neither I nor any of my troops mean any harm to you or your family. I do understand that some of the legionnaires in the market are concerned about your casual attitudes toward our gods, but that is no part of the conversation I want to have with you now. I have always made it clear that I will not tolerate any complaints of harassment by any legionnaires over conflicting Jewish opinions about Roman gods. “So. For purposes of conversation, do we have at least this temporary understanding?”

“I feel very disadvantaged here. Why have you asked me to speak with you?” Avraham asks. Quintus pauses to gaze at him. “I don’t see any point in wasting your time. I will be leaving Jerusalem within the next two months, and I am looking for a Jewish family familiar with the Judean and Syrian provinces to come to Rome with me and work as household staff to myself and my wife.”

“Why don’t you simply take us as slaves during the dark of night? That is the usual Roman way, is it not?” Avraham asks.

Quintus cannot be sure if he detects malice in the man’s tone. He proceeds with caution. “Perhaps it will be necessary to take you to Rome as slaves, or so it will need to appear to others, but that is not my preference. I can assure you and your family that you will be decently compensated while you work for me, whether as slaves or free. If you work well, we can discuss the return of you and your

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family to Jerusalem after some period of service, and I can personally guarantee some measure of status and some amount of compensation to help you resettle here again, or in Rome if that becomes your wish.”

“You are making a very generous offer,” Avraham says. “I have no idea how to respond to you, and I have no idea why you are making such a generous offer to a total stranger who, by his culture and upbringing, may have hostile intent toward you and everything you hold dear, and who could readily lay in wait for an opportunity to kill you... and your family.”

The two men pause and take in the other’s countenance for a moment. Avraham, a practical joker at heart, is unable to keep a straight face for longer than that, and, as he looks away his frown cracks into a smile. Quintus, relieved that it appears he will not have to take offense as any good Roman should, also smiles.

He looks into the eyes of Avraham as he composes himself and offers apology. “I apologize to you sir. I have taken poor advantage of your graciousness and hospitality. Please forgive me.”

“Accepted. Decanus Kanutus said you were a reasonable man,” Quintus says, “but very sharp and very persistent. I will make a guarantee to you now that your return to Jerusalem with your family is assured, though we will need to negotiate a date... perhaps three or four years into the future. When you return, you and your family will enjoy considerable status among your peers, in whichever ways you and your peers define that term. You have my personal assurance of that.

“Let us leave aside the questions of motive, intent, and trust for now. Instead, let me describe the work I have in mind. I promise you, when the time is right, that I will tell you all that I have in mind as reasons for making this offer, and for making the offer to you in particular.

Faith

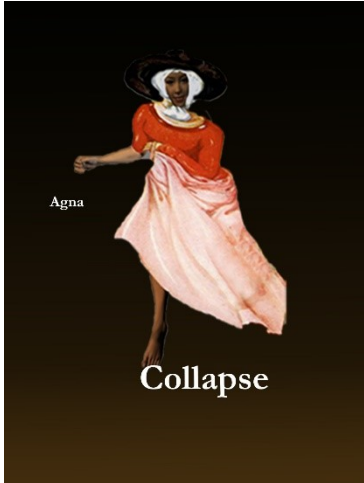
First of all, I'm sure you realize that men in the upper reaches of Roman society often have extensive Jewish staff in their households, and that they are usually treated quite well, whether slave or free. "My estate is just outside Rome on the way to the port of Ostia. I have been away from Rome and away from my estate for over a year. My wife, Cornelia, is taking care of the properties, but when I return, her staff will return to their own properties.

"If I don't bring staff back with me, I will need to recruit in Rome, and that will be very difficult and very time consuming at this time of year. I worry that I won't find enough good staff to turn the soil, plant my crops, and husband my stable of horses.

END

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COLLAPSE



Summer, 1350 CE. Agna, A Young Woman, Works As A Helper In A Small Bakery Near The Docks Of Hamburg, Germany. Suddenly, A Cry Of Plague Rings Through The Streets. She Grabs Her Small Bag Of Belongings, And Her Few Precious Bits Of Parchment, Her Pen, And A Small Bottle Of Ink For Her Attempts At Writing. She Tries To

Escape The Black Death, Which Is Spreading From The Docks Thanks To A Cargo Ship Carrying The Bubonic Plague.

====

The Baltic herring fishery is very productive. My parents would say that the herring form the commercial basis for the creation of The Hansa itself. The herring is preserved in salt, which comes from mines in Luneburg. Whenever a herring wagon from Lübeck must compete for roadway with a salt wagon from Luneburg, traffic on the narrow path gets tangled as one tries to get past the other.

I know many of the teamsters on these wagons because my family helps them gut and salt the herring or pound iron into the shapes necessary to make reinforcing joints and steel wheel straps for their wagons. I do not want to show my face to some of them because they have not treated my family or me well in the past, and their actions toward me now that I am on my own might be even less desirable. I believe my most important possession is the dark hood and cloak that warms my body, hides my face, and hides my femininity from those who might mean me harm.

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“Is that you, Agna?” a man on a wagon passing in my direction calls my name. I think I recognize the voice, but I am afraid to turn to see who it might be.

He persists. “Agna, it’s Kurt. What are you doing on this road?”

I look up to see Kurt, a friend from my village. I smile but am still unsure how to answer his inquiry. Kurt calls out to his teamster to pull the oxen and wagon to the side and stop. He jumps down from the wagon and comes over to greet me.

Both of us are too shy to hug or touch in public, but we do exchange smiles and warm glances with our greetings. Finally, Kurt asks again what I am doing traveling by myself along this road with its many thieves and dangerous men.

“I am walking to Hamburg. I have decided that I want to see if I can find better work, since there is not much work in Lübeck for young girls from the villages. I left the hotel where my relatives generously allowed me to work dumping shit for these past several months. I am very happy to see you, Kurt.”

“I am happy to see you as well,” Kurt responds. “But the road is dangerous, and you should not travel alone. Please come with me on the wagon. I can watch out for you, and I know some people in Hamburg who may be able to help you find work and housing.”

This is the best prospect I’ve had in a while, so I climb up on the back of the wagon and sit next to Kurt on top of a barrel of fish. We talk about things that have happened to us since we last saw each other in RabanHaven many months ago.

The teamster lightly cracks his whip, and the ox team leans into the wooden shoulder harness and moves the wagon back onto the road.

Talking is hard. The road is bumpy and rutted by deep tracks in some

Collapse

places, and it is deep with mud in others. After a while any conversation seems like too much trouble. There is some woolen cloth in the front of the wagon. I retrieve the cloth, pull it around myself, and then lie down on a plank that Kurt has laid on the tops of two barrels for me. In spite of the rough ride, my exhaustion gets the best of me. I fall immediately asleep. Later, I wake up to find Kurt shaking me. He is whispering hoarsely in my ear. "Aгна. Get up. Please get up!"

"What is it, Kurt?" I mumble.

"Knights. They are up ahead searching the wagons for illegal goods." I jolt upright. The knights are of the Teutonic Order. My parents told me they are sometimes contracted by the business interests of the Hansa, not to mention the Holy Roman Empire, to make sure the commerce moving along this particular road is approved for transport. "I need to know if you have papers that authorize you to be on the road," Kurt says. "If not, I can tell them you are a family friend from RabanHaven, and you work in Lübeck helping me organize these shipments of herring." My head spins at this news. "I didn't know I needed papers to walk along the road. Will I be in trouble if I don't have papers?"

I've learned that the teamster's name is Aldrick. He turns to the back of the wagon, then pulls his hood aside to look at me. He is a much older man than I had thought. His face is wrinkled, and the eyelids and the bags under his reddened eyes actually droop. I recognize Aldrick as a steel smith in RabanHaven who has worked his trade there for most of my life. He has done work with my family several times. He has seemed to always be ancient over all the years that I have known him. His voice is raspy as he speaks to me.

"It will go better for you if you don't say anything, miss, and you should try and keep your face hidden. These knights all had early family members killed or wounded by the Mongols in their last

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battle with them in Poland a hundred years ago. They have long memories, and they might start getting excited if they look too closely at your eyes.”

I turn to Kurt. “Give me some dirt and grease from the bottom of the wagon around the axle. I’ll smear it on my face and try to hide my eyes. I don’t think a Teutonic knight will find a dirty little girl attractive enough to ask questions. If they do ask, I’ll start to cry and wipe the tears away with my cloak. I’ll look at you with a very sorrowful look. You can tell them I am a little thick and a little afraid of them. That should further discourage them from wanting to talk to me.”

When Kurt returns my stare, I see that he is impressed with how much I’ve grown, how street smart I’ve become, since we last saw each other. The two knights are on horseback, and they are inching closer all the time. They are wearing their white capes over white singlets with a black cross emblazoned on the front. Both are armed with long swords.

Two squires carry out their orders by crawling into the wagons, asking for papers, and, sometimes, demanding that a case or carton be opened for inspection. When they stop at Kurt’s wagon, a squire asks him a few questions. He seems satisfied with Kurt’s answers, but then asks about my relationship to him. I am looking down and away from the eyes of the knights and the squires. Kurt tells them why I am with him. The story is a good one because it is mostly true.

I glance up briefly when I hear the squire talking to Kurt about me, but I quickly look away. The squire asks no further questions. He jumps down from the wagon and walks alongside the knights to the next wagon in the line alongside the road.

I cannot help but be impressed with the knights’ dress, their carriage, and their demeanor. They look too young to be much concerned with losing a distant relative to the Mongols so many years ago. It is at this

Collapse

point that Aldrick turns again to speak to me in his gravelly voice.

“These knights are trained from birth to believe that they won a decisive victory at Leignitz in Poland. The truth is that the knights’ armies were destroyed by the Mongols. The knights claim their victory is the reason the Mongols retreated from Europe a few months later and never returned. The Mongols left Europe because their Great Kahn, Obedai, had died in their capital at Karakorum. They returned there in order to protect their political interests.

END

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REBIRTH



Summer, 1475 CE. Orabella, A Once Homeless Young Woman Now Apprenticed To The Studio Of Verrocchio, Paints A Fresco For The Home Of Lorenzo De Medici In The Hills Above The Tuscan City Of Florence. She Has The Help Of Leonardo Da Vinci In The Design Of The Work.

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She is an orphan, a girl of the streets living in a poor section of Florence, near the industrial docks along the Arno. She does not know her parents, nor can she say with any certainty the last time she felt close to a grown man or woman, other than the young woman, a prostitute catering to the upper classes, who took her in when she was barely more than a toddler.

Their paths had crossed early one morning on Florence's back streets, as the taverns closed, and the shop stalls opened. The orphan had suddenly appeared beside the prostitute and taken her hand. The orphan looked up into the eyes of the prostitute who was, at first, not sure what to do with this small child. As she walked to her small but clean room after a night of entertaining the guests of her most important client, she was not at all sure she had the energy to deal with this.

After succumbing to the charm and pathos and need for decent clothes and a meal in the orphan's eyes that morning, the prostitute—she was called Magdalene—cared for the girl, teaching her the alphabet and basic reading and writing. She often took her around to see the sights, including the statues along the major piazzas

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and the churches in the wealthier neighborhoods, though, thinking it wasn't her place, she never gave the child a name.

Unfortunately, after a few years, the young prostitute grew ill and died in the orphan's young and caring arms.

After being turned out of the comfort of the prostitute's chambers, the orphan did not know where to turn. She had to develop intelligence, wit, and the physical and mental strength needed to survive. For a long time, her closest friends were other children of the streets. Most had the skills and toughness of the orphan, but none had her powerful desire to rise above their squalid lives. The child dreamed of rising, transformed, into the beautiful world Magdalene had exposed her to in her earliest years.

The girl does not have a clear memory of her former life until, one day, she and her young friends are walking along the streets toward one of the city's cleaner public markets. She is impressed by all of the fine clothes and refined speaking of the shoppers out on this sunny day. Though it has been a few years, a vision of Magdalene crosses in front of her eyes. She has to turn away from her mates, her eyes suddenly flooded with tears. Once she composes herself, the group goes back to the important business of lifting valuables from the purses and pockets of the wealthy.

In their frequent forays into the more well-to-do parts of the city, the knowledge the girl has gained from walking tours with her now-deceased mentor become a guide to the most crowded areas, where the pickings will be particularly fruitful for her tiny band of pickpockets and petty thieves.

After a few harrowing escapes across rooftops and through back alleys, with tradesmen, servants, and armed guards in pursuit, her

Rebirth

young friends grow to respect all that she knows that is important to their independence and well-being. She knows the wealthy neighborhoods well, and she knows how to avoid the scrutiny of the many private security guards in them, who are constantly on the lookout for ragamuffins. The girl's friends soon begin to call her "Orabella," which means beautiful gold.

Other than the many sweet endearments from Magdalene, Orabella is the first name the girl has ever had that she can call her own. The young street tough who first gave her the name gave it with an attitude of friendliness that she did not understand. She had shown him no special favor. The tough—his name was Carlo—was overweight, dressed poorly, had pimples and a vulgar mouth.

Even so, Orabella could not ignore the fact that Carlo seemed to have the respect of the others. He was the one who collected the day's stolen goods and redistributed them to those who, in his judgment, had the greatest need for whichever item had been taken. Any leftovers were held by Carlo to be distributed on another day in response to a different and more urgent need.

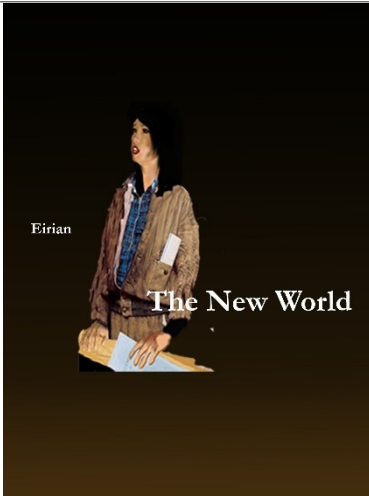
Nobody argued about this for at least as long as Orabella had been with them.

Carlo protected her whenever any of the others tried to physically push her around or talk dirty to her or call her ugly names. When Carlo stepped into a situation involving Orabella, the others always stepped away.

END

Jerry Smetzer

THE NEW WORLD



Early Spring, 1905 CE. Eirian Ross, A Woman Retiring From Her Post At Cavendish Laboratory, Looks Back Over Her Bright Career. It Began When She Was Trained, Surreptitiously, In Advanced Mathematics At The University Of Edinburgh, After Working With Scientist James Clerk Maxwell At His Rural Estate In Glenlair, A Day's Train

Ride South. Together, They Will Test And Document The Partial Differential Equations That Maxwell Has Developed To Define Electromagnetism. Eirian Also Reflects On Her Time Studying The Writings Of Ada Lovelace And Attending Offbeat Lectures By Charles Dodgson.

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Whenever in London, Maxwell took every opportunity to meet with Charles Babbage and the aging Faraday to discuss the future of science in this new industrial age—an age based on coal, the manufacture of steel, and the technology of the steam engine, and, of greatest importance to their common interests, the telegraph.

I remember a visit to the Oxford University campus in July of 1862. I and my childhood friend from Corsock, Bethan, had been invited by Maxwell to travel with him to that ancient and prestigious university to attend a summer lecture by Charles

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Dodgson on the mathematics of Euclid.

Rumor had it, according to Maxwell, that Dodgson intended, someday, to put the axioms of Euclid into a Shakespearean theatrical format; each axiom would start a new scene. Maxwell thought Dodgson's idea was preposterous, but also thought the lecture would give us an interesting insight into the weird, wonderful, and magical mind of Charles Dodgson.

Dodgson was a sometime mathematician, many times a storyteller, always brilliant and totally creative in bringing far-flung ideas into his ambit as senior lecturer in mathematics at Oxford. His skills as a mathematician were not stellar, and due to his stuttering, his ability to present and lecture was erratic at best, but he fashioned wonderful and fantastic characters, figures, and situations to bring dimensions, color, smells, and life to his narratives. In the lecture we attended, he sprinkled references to hookah- smoking, talking blue caterpillars; disappearing Cheshire cats; waist coated white rabbits; and officious dodo birds with abandon.

Maxwell believed there was a connection between heaven and earth, and he had dedicated his life to finding it. Despite the Scottish conservatism and religion in his point of view, Maxwell sometimes let his mind wander along the pathways suggested by Dodgson's imaginative creatures and fantastic events.

Maxwell had other business with Babbage and Faraday in Cambridge and London on this trip, so he excused himself after the Dodgson lecture to catch a train for the sixty-five-mile trek to Cambridge.

Despite his fairly clumsy presentation, Bethan and I decided to see if we could get some time face-to- face with Dodgson. We knew little about him except for the interesting stories that Maxwell had told us.

After the lecture, we approached Dodgson with a couple of carefully

The New World

thought-out questions, but before we could pose them, he immediately invited us to join him and some of his friends on Oxford's rowing ponds. His friends included H.J. Liddell, dean of Christ Church, Dodgson's College; Liddell's wife, Lorina; and their daughter, Alice.

As an afterthought, Dodgson invited one of his bright young freshmen in mathematics, Sean McCabe, who had attended the lecture, to act as our guide and interpreter.

Sean was a nice young man, but he seemed very shy. When he introduced himself to Bethan and me, he stuttered as well. "H-h-hello. M-m my name is Sean. I'm-m-m happy to meet you."

I had been working to take the hard edges off the deep Scottish brogue I inherited from my parents and our surrounding farming community, but it was still strong enough that I could not hope to fool a member of the English upper class like Sean. Because Sean stuttered, however, I hoped he would be sympathetic to my difficulties with speech and dialect on the grounds of this most traditional of English institutions.

We introduced ourselves and walked together to the boating ramps.

Later, as Sean stepped away to speak with someone, Bethan turned to me and whispered, "Sean is a very nice-looking young man. Do you think he will someday get over his stutter and his shyness?"

"Yes, I think so. Perhaps he stutters because his mentor Dodgson stutters," I replied.

As the day on the rowing pond evolved into an afternoon of tea and conversation, I took note of Dodgson's fondness for the young Alice. She was not more than ten years old, but very pretty, charming, and quite mature for her age.

"They seem quite infatuated with each other," I said to Bethan as

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we looked upon Dodgson and Alice. Dodgson had found a deep hole among the roots of a large tree near the stream, where rowers passed by in their punts. Alice leaned over to look into the hole, and it looked for an instant that she might fall in. Dodgson caught her by her waist and pulled her back out. She looked at him and began to giggle.

Dodgson stepped a few paces away and sat on a nearby bench. He looked toward Alice, then motioned for her to come over. He pulled a set of loose notes out of his satchel. She sat down beside him as he began to read to her the story that would, according to Sean, become *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

"Look at the father," Bethan said. "He seems a little uncomfortable with their behavior."

I looked in the direction of Alice's parents for a moment. "But not so much that he wants to try to break it up. I wonder what's in that manuscript."

"Maybe more strange caricatures of Mother Goose rhymes or the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales, like in his lectures."

I turned to my friend. "Before we decided to come down here, Dr. Maxwell told me that, in addition to the business at Cambridge, the other reason he wanted to come down to Oxford was that Dodgson had been working on a book of fantasy, and James thought I might enjoy meeting Dodgson. He told me to think of the trip as a bonus payment for the editing and testing work, I have been doing for him on the equations. I am glad you decided to come with me, Bethan."

"I'm very happy you invited me to come with you, Eirian. Thank you." We held hands for a moment, then Sean returned and suggested that they join the others for refreshments. When I asked

The New World

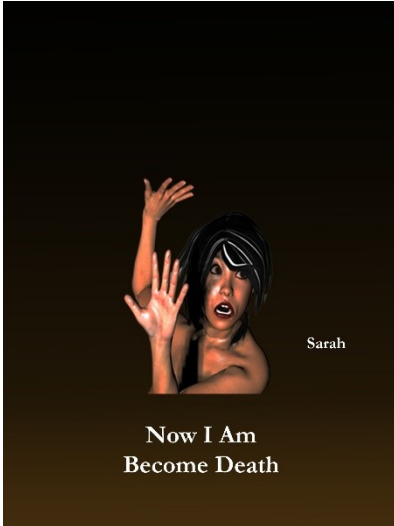
him about the nature of Mr. Dodgson's planned manuscript, he explained that Mr. Dodgson was writing a book of fantasy that featured the girl.

"He is concerned about her reaction to it," Sean said, "so he reads from it, to her, at every opportunity."

END

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NOW I AM BECOME DEATH



Fall, 1943 CE. Sarah, A Bright, Young Physicist And Mathematician, Works With Richard Feynman At The Manhattan Project Lab On A Desert Mesa Called Los Alamos Near Santa Fe, New Mexico. Under Feynman's Loose Supervision, Sarah Will Design The Procedures, And Then Test

The Mathematical Formulations Needed To Measure Experiments With Bomb Architectures, Container Shapes, And Expansion Rates Of Bomb Blast Effects.

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Sometimes, I get bogged down in a tangled pursuit of solutions to one of the problems typical of Feynman's requests. During my advanced courses in calculus, I had learned to recognize the point in the pursuit of a solution when I needed to stop trying to force a path to an answer and take a mental break. Everybody doing this kind of work has to know how to do this. I would get up from my worktable and walk around, or I would lie down on the couch and take a nap, or I would lean back in my chair and begin a process of woolgathering over things that I knew to be more pleasant.

I have often recalled the day—Friday, April 30, 1943—that I arrived at the train station in Lamy, New Mexico, after a three-day trip from Chicago. Lamy, a tiny town with a big railway station and a big hotel, the Ortiz, was as close as the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad ever got to New Mexico's state capital. The engineers who laid out

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the route realized that the hills around Santa Fe made it impossible to run the railway directly into the city.

A small spur line had been extended in 1896, and many new arrivals like me took this rail spur the fourteen miles from Lamy into the small station in Santa Fe. Feynman wanted me to get the best possible treatment, such as it was, on my way to the mesa with its hectic, gritty, muddy world and its barracks-style buildings known to the civilian and military inhabitants as Los Alamos.

I was approached by a civilian driver on the station platform, who greeted me by name. I did not know the driver, but I had been thoroughly briefed on the security protocols and procedures on the Project. I knew a strange man in civilian clothes would approach me, speak my first name, and take my bag to a car parked nearby. Once in the car, I was then driven to a pleasant residential compound at 109 East Palace Drive near downtown Santa Fe.

The entry to the compound was marked by a small, blue sign with red lettering that read, enigmatically, **U.S. ENG** on the top line, and then, on the bottom: **RS**. This was the only point of contact in the city for almost all civilian and military personnel, and for much of the material passing through Santa Fe on the way to Los Alamos.

Once inside the compound, I was taken to a small office in the back. There, Dorothy McKibbin greeted me warmly.

"I think you must be Sarah," Dorothy said with a smile. "Welcome to Santa Fe."

"Thank you," I responded. "Here is a copy of the orders that I think I am supposed to give you."

"Yes, thank you. You will have to fill out this form so I can give you a letter of authority to go up to Los Alamos."

I had just come out of the warm and rather carefree embrace of

Now I Am Become Death

academia. I was not used to the possible demand that I “fill out” an official-looking—not to mention officious and scary-looking—military form.

Jokingly, I asked, “What happens if I don’t fill out the form?” “Then I can’t issue your pass,” Dorothy responded with a smile that suddenly looked a little less warm. “I’ll let you think about what might happen on a top secret military base if you are caught without documented authorization for your right to be here.”

I felt admonished. I took the form, looked Dorothy in the eye, and apologized for my devil-may-care attitude. I took my time so that I could carefully fill it out.

As I turned to go back outside to find my driver and my ride up to the mesa, Dorothy left me with this parting comment:

“I think you will do fine. Be glad that you had a more or less friendly introduction to project security. Up on the mesa there are some people in uniform with guns, and they can sometimes get very excited when they think there is a security problem standing in front of them. Be careful and good luck.”

I waved and thanked Dorothy. Obviously, she carried a lot of weight on the project. I expected that I would see her again. When that happens, I will know better than to ask a dumb question.

END

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CHAOS



Spring, 1967 CE. Rafaela Barardi, Trained In Medicine To Become An ER Doctor, Instead Goes To Vietnam As An Army Nurse To Find Her Cousin, An Army Green Beret. He Is On A

Confidential Mission And Out Of Contact With His Headquarters. Rafaela Fears He May Be Missing In Action Somewhere In The Highlands Near The DMZ and the Laotian border. Meanwhile, Aleck Morris, A Reporter For A Midwestern Magazine, Gets Approval To Cover The Conflict From Within “The shit.” When He Winds Up Wounded In A front line MASH Unit after a battle near Khe San, He Soon Becomes Involved In His Nurse’s Mission To Find Her Cousin, No Matter What the consequences.

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RAFAELA.

In early June, the sun was just coming up behind us as we drove toward the Rocky Mountains. We were somewhere in the Utah desert west of Salt Lake City, driving fast across a long, flat, dry lakebed. I had bypassed the mufflers, and my speedometer read a little over 100 miles per hour. We had picked up a hitchhiker at the University of Chicago to help with the driving. He had long, scraggly hair, a tie-dyed T-shirt, and ratty old shorts and sandals. He also carried a large jar of multicolored pills. He was asleep behind me. Matty was riding shotgun, also asleep.

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I gloried in the freedom—and the sound, through my open window—of the screaming engine and open pipes echoing off the surrounding hills. Suddenly, I noticed the blip-blip-blip of a flashing red light in the rearview mirror. I knew our Ford was fast, but it was about fifty miles to the Nevada border. I was briefly tempted to make a run for it, but I probably couldn't outrun the patrol car before my souped-up engine blew up. Worse, if I was caught doing something like that it would mean the end of my careful plans to go looking for Rafael.

I pulled over, as did the police officer. The officer approached our car. He was calm but frowning. "Did you see the twenty-five-mile speed limit in the town you just blew through?" "I'm sorry, officer. I saw a couple of buildings, but I don't remember seeing a town. I know I am over the speed limit, but I'm a medical doctor, and I am trying to get to Fort Ord for some orientation to my duty station in Vietnam. I'm running late, and the road ahead looked clear and straight, and there were no cars coming." Whatever little fib it takes, I thought to myself.

The officer looked skeptical. "Do you have some papers that will confirm any of that?"

"Yes. I have a letter of congratulations from my medical school. I also have a letter from the army telling me where to go when I have my personal business wrapped up."

"Let me see 'em," he said. "By the way, who's your friend in the back?" He pointed at the scraggly form in the back seat, the bottle of pills hugged tightly to his body.

"A hitchhiker we picked up in Chicago to help with driving and gas money. He told us the pills are diet supplements."

After looking at the papers for a moment the officer said, "Look. I am going to do you a favor by letting you go with a warning, but

Chaos

please do me a favor by reconnecting your mufflers and by trying to stay somewhere close to the speed limit while you are in Utah.”

I felt a flood of relief. I had gotten more stressed by the situation than I thought I would. “I will, officer. Thank you very much.” The officer stood back from the car. I flipped the lever that reconnected the mufflers and pulled back onto the main highway. Matty lifted an eyelid.

“Hey, Rafe. I’m really impressed. “

“Cool,” said the fellow in the back seat.

The remainder of the trip across the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada was routine, with the exception of a wreck on one of the mountain passes west of Lake Tahoe. A car had gone through a railing and rolled down a hill. An ambulance and a state trooper were parked next to the break in the railing. Matty was driving.

“Pull up to that state trooper,” I said. I rolled my window down and spoke to the officer. “I’m just out of medical school, sir, trained for emergency medicine. Do you need help?” “Yeah, maybe so, but it looks pretty bad. Hold on for a second.” The officer turned to his walkie-talkie. “I’ve got a young woman up here who says she is a med school graduate. Can she do anything useful down there?”

The connection had a lot of static, but a voice came through. “I don’t think so. His neck is at a bad angle, and I can’t get any vital signs. I don’t think there is much to do but cleanup and paperwork.” “I’d like to go down anyway, officer.” He looked closely at me. “Knock yourself out,” he finally said.

But there wasn’t much anybody could do. I could see at a glance that nothing could be done to bring the twisted form back to life. The ambulance crew thanked me for coming down the hill, and for being willing to stay in contact. The three of us drove on.

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ALECK

“Get up. We have to move... NOW!”

I rolled over to grab my helmet and rifle. Somebody grabbed my shirt and pulled me up. It was barely light enough to see, so I was having trouble keeping my feet under me and moving in the right direction. A man I assumed was Mike was crouched and running ahead of me.

“Where’s Jack?” I whispered.

“He’s ahead of us. Don’t worry, we have him,” Mike said. “Keep quiet.

Charlie’s coming.”

We kept crouching, ducking, and trying to move as fast as we could through the mud and brush. The rising sun was behind us, so I knew we were running in the general direction of Khe San, but I had no idea how far we had to go. After about a half hour of running, my feet began to drag. Mike noticed and stepped off the trail where the brush was partially cleared. He pulled me into some denser undergrowth.

“How you doin’, cowboy?” he asked, his voice low.

I wanted to throw my weapon and extra clips away because they were heavy and cutting into my skin, but I knew I couldn’t. “I’m out of breath and feeling totally beat up. How much farther?”

“My guide cut some brush for us, so as long as we can stay on this trail, we should be able to get to Khe San by nightfall. Otherwise we play Boy Scout for another night. The only trouble is if Charlie finds this trail, he can move along it faster than we can.”

“Do you know if Charlie is close to us?” I asked.

“No, I don’t, but if you stay quiet, I’ll listen for noise that might tell us something.”

Chaos

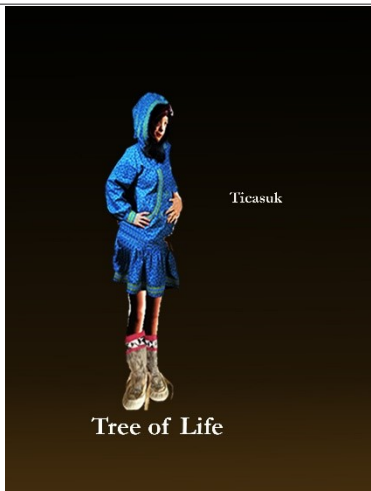
I sat back to catch my breath. Suddenly it occurred to me why Mike was so hard to see in the dark. He was black. I had to ask: "I thought Green Berets were all white boys from the Ivy League." I tried to keep my tone light, but I don't think Mike took it that way.

"Shut your mouth, white boy. I'll talk to you in a minute about that."

END

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TREE OF LIFE



Early Fall, Sometime in The Near Future. Ticasuk Vitti Is A Crab-Pot Puller on A Crab Boat with An All-Women Crew. They Are Working the Bering Sea Crab Fishery Near St. Paul Island, Alaska. In Recent Weeks Marine Radio Has Been Reporting Increasing Hostility in The Public Exchanges Between US President Trump and North Korea's Supreme

Leader Kim Jong Un. Ticasuk, Nicknamed Tica, Fears the Possibility Of Nuclear War In The South. She Asks the Captain to Let Her Off at St. Paul. She Will Try to Find A Pilot Who Will Fly Her the Seven Hundred Miles North To Kotzebue, Then To Her Mom's Home Above The Arctic Circle Near Ambler On The Kobuk River.

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After dinner around the crew table, while Ann Ruggles maintains the helm, Delaney announces her plan. "I want to do one more small set before we go to St. Paul to fuel up. I think there are some crab in a little depression on the edge of the shelf about seventy miles southwest of St. Paul. I'd like to do a set of twenty pots before we quit. Once we do that set, we'll head for St. Paul to unload and fuel up. Do any of you have any questions or concerns? Any bitches about the trip or my handling of the boat?"

Insh—officially the engine room's oiler; unofficially, the only person on the crew who knows the details of every mechanical and engineering system issue and problem on the boat—speaks in her

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Irish brogue. “Nah. Yer doin’ good, cap. Though I wish you’d got us more crab. My Guinness budget is all shot to hell after this shitty season.”

“I doubt if the seasons ahead look much better,” Marnie says, “but maybe they will after the crab stocks have had a chance to rebuild.”

“They might get better, that is, if the ocean stops warming, or if the Russians and Chinese don’t get them all first,” Delaney says.

“Or if Trump and Kim Jong Un don’t blow us all away while they are playing chicken with their little nukes,” Insh said.

Sadie, the gray-haired, stocky cook, chimes in. “I’m with you, Insh. I’m going to have to get a job in Dutch flippin’ burgers this winter. I can’t even afford to get to Anchorage to see my buds at Chilkoot Charlie’s for football and beer.”

Delaney is not sure about Sadie. She’s only had two fishing trips on the Challenger, and she has not really been tested on the deck during heavy seas. She’s a good cook and loves cooking for this crew, but there does seem to be an edge to her attitude if she is under any stress.

Though she does not make an issue of it, Sadie wears a Saint Christopher medal, and she carries a pocket version of the Bible. If something comes up that requires Sadie’s attention, Ann Ruggles knows where to look for her. There are only a couple of quiet places on the boat suitable for hiding out for the purposes of either reading or pouting.

“I’d like to get off at St. Paul,” Tica Vitti says. Tica is the newest and greenest member of the crew. She was born almost twenty-two years ago to her Inupiaq mother, Mary Lincoln, and Italian father, Antonio Vitti. Small, slender, and extensively marked with traditional Inupiaq face and body tattoos, Tica did not at first appear to Delaney

Tree of Life

to be a good prospect for hard physical work on the Challenger, but she had a good reputation around Dutch Harbor's shoreside community. She had some good skills with electronic systems, but she also took on hard jobs like cleaning the barnacles off the bottoms of boats. She worked hard to get her share of the work done, and by various means she could persuade others to do theirs.

Like her mother and many in her home community of Point Hope, Tica is a talented visual artist. She came to the Challenger with a sketchpad and a small pouch of colored inks, pencils, charcoals, and erasers. She often makes quick sketches to use as trading stock with other crewmembers who might have something of value, like easy or interesting job assignments, to exchange.

END

About the Author

Jerry Smetzer writes, paints, and reads science, history and the arts. He hangs out doing potlucks and zoom sessions with his long time gang of friends and family across Alaska and the USA. He has lived, studied and worked in Alaska – almost entirely in Juneau and Fairbanks – since the age of 16. He has experienced many things. He has read deeply, learned much and traveled widely all his life. He has kids born and raised in Fairbanks, now scattered with grandchildren around North America. He was pleased to have gotten together in Florida with them and with all the extended family for his Mom’s 100th birthday in June of 2018. “I have always wanted to write a great novel. With the help of all my readers maybe we can make it so with *Cassiopeia’s Quest – Revelation.*”

