

CC&D



**v176.5**  
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the **UN**religious, **NON**family-oriented lit mag

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Mid-September 2007 supplement

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...Because select writings from Pat Dixon work really well together, we here at cc&d thought it would be a great idea to group similar writings from Pat Dixon together into a special 2007 supplement. Enjoy these select writings from Pat Dixon.

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prose  
the meat and potatoes stuff

## When Can I Go Home?

Pat Dixon

1

“Do you remember who I am?” asked Charles Bennett, smiling at his 93-year-old mother.

Linda Bennett, sitting in her wheelchair opposite him, returned his smile and said, “What?”

Charles repeated his question more slowly and in a slightly louder voice.

“Oh, yes. You’re—my—my—brother.”

“Do you remember your husband? James Bennett? A lawyer?” Charles asked.

“What?” said his mother.

“Do you remember being married—married to James Bennett?”

“No.”

“Well, you’re my mother. I’m Charles, your son—your 71-year-old son. Charlie—all grown up—getting old now. Your son—not your brother. You were an only child, Mother.”

“I was?”

“Yes, Mother. You used to joke that you were so big at birth that you ‘broke the mold’—your mother, Doris Potter, couldn’t have any more children. That’s what you used to tell me and Carol, my kid sister, way back when we were little.”

Linda Bennett tugged on the zipper of her large cloth purse. Although Charles had recently lubricated it with candle wax for her, she pulled it in the wrong direction for half a minute, mystified that it remained closed.

“You do it,” she said, pushing her purse off her lap, onto the floor.

Charles retrieved her purse, opened it, and handed his mother a small, used facial tissue.

“Is this what you needed, Mother? Your nose is a little bit runny, I see.”

She took the tissue and rubbed her jaw, chin, and earlobe with it.

"I want to go home. When can I go home?"

"You're not well enough to leave here yet, Mother. I've got you on a list for a single room here. I don't know how long it will take, but I think you'd like a single room instead of having a roommate, right?"

His mother stared down at the tissue in her hand and said nothing.

"So," said Charles, "I spy with my little eye—a woman with a new hair-do. I bet you went to the hairdresser this morning, right? You had Mrs. Schumaker do your hair."

"What?"

"You had your *hair* done today, Mother. It looks *very* nice. Have you looked at it in a mirror yet?"

"No."

"Well, you have one in your purse. There's a mirror in your purse."

"There is?"

"Yes. You can look at your hair-do right now—if you want to. Let me get it out for you. I'll get your mirror out for you."

He handed her a small oval mirror with a pale green plastic handle and said, "Look at the good job your hairdresser did today, Mother. *Very* nice!"

Linda Bennett stared at her reflection for a minute and then smiled slightly. She did not look up when another elderly woman suddenly appeared at the doorway and said in a loud, fearful, whining voice, "What am I doing here? What am I doing here? What—what—what am I doing here?"

Charles stood and walked to this newcomer, patted her shoulder, and said, "You're doing fine here. Just fine."

The woman smiled at him.

"Oh. Is my mother—is my mother worried I'm not home?"

"No—she knows you're here. She knows you are doing fine here."

The woman smiled again, said "Oh," and continued down the hallway. Charles went back to his seat next to his mother.

"Do you like your hair-do, Mother?"

"Yes. It's—curly. Here—you look."

She held out the mirror to her son.

"I can see it from here, Mother—without the mirror. Your hair looks nice from here."

Linda cocked her head to one side and frowned slightly and blinked.

"That's your room over to the left, Mother," he said, pointing above the short plum tree on the east side of the courtyard. "Can you see it there, over your tree there?"

"That's my room," she said smiling.

"I've got to use that little restroom over there for a minute or so,

Mother. Don't try to get out of your wheelchair while I'm away, please, okay? You can look at the flowers in the courtyard and at your window up over your plum tree, and I'll be right back. We'll visit some more before I go home. I'll need to do a little grocery shopping on the way. I'll buy some salmon and squash and lettuce to make myself some nice supper. Okay? I love you."

"I love you, too."

## 2

Eighty-five minutes later, Sarah Johnson, a nurse's aide, saw Linda Bennett still in Lounge C, staring out of the window at the hillside and clouds beyond the low roof on the southern side of the courtyard.

"Hey there, Miz B," she called from the doorway. "Your son gone home? Gone an' lef' you 'lone in here?"

When Linda didn't respond, the aide continued on her errand. Twelve minutes later, returning from the west ward, Sarah Johnson entered the lounge, tapped Linda's arm, and repeated her questions twice more.

"I guess so," said Linda, tugging on the zipper of her purse.

"Well, Hon, why don't we jus' take you back to your bingo games? You *like* bingo, don' you, Hon?"

Linda smiled up at Sarah's large friendly face.

"When can I go home?"

"Lor' knows, Hon! When's *any* of us goin' home? Tha's one o' life's big mysteries! Right now, we's goin' t' your dinin' hall f' your bingo games. Tha's all I kin say."

## 3

At 8:00 p.m. that Saturday night, Bess Turner, the receptionist in the lobby of Hartford's Walter P. Trudeau Center for Health and Rehabilitation, paged through the sign-in book and noted that seven visitors had not yet signed out. Charles Bennett, most uncharacteristically, was among them. Bess, thinking nothing of this, hit the switch so that the front door would no longer open automatically from the outside and went off duty.

Sunday came and went without Charles Bennett appearing at the front desk to sign in, as had been his custom for the past two years and four months. No one thought this unusual.

At 10:26 a.m. on Monday, Nina Hastert, Assistant to the Social Worker, attempted to use the restroom of Lounge C but found the door

locked. Two and a half hours later, Bethany Glover, Special Medicare Counselor, tried the same restroom door and found it still locked.

At 3:18 p.m., Carlos Hernandez of Housekeeping attempted to enter the restroom of Lounge C to clean it. He knocked, got no response, then used his passkey to enter. Despite the strong odor of decay that presented itself, Carlos took one quick glance inside and determined that a large white-haired man was sprawled across the floor. He relocked the door, opened three of the windows of Lounge C, and quite properly went downstairs to notify his supervisor.

# Repossessed

Pat Dixon

Prologue

Glancing up from a small slip of paper, the head librarian introduced Dr. Kathleen Shaughnessy as “Witherspoon Academy’s own answer to Edith Wharton, Eudora Welty, and Joyce Carol Oates,” then led the audience in brief applause and seated himself to the right of her lectern. Kate thanked him and took a small sip of water.

“Tonight, people, I have half a dozen stories to read,” she said, “but with this first one I’m going to depart from my usual format of explaining my A-to-Z goal, because this little story partly attempts to include all of you within its world—and me as well—and I want to see how it hits you. Just give me a few seconds, please, to fill in some blanks so I can ‘customize’ the story to this group.”

Peering over her reading glasses and pointing her index finger above each person’s head, Kate rapidly counted the people before her and then jotted short phrases on the first page of her typescript.

“Ready to roll, my friends. Just so you can keep track of progress, this one, which I call ‘Repossessed,’ is about fifteen hundred words and has three very short chapters which I’ve numbered in reverse order as a kind of countdown.”

Taking another sip of water, she picked up her story and read it aloud:

3

“Yet once more,” says Kathleen Shaughnessy, “I see there are no representatives of Witherspoon’s administration among us. At least no acknowledged ones. Perhaps one of you—perhaps two—perhaps all of you are in some sense their unacknowledged—umm—representatives—and so perhaps I should watch my mouth—as my mother would have advised, way way back in her better days—not that I often heeded her.”

Kathleen Shaughnessy smiles at the twelve students, two librarians, and one lone faculty member who have come to the Witherspoon Academy library to hear her read some of her recent short stories.

“Anyway, thank you all for coming out on this dark and rainy night. Yet once more, courtesy of our fine library staff, we have coffee and

assorted flavors of donut holes waiting for us when we get done here. Normally I would start with a short overview of the six or seven stories I plan to read tonight, but this time I'll just jump in with what editors might call an 'experimental' story. This one might be termed a 'metafiction,' and, as Will Rogers once said, 'I never metafiction I didn't like.'"

The two librarians and the lone faculty member smile politely. Nine of the students stare blankly at Dr. Shaughnessy, but three of them wince.

"I've had," she says, "great trouble naming this story. Normally I don't have such problems, but after trying out five other titles, I'm reluctantly calling this one 'Repossessed.' It has only two very short chapters, which I've put in reverse order as a kind of countdown."

She pauses and swallows three sips of water from her large paper cup, clears her throat, and begins reading:

## Repossessed by Kathleen Shaughnessy

### 2

Fran Dixon looks up as Pat enters their living room.

"How's your latest story going?" asks Fran.

"I've set it aside and have begun a different one," replies Pat.

"I suppose that's okay. I guess that's a pretty normal thing to do."

"Of course it is. All sorts of authors have done the same. Just yesterday I happened to read online that Anthony Trollope—your favorite author—did that with some of his novels when he went on long sea voyages to arrange postal treaties or whatever. And Trollope was as normal and sane as writers come."

"Hmm. And he . . . ? Well, yes, I suppose that he would."

"And so will I—eventually."

"So, then—what's the new story about, hon?"

"It's sort of an experimental thing. I happened to think of it while I was over at the gym having my workout this morning. Annie, my trainer, says to me, 'Written any new stories?' And I reply, 'Nothing really new. I'm working on one I thought up nearly five years ago—about people being punished for violating traffic laws. You know what a nut case I am about that sort of person. Two of these selfish snots, both talking on their cell phones, nearly ran me down just a few minutes ago while I was walking over here. My story's titled "Embarrassment," and it's about a live TV



program of the same name where people who have been caught on film or videotape running stop signs or traffic lights—or speeding—or doing illegal U-turns—or—whatever—they all get bare-ass spankings in front of, say, millions of TV viewers—and not by anyone who'd turn them on. They're being paddled by little old ladies or big fat clowns or half-toothless biker dudes—or whatever. And the title and the name of the show, of course, is a pun on the authorities making somebody's ass bare. *Embarrassment*. Get it?"

"I remember you telling me about that one," says Fran Dixon. "I gather you've gotten stuck on just how to put your points across to readers?"

"Correct. I was going to lay it aside and try to work some more on my other old crazy driver story—where the scientist guy is testing out his new telepathy machine that lets him read the minds and feelings of other drivers—supposedly invented to help make the roads much safer."

"I don't remember that one."

"Sure you . . . Well, maybe it's been too long since I told you about it—or maybe I haven't told you. The gimmick there—and it's told from the viewpoint of the scientist, who's in the hospital, remembering—is that his machine, which is designed to let him know that some other driver is cluelessly speeding to get home and have a B.M. or watch a TV show—or is being aggressive because his wife or his boss gave him a bad time—or whatever—his machine gets jostled by a pothole or something, and, instead of just receiving others' thoughts and feelings, it starts transmitting his thoughts and feelings out to other drivers—and then fifty other drivers sense him reading their thoughts and emotions and get so blindly pissed off at his snotty old condescending attitude that they all converge—some even backing up—and ram the living crap out of him and his car—and his new machine."

"Sort of a satire, I take it. Too bad markets like *Twilight Zone* and *Outer Limits* have gone off the air."

"Yeah—sort of a satire. But Annie made me suddenly think I was only trying to do something old, or at least old to me, and I wondered what might be a new thing, and I had no idea—until I was doing some of my ab crunches. That was when a newish idea started to come to me. By the time I'd done four or five more sets on other Nautilus machines, I had a pretty good plan laid out for what I wanted to do with it."

"Well—good."

"I happened to be looking in the mirror on the wall in front of me and saw how there was a reflection of me there—and a reflection of the *back* of me in that ab-crunch machine, coming from the mirror on the wall

behind me and Annie. We've both seen that kind of thing a hundred times when getting our haircuts, of course—or our hairs cut. Everyone has. You can sort of see five or six semi-clear reflections of your front and back, and you imagine they go on and on for an infinite number of repetitions, but you can't really see much more—you know?"

"Yeah? And?" says Fran.

"So—and I told this to Annie: 'I just now had a new idea for a new story—thanks to you poking and prodding me a minute ago. What if a fictional character I'm writing about is a writer who is writing a story about me writing a story about him or her—writing a story about me—writing a story about her or him? I've even already got a character named Kate Shaughnessy in four of my other stories, who's a writer of sorts, and I could reuse her in this one. It can't be very long, of course, because it would bore the crap out of people if it were stretched too far and got repetitious. Maybe I can combine it with one of my favorite themes—forgetfulness. I've written about a dozen stories about people who get ideas late at night or while driving or jogging—and then they forget them. Maybe I'll have this Kate Shaughnessy character write about me as if I were somebody a bit different—possibly a scientist instead of merely a science teacher—who has an idea for a new way of growing stem cells to cure spinal-cord paralysis—who has this great idea while driving—but I'm in a car wreck.'"

"Science teachers can have ideas, too," says Fran. "You have them all the time."

"You're right—as usual. Anyway, Annie looked very upset when I said that stuff about me being in a car wreck, but I continued. I said, 'In *one* version that this writer character considers, I'm ironically killed, but then later, with the character named Pat Dixon writing about *her*, Kate Shaughnessy thinks up other possibilities: next she decides to write that I'm merely knocked on the head and *forget* what the new cure was—I just—or the person whom my character Kate Shaughnessy calls Pat Dixon is just, well, vaguely aware that the idea for a cure *was* there—but has been lost—and then, finally, and here is where the two-hatted character with my name comes in again—as a writer—and has that Kate Shaughnessy writer come up with a third, better idea: the character with my name, who has come up with the new cure, is now paralyzed totally—and yet ironically can still totally remember all the details of the cure—but even more ironically cannot even blink now to try to communicate this cure to anybody.'"

"Hmm. Wouldn't that sort of muddy the waters of your multiple-

reflections story? It sounds to me as if you have, maybe, two stories there.”

“I know—and here’s what I’m going to do: after my character, Kate Shaughnessy, comes up with this ‘better’ idea for the character with my name, I’m going to have her jot it down on a scrap of paper and tuck it away in a box with other story ideas she plans to work on someday—and then forget about it—implying, perhaps, that she never finds it again.”

“That could work—maybe.”

## 1

Kate Shaughnessy softly says the words “The End” and looks at her fifteen listeners to try to gauge their reactions. Several of them are blandly smiling, as if, perhaps, expecting something further from her odd little story. Others are studying their fingernails—or the ceiling tiles—or the gently blowing burgundy drapes covering the seminar room’s partially open side window. And the rest are slowly shaking their heads and nibbling gently on their upper lips. Kate Shaughnessy considers these reactions very satisfactory. Then she whispers to herself, yet once more, “The End.”

## Epilogue

“That could work—maybe,” echoed the head librarian with a broad grin. He began to applaud loudly, and was joined, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, by the others.

Smiling, Kate Shaughnessy softly said, “Thank you. You are too kind. I hope that some of these other stories, which are much more traditional types of fiction, will suit some of you better. Different strokes for different blokes, you know.”

And she reached for her water cup with one hand and her second typescript with her other.

# Shaken, Not Stirred

Pat Dixon

1

Subj: grandma b got rescued today—by her aged son!!  
Date: Sunday, September 17 — 6:50:54 PM  
From: chasb@bpn.com  
To: janepatten@bpn.com; michael236@kwkmail.com  
dear janie and mike,

just a quick note to let you know your grandma b is fine and is getting good care at the trudeau center rest home. your late mom & i did a better than decent job 2 yrs ago at choosing this place if i do say so myself. the weather has been unseasonably warm this month & i've been seeing my mom/your grandma nearly every day, & most days i take her out into the little courtyard below her room because she likes the fresh air and sunshine. i park her under a little cherry tree for shade—there's no such thing as a 'healthy tan'—as my dermatologist has reminded me by burning off 6 more 'places' from my forehead this july—& i face her toward the little plum tree that's below her room.

that's what i've done a few hundred times with little variation. but finally today was different, & i had to make like the cavalry & come to her rescue—a nice change of routine!

i guess i need to give you a little background info for this. back 2 yrs ago when i & my li'l sis/your mom signed grandma b into trudeau's, we were careful to check NONE in the box where they wanted to know her religion. maybe you never knew that grandma b was brought up in a 'secular' jewish home—in any case, when she married grandpa b, who was a baptist (sort of), they agreed that religion would not be something they'd force on any kids they might have & when your mom & i were growing up we tried out going to churches a few times with friends but never felt any real need to stick with any one church. (in college i went to a campus chapel that a seemingly hot at the time young coed attended, but that was in another lifetime of mine.)

anyways, today i sign in at the front desk, leave off two new blouses & a wool skirt for her birthday (coming soon!) to be labeled for her, & then go looking for her. first stop, 2nd floor: i check her room & don't find her or her roommate there. i check the dining room & see about 25

ladies & 2 old duffers half asleep while 3 aides are pasting photos of 'family day' onto huge sheets of poster paper—but no grandma b there! next i head for the lounges that are off the corridors between the 2 upstairs wards—half a dozen visitors are meeting with their relatives in these but nowhere is your grandma! i look down at the courtyard from one of the lounges to see if just maybe she got somebody to take her out there—nope! no dice!

sooooo, brainstorm: i go to the nurse's station & ask the handsome haitian nurse who looks like marion anderson, a famous contralto singer before your time—& mine—if she has any clue as to where mrs. bennett might be hiding. bingo! 'yes,' she says, 'downstairs in the front common room!' so back to the elevator. 2nd stop: first floor. yes, i find her in the common room—but—oh no—she is miserable there—twitching & shifting in her wheelchair—looking all puzzled & frowny—unable to move fwd or backward.

ten feet in front of her is a white-haired preacher holding his bible overhead & urging everyone to open their hearts & renounce satan. he is flanked by 4 other well-meaning men who are slightly younger than he is & who shout 'amen, brother!' after every sentence or 2.

looks like a job for SUPERCHARLES!

i thread my way in, past 35 other wheelchairs that are pretty tightly lined up—she being in the center approximately. she sees me & knows i'm a friend of SOME sort—maybe even a relative—& begins to smile & wave one hand to get my attention—tho' i am looking right at her. in less than 40 seconds i'm standing behind her chair & she's saying, 'get me outta here! GET ME OUTTA HERE!!'

sooooo i release the brakes of her wheelchair & ease it around & down a narrow aisle between rows of 'inmates' who are in their chairs. 2 or 3 people are even able to move backwards so we can get through, & your grandma & i thank them. just as we make our exit, the choir breaks into song with 'old rugged cross,' & grandma thanks me for rescuing her.

i ask her if would she like to go outdoors into the little courtyard & she does, so we do. then i ask her HOW she ended up at the service in there & she has no idea.

we look at the zinnias & marigolds & impatiens (sp?) that are still in bloom & then she points to her 2nd floor window & says, 'that's my room' & i tell her yes.

'do you feel better now?' i ask & she says it's nice in the sun. for better or worse she had already forgotten being at 'church'—for some things it's as if a damp sponge is wiping clean the chalkboard of her mind a

minute or less after something happens to her. i've talked to her nurses, her doctor, her aides, & the social workers—and they say every 'resident' is different in what they can hold onto & how quickly they forget things. lately she's beginning to forget names of her family—even my dad/her husband! i've made her several copies of LINDA F. BENNETT'S LIFE HISTORY (2 pp. long & color-coded for parents, children, grandchildren, & great-grandchildren) & she loves it but is perpetually surprised every time she reads it—esp. when she gets to her own age. i usually try to inventory her for what she remembers, both recent things & things long past, & i'm sorry to say there's been steep slippage lately in the latter. if you want to phone her, before 3 p.m. is best & even then she will probably be pretty confused. it may be that you'd rather remember her as she used to be & i can relate to that too.

again, the staff here is really super. i have left answering machine messages for the director & the social worker that grandma b is NOT to be taken to any more 'church' services here & i'll follow up with them on monday morning. i'm sure they will follow through.  
love to all,  
uncle charles

2

Subj: Re: grandma b got rescued today—by her aged son!!  
Date: Sunday, September 17 — 9:23:47 PM  
From: janepatten@bnp.com  
To: chasb@bnp.com  
Dear Uncle Charles,

Thank you so very much for taking good care of Grandma B! It is so reassuring to read that she is being cared for properly by caring people! I know that you and Mom made the right choice and that you are continuing to make the right decisions about Grandma's care now. I can only imagine how it must be for YOU to see some one you love getting more and more helpless and forgetful - right before your very eyes. I am certainly very thankful that you were able to rescue Grandma from those people even if they were well meaning - as I am SURE they were! As you said, she may forget lots of things VERY rapidly, but she DOES know when she's happy and when she is very UNHAPPY - and you were her HERO this afternoon!

Hope YOUR health is holding up. We are all doing well. Bob got lots of overtime this past month and I have just started clerking at a new

store. The folks seem nice so far. Bob Jr. and Ally are getting along well in school so far, too, and have a new puppy now, replacing ol' Harcourt Fenton Mudd who had to be put to sleep in July. No name yet for the new pup - maybe we should call him "Nemo"? < smile >

Tons of LOVE from all of us - and VERY VERY VERY grateful thanks again!

Janie

3

Subj: Re: grandma b got rescued today—by her aged son!!

Date: Thursday, September 21 — 10:14:29 PM

From: michael236@kwkmail.com

To: chasb@bpn.com

Deaer Uncle Charlie,

Good to hear the good news about Granma B being rescued! I can relate to how she must of felt! Mom & Dad never pushed church on Janie & me but Becky my ex was always after me about it & did drag me there a quite few times!! Wasn't a happy camper!!

Your definately right about rembering Granma as she was. I bet most days she doesn't even know she has a grandson does she?

I think Janies husband Bob feels pretty much like I do about church. Why mess with somethings when there's good games to watch on the TV! Right? Live and let live!

Speaking of Janie, she sent me a pretty good funny yesterday abot that situation. She was always the sharpest tack in the draw anyway, was n't she? Am pasting it below for you.

Congrats for that great rescue from me to!

Mike

<<< So, thanks to Uncle Charlie, Grandma was "rescued" - but not "saved." >>>

# Simon Thinks

Pat Dixon

Once, long ago, Simon noted that he  
Was prone to begin “Once,” “Long ago,” and “It used to be”;  
But self-insights are rare, and more often than not  
They were, like this one, forgot.

—Joel Hazard

1

Once upon a time, Winston Edmund Whitehead, professor of chemistry at a tiny military academy in southern Connecticut, was driving his nine-year-old Honda to work. It was Tuesday, payday. Before leaving his apartment, he had consulted his “stuff to do” list and felt that he should pick up cash—a couple hundred bucks—because a long Thanksgiving weekend was fast, yet once more, approaching. On Thanksgiving itself, as had been his custom for the past seventeen years, he would be taking four “orphans”—college students who were staying on campus over this holiday—to a local restaurant for dinner. He strongly preferred to pay the check and tip with cash.

As he drove, Whitehead wondered vaguely and without urgency which cash machine would be easiest to aim for. The whole route from home to office was just under fifteen miles via four small bedroom villages, and the third and fourth of these had small branches of his bank on their main streets.

In irritation at a shrill commercial urging him to invest in high-yield bonds, Whitehead shut off his car radio and made brief, birdlike glances at his collection of audiocassettes. Today he chose the one with highlights from Verdi’s opera *Nabucco*. With the familiar opening notes of “Va, pensiero, sull’ ali dorate,” his spirits soared, and he no longer minded the bumper-to-bumper traffic that slowly snaked along the maze of old narrow blacktop roads.

This morning while shaving he finally had noticed his massive belly with displeasure and had willfully begun a diet. His doctor had told him four years ago that his weight was creeping up, and today, moved by vanity, he was heeding that warning—one bran muffin, a small glass of apple juice, and one cup of instant coffee must suffice till noon! Now, as if in



vengeance, his rebelling stomach began to compete with Verdi's chorus of Hebrew captives, and Professor Whitehead, to stifle it, pulled a large bottle of antacid tablets from his glove compartment and took six of them. *Extra calcium—good for me*, he thought and began humming along with the noble melody which had been played at Verdi's funeral by, he believed, Toscani—and at Toscani's funeral by—by—somebody else. Brief visual images of a TV documentary on Verdi flashed through his mind as he drove.

Halfway to work, small drops of rain began to appear on his windshield. Within two hundred yards it began to pour, and Whitehead automatically turned his wipers on at their highest setting. The headlights of oncoming traffic suggested that it would be somewhat darker ahead. He turned on his own headlights and whispered a new buzz word he'd recently learned—"Proactive"—and smiled wryly.

He unconsciously began to visualize his route to the first bank—it was three blocks beyond his normal turn-off to the fourth village. In his mind's eye he replayed about a dozen scenes from past experience—driving south and being unlucky nine times out of ten, driving north and never finding parking, trying side streets with little hope and less luck. He saw himself trying to regain the westward road to the fourth village during morning rush traffic, being variously trapped behind timid drivers or in front of impatient hornblowers. Images of alternate side roads that paralleled or rejoined his usual route came into his mind in rapid succession—images lasting fractions of a second—all of them unpleasant and some of them quite distressing. Through all this, however, he continued to hum or sing along with his cassette.

The autumn rain was much heavier now, and he increased the speed of his wipers and decreased the speed of his vehicle. The glare of oncoming headlights made him squint slightly.

Driving into the second village, Professor Whitehead jammed on his brakes and sounded his station wagon's ineffectual little horn—a young man in a pickup truck had passed him on the right and then cut in front of him to make a left turn into a supermarket.

"Schmuck!" yelled Whitehead, venting his sudden anger. *Guiseppe's getting competition for my attention today*, he thought. As he proceeded somewhat more cautiously, he continued to hum and sing, and dozens of additional images of village roads and streets flashed through his mind—some of them replays of the first series, some of them views of the routes and parking areas near the bank in the fourth village, some of them evening scenes in which he was driving homeward looking for parking

near the bank after work.

Images of the restaurant he'd made reservations at came into his mind as he approached a side road that led to it. Professor Whitehead knew only one of the "orphans" slightly from a class last year, but he would be meeting the other three for the first time tomorrow afternoon to spell out pick-up times and his price range for the dinner. Last year had been especially pleasant, he recalled—the dean's assistant had given him one total stranger and three students he'd given low grades to, and by the end of the evening these four who had nothing to gain from him were fully agreed—at least for the moment—that his stricter grading was the kind of "reality check" that students needed. Indeed, two of them, who'd failed his course the first time around and who'd figuratively cried in his office when they'd seen their grades, had been able to laugh at their younger selves by the end of the evening.

At a traffic light, Professor Whitehead began playing the other side of his Verdi cassette. *Who else*, he wondered, *who else volunteers to take these kids out to dinner on a holiday?* Only twice had students been staying on campus over Christmas, and he'd been there each time with an offer of dinner and, if they wanted, an evening church service, both of which had been eagerly accepted. He caught himself: *Don't polish your own halo, asshole!* He smiled and recalled that a dear dead friend had told him that on several occasions. *Elaine*, he thought, with bittersweet feelings. He could almost smell her, and his finger tips and lips experienced a tactile memory of her body and face. He sniffed in a deep breath, shrugged, and regripped his steering wheel to shake away her ghost.

As his Honda approached the fork that led to the west, Professor Whitehead hummed and thought about the quiz he would be giving in his first class. For the third time a series of visual images pertaining to the two banks and parking and routes to and from them ran through his mind—now, though, for the first time, he became conscious of these images.

*Huh—like a kind of maze!* he thought. *Solving—trying to solve—options being shown—son of a gun! Like tracing paths through a maze.* He tried to visualize the routes willfully but could not. *Focus on the damned road! Watch the road!* he told himself as his right wheels grazed a curb.

He approached the fork where a decision had to be made—bank one or bank two—and smiled at the lack of real urgency. He weighed the factors of traffic light color and numbers of cars in each lane and, with fifty feet to go, stayed in the right lane, which branched to the west. The red light and five cars waiting in the left lane had lost out to the green turn arrow and three cars making the right turn. The bank of village number

three was effectively ruled out for now—unless—unless he were to back-track stupidly and try approaching it from the south. Whitehead smiled at that notion and sped up as the lighter traffic ahead of him did likewise.

Although he usually took one of his four short cuts through the final village rather than drive up its main street, he consciously decided to drive by his bank to see whether easy parking was available now. Scores of visual images of this route appeared fleetingly to him, and Whitehead was aware of “previewing” at least seven parking options, including two parking lots that could only be approached awkwardly from one-way streets. *Like solving some kind of damned maze! Like playing with a chess problem,* he thought again, smiling to himself.

The rain had stopped, and, prompted by the noise of rubber on dry glass, his right hand, almost as a reflex, turned the wipers off. The morning sun shined brightly on the soaked pavement ahead of his station wagon, causing him to squint.

From his distant past, Professor Whitehead recalled images of being on a warm beach with Marlene, his childhood sweetheart and then his wife. They’d been married for three years, and he was reading *Look* magazine while she sunbathed. He’d shut one eye and noticed that the bright white page had changed to pale pink. When he’d opened his eye, the page became white again. He experimented, shutting the other eye, and found that the page became pale blue. For over a minute he’d played with this novelty and then had shared his discovery with Marlene. *Thirty-five years ago, babe,* he thought.

Marlene had been irritated to hear his findings and had scoffed and said that her eyes and brain didn’t work like this and probably no one else’s did either. Until today, he’d put the memory from him. He began now to wonder about his newest “discovery.” Did he usually make decisions this way? Were there other things that led to images? Did others’ minds also work this way?

Ever since his very first exposure to Freudian psychology during high school, he had always been skeptical about descriptions of how “the unconscious” worked. What he had experienced today seemed different from what he’d read about in his two college psychology courses or in the several pop-psych books and articles he’d read later. Even the two weightier books by professional therapists that he’d struggled through didn’t have any passages he could recall that covered the images he’d just seen.

Professor Whitehead wondered why he’d never noticed them before. Was his mind doing this for the first time? Was today different somehow? He resolved to make a point of looking into the matter during the next

week, both by looking through psychology texts and by asking others—no matter how embarrassing it might be to appear “weird” to them. After all, they weren’t Marlene, and he was no longer a pup of twenty-seven. He wondered whether this might even be something he could write an important article on, although it was outside his so-called “area of expertise.” *Who knows?* he thought with new determination. *I’m almost sixty-three, divorced, all alone except for Sunny.* For a split second he saw the image and heard the bass purring of his loving and lovable orange cat, Sunny Jim. *Who knows? Wouldn’t that surprise Marlene! It’d just fry her!*

He frowned briefly, recalling that three, four, perhaps five times—*Was it twenty years ago?*—he’d planned to write an article for one of those cat fancier magazines he’d paged through while he and four earlier cats had waited their turn at a vet’s office. He pictured a pair of litter boxes, side by side—*Number one only in box two, an’ number two only in box one.* He had experimented for twelve days by changing the locations of the litter boxes and had discovered that cats—at least *his* four cats—preferred using one box solely for poop and the other solely for pee, and only when the boxes were more than thirty-five feet apart would any of them begin to use just one box for both of its bodily wastes.

*That would still be a good article to write,* he thought. He knew his notes on this experiment and conclusions were—somewhere.

Grinning, he looked at his watch. *Forty-five minutes till class.* A block ahead of him a car pulled out of a parking place in front of his bank. *Lucky!* he thought, and he parked his small vehicle with the practiced ease he was secretly proud of.

Whitehead felt vaguely surprised to see that the meter had no time on it. As he fed it a quarter for half an hour, brief images of himself finding his car ticketed near here two years ago passed through his mind. The fine had been \$25, and he reexperienced a sudden brief rush of irritation.

Inside the bank lobby, he called up his checking balance—\$1,645.57—and requested \$160 from the cash machine. Then, momentarily previewing himself at post-holiday sales on Friday and Saturday and Sunday, he withdrew an additional hundred dollars. As he put this money and the two receipts into his billfold, Professor Whitehead briefly pictured the interior of a bagel shop just two doors from the bank.

Leaving the lobby, he started toward his Honda, paused, noticed that his stomach was again issuing a request for food, began to salivate, and walked amiably and self-forgivingly to the bagel shop. *Dieting will work better after this Thanksgiving is behind me,* he assured himself. Entering, Winston Edmund Whitehead half-consciously imagined hard bread

crust between his teeth and against his tongue. Two people were ahead of him in line. As he got behind the second one, a third person, a dark-haired young woman approached from behind, tugged on his overcoat sleeve, and then squeezed into line in front of him.

“What are you doing, miss?” he asked in a loud voice. The woman took no notice. Professor Whitehead phrased his question differently.

“You, in the red hat—why did you cut in front of me just now?” he said.

Half turning, the young woman appealed to others in the shop: “They saw I was here first. I was in line behind this man here, and I just left the line to get a couple other things. But this was still my place in line!”

While she was speaking, the other two customers had made their purchases and were leaving. The tactic had succeeded, and the woman in the red hat was now at the counter with money in her hand.

As she pushed past him, leaving the shop with a smile, Professor Whitehead called loudly at her back, “Be like a New Yorker, if you have no decency or self-respect. It’s your own choice.”

The six customers behind him averted their gazes. The middle-aged man at the counter blandly asked Professor Whitehead what he wanted.

Whitehead’s tongue and teeth anticipated the sensations of two kinds of seeded bagels—sesame and poppy. An image of poppy seeds between his teeth looking like dozens of small cavities decided the matter.

“I’ll have two—no, make that *three* sesame bagels—please,” he said.

Striding from the shop, he bit a large piece from one of fresh-baked bagels. Ahead of him, standing near his station wagon, Whitehead saw a woman in blue jeans and a mink coat eating a chocolate bar. Salivating now for chocolate and visualizing the candy counter of the news store on the corner, Whitehead whispered to himself, “To the rear—march!” Entering it in quest of a Snickers bar, he dropped his half-eaten bagel back into the small white paper bag.

From his place at the end of a line of customers leading to the candy counter and cashier, Winston Whitehead noticed huge stacks of the *Times*, the *Courant*, and the *Journal*. Above and behind these newspapers, he saw a new brightly lit alcove recessed into the side wall, lined with racks of magazines. Two large hand-lettered signs on either side of the alcove reminded that THIS IS NOT A LIBRARY! Within the alcove, Whitehead saw four “adult” magazines whose names he recognized and several dozen more whose names he’d never before encountered.

“Sandy,” he said under his breath. Professor Whitehead stepped out of the line and walked to the alcove. *Very like her*, he thought, reaching for a thick, bright, glossy magazine whose cover featured the narrow,

high-cheeked face of a smiling young woman with straight blond hair and slightly bucked teeth. He pulled a copy of the magazine up from the rack.

“Good jumpin’ Joseph!” he whispered. “Except for *them!*” He shook his head and smiled wryly at the disparity. *Major sex lures*, he thought. *Quintessential*. Sandy, as he saw her in his mind, was a slight young woman of twenty wearing sandals, jeans, a T-shirt, and a denim jacket. Her high small breasts and perpetually erect nipples had provoked fantasies within him during the year she had attended his chemistry lectures at a small liberal arts college in Oklahoma twenty-eight years ago. As he pictured Sandy in a front-row seat, her hand stretched over her head to ask him a question, he became vaguely aware that he was experiencing the mild tingling of sexual arousal.

*Flower child*, he thought. He felt momentarily sad. In what was to have been her senior year, she had transferred to the school of business. One afternoon, twenty-six years ago, she had stopped to chat with him on the campus quadrangle and had told him how an introductory economics class had excited her and totally changed her thinking about life, the world, and everything. Standing close to her as she rhapsodized, Whitehead had found himself staring for the first time at her mouth. She was wearing braces, and her severely bucked front teeth were already much closer together. He’d hated studying economics himself and only half listened but had nodded encouragingly all the while Sandy spoke. When she paused, he’d said, glancing from her mouth to her wide blue eyes, “I think that you’ve made an excellent decision, Miss King.” He’d meant about having her teeth fixed, but he had been wise enough not to specify that.

Now, in the News Rack decades later, he smiled to recall his tact. He’d seen her name on the graduation program two years later and had caught a very distant glimpse of her waist-length blond hair as she went up to receive her diploma among the *cum laude* students. *Where are the snows . . . ?* he thought. *Sandra King, you’re now nearly fifty—if you’re still alive somewhere. You might be a grandmother.*

Someone jostled him to reach a newspaper. Whitehead focused abruptly on the magazine in his hand. The slender, twenty-ish blond who stared back from the magazine’s cover with (almost) Sandy’s face was clad only in a red satin string bikini. She was clutching her small fists against her monstrous naked breasts, flattening them partially into the shape of massive mushroom caps. Her dark eyebrows and a dark streak up the part of her hair made it moot that she was a natural blond.

*A world-class example of silicon-based life*, Whitehead thought, repeating the essence of a joke he’d made up six years ago when a student had asked

why all life forms on earth were based on compounds of carbon instead of its cousin element silicon. After explaining that nature tends to be lazy and uses less energy making compounds from carbon which is a lighter element, he had added spontaneously, chiefly for his own amusement, “Of course, if robots ever learn to make their own silicon chips, they’ll be a kind of exception—and from another point of view, artificially endowed females might already be considered a form of silicon-based life.”

No one from the computer club had complained, but, according to the dean (whom Whitehead had distrusted for two decades), four young women had, and so he’d been obliged to apologize publicly for making a sexist remark in his classroom. He still suspected that no one had objected, and he wondered what would have happened if, claiming academic freedom, he’d refused to apologize. He’d realized, however, that it was a tactless remark, and it had seemed right that he disavow it. It did rankle him the following month, though, that a teacher who’d made a far more heinous remark had lied and been exonerated. A young woman on the tennis team had gone to class in shorts, and Herman Fischer had said, “Your legs look powerful enough to crush a man’s skull!” After she and eight classmates had complained, Fischer swore that he’d been innocently complimenting her strength, nothing more, and that he would certainly have said the same thing about her arms if she hadn’t been wearing a jacket that day. Some faculty members whispered that Fischer was the dean’s pet, perhaps even the dean’s eyes and ears.

A middle-aged man jostled Whitehead while reaching for copies of *Oui* and *Hustler*, and Professor Whitehead, like Walter Mitty, again returned to the present. He glanced at the hand-lettered sign nearest him and smiled, recalling both visually and aurally two instances in his past when obnoxious cashiers had shouted “This ain’t a library!” at him—once when he was twelve and once again during the summer after his divorce sixteen years ago. He blushed slightly and felt vague anger. He glanced over his shoulder toward this shop’s cashier, fully prepared to counterattack should this person have a similar attitude toward magazine customers. Faintly disappointed, Whitehead saw that the cashier was a young woman who was totally busy with nearly a dozen customers.

Taking the magazine with him to the rear of the line, Whitehead began to glance through it. It was called, he noted, *ZeBra* and featured (according to its cover slogan) “the Himalayas of XXX-cup hooters.” In the center of the magazine he found five pages and a fold-out that featured the Sandy-faced young woman. She went by the name Busty Towers, and a pseudo-interview dealing with her supposed appetites

accompanied the dozen photos of her. In most of these Ms. Towers stared directly at the viewer with puckered lips. In all of them, unlike her cover photo, her breasts were totally exposed and resembled a pair of over-inflated pale pink party balloons. Each was somewhat larger than her own head and decidedly rounder.

*Sweet Joseph*, he thought with mild sadness, *why would such a pretty young girl do this to herself? Is she some sort of moron? What's this sex-lure type o' work pay her, anyhow?* Below Whitehead's threshold of consciousness, the faces of one young and two middle-aged movie stars—whose recent implants had made the front pages of the supermarket tabloids—flashed past his mind's eye.

As he began to estimate Ms. Towers' health risks, Professor Whitehead found himself jolted back yet again by the cashier's gentle voice. "What'll it be for you, sir?" she asked with unprofessional civility.

Professor Whitehead put the issue of *ZeBra* on the counter and said, "And two—no—*three* Snickers bars." He set the candy and a twenty on the counter next to the magazine. A large clock behind the cashier told him he now had fifteen minutes till class. He glanced at his watch to confirm this.

*O'Shit*, he thought, smiling at his favorite "Irish oath" and taking his change and the brown paper bag with his four purchases. The bank was less than a mile from the college, and he was not in the least concerned about being late, but he knew that he probably wouldn't have time to leave the magazine in his office. As he drove, he rapidly visualized a series of scenarios: he could leave the brown paper bag in his car on the seat or under the seat or on the seat under his car blanket, or he could take it to his office and risk being perhaps up to five minutes late for class, or he could put it temporarily into his departmental mail box for three hours and take the chance that no one would pull it out by mistake or out of curiosity, or he could carry it to class and either put it on his lectern or roll it loosely and put it into his lab coat pocket, or, if he'd kept the briefcase his wife had given him for his birthday six years before their divorce, he could put it inside that—and perhaps lock it, perhaps not. He felt no pressure to decide yet. Automatically and unaware of his actions, he ate one of the Snickers bars.

Traffic and the traffic lights favored him. As he drove the last half mile Professor Whitehead, as if in a kaleidoscope, saw images and heard sounds and smelled the odors he associated with the three women whose breasts he'd seen in the flesh during his adult life.

Those of Marlene had been the largest: B-cups when they'd courted and married, then C-cups as her weight increased by sixty pounds over the next fourteen years. *Playmates*, he thought. *You were mine, and I was yours—for*



*maybe those first two years.* He felt a chill between his shoulders. He'd known Marlene the longest, and yet today his memory of her was very brief.

Abruptly he felt a dark, crisp, cold, starry night. In Denver, at a chemistry teachers' convention where he was interviewing for his first job, a fellow grad student named Lew invited him for a beer at a small topless bar near the motel where they both were staying. Lew, thirty-three and the father of a three-year-old son and a two-month-old daughter, wore thick black-rimmed glasses and insisted they sit at the rail where the dancers would be. Winston Whitehead, his mind full of that afternoon's interview, had acquiesced.

The first dancer was a skinny native American who looked about sixteen. Over a loudspeaker a man's voice introduced her as "Fawn, our full-blooded Cherokee princess!" She wore only a pair of high-heeled black pumps, a green G-string, and a pair of white cone-shaped pasties that looked like sad little dunce caps.

This young woman had a small tattoo of a rattlesnake on her right shoulder, and her high, tiny breasts and long straight hair had swayed slightly as she languidly danced to some recorded trumpet music. She never glanced at the men near her but seemed to be gazing through the far wall over their heads, mentally elsewhere.

Lew had whistled and waved a five dollar bill at her, but she took no notice, and when the music stopped she simply walked behind a curtain. Over the noise, Lew shouted that she must be stoned on drugs, and, as Lew drained his first beer and speculated loudly on the charms that were yet to come, Winston Whitehead felt strangely melancholy and excused himself. He walked to the bar, sent a fully clad waitress to Lew with a fresh Coors, and went out into the December air to look for a cab. There had been none, and he'd walked two miles in the chill to the motel.

Whitehead's third woman—"My joy," he whispered—was Elaine Golden, a librarian who had lived in his apartment building. Almost thirteen years ago they'd begun a brief, discreet affair. Elaine had been twenty-nine, and Professor Whitehead had recently turned fifty. Vivacious and witty, with the petite body of a young Olympic gymnast, Elaine had loved him to make love to her prominent nipples before and during their other love-making.

Today as he drove onto campus, Whitehead frowned with pain as he heard once again some phrases of the phone call that had told him how Elaine—her jaw and throat both crushed—had been killed by bus. He shivered, drew a deep breath, and parked his Honda outside the science building.

As he walked through the front door, Whitehead carried both paper

bags, the white and the brown. He still had almost seven minutes till class time. Whispering “office” to himself, he strode to his small private den and unlocked the lap drawer of his desk. He glanced again at the Sandy-like face of Ms. Towers for almost half a minute, feeling some slight pity that caused him to shake his head and gently gnaw his lower lip—yet dimly aware of that faint pre-arousal tingling once more.

“So!” he said aloud, locking the magazine in his desk. “Once more unto the breach!” He got to the large third-floor lecture hall with nearly a minute to spare and donned his long white lab coat. He smiled theatrically at the seventy-odd young faces that glanced toward him and smiled inwardly to see that his department head was present for a semi-annual classroom observation of his teaching. *Showtime*, he thought with total confidence. For two decades he had been rated first or second in his department and always among the top seven of the whole faculty.

“Mr. Wagner, Ms. Gardner,” he said smiling at two students in the front row, “please distribute these to your classmates. Everybody, please print your *full* names and student *numbers* at the top, and we’ll see if you can remember what you read about gram molecules any better than you did last week. This *short* quiz”—here he paused and turned to write QUIZ on the chalkboard—“is *scientifically* designed to reinforce the importance of one of this course’s twelve major objectives. Once again, as I told you last Friday, you can expect *similar* questions on our final exam in *three* weeks.”

## 2

At 3:15 p.m. that afternoon, Professor Winston Edmund Whitehead sat down in one of the faux-leather chairs in the conference room of the library. The Faculty Development Self-Study Committee (FDSSC) was meeting to consider once again what improvements could be recommended concerning faculty research assistance. Although budget constraints dictated that nothing would actually be done, a lengthy report had to be prepared in any case for the eyes of the accreditation group that was coming to the college in ten months.

Only Herman Fischer, a bald mathematician, and Bart Franklin, a slender, graying physicist, were already seated at the oval conference table. Professor Fischer’s face brightened up, and he broke off his conversation with Professor Franklin.

“Hey, Win!” he said. “Gi’ me some *skin!*”

Winston Whitehead glanced across the table and smiled uncomprehendingly.

“Do you mean shake hands?” he asked. Fischer was sitting on the other side of the table with both hands out of sight.

“Stop being a shit-head, Whitehead,” said Fischer, leaning his white-bearded face forward confidentially. “I saw you in the News Rack this morning looking through those tit-mags! I’d’ve thought your balls would’ve dried up by now—ha!—like mine!”

Professor Whitehead slowly smiled in a way that he hoped would look good-natured. Elaine, he half recalled, once had shouted at Fischer that he was an “odious man,” but she’d never explained what Fischer had done or said to provoke her.

“Hermy,” said Whitehead, watching the doorway, “I could lie to you and say I’m just doing research for a major article on silicon-based life . . .” He paused to let both Fischer and Franklin chuckle knowingly: his having been disciplined had been the talk of the faculty for at least three days. “But the real truth is a divorced guy like me who ain’t totally dried up yet needs to be really careful about all those incurable diseases we’ve been reading about. Nobody’s ever caught the killer crud from a magazine!”

Whitehead hoped that his broad smile concealed his anger. *Effing shit-head, yourself, Fischer, he thought. Anybody who crushes YOUR skull had better double-diaper it first!*

To change the subject, he asked Fischer directly whether he’d circulated a questionnaire yet to his colleagues. As Dick Lucas of Engineering and Nancy Weinstein of Humanities came in, Fischer raised the current issue of *ZeBra* above the table. Whitehead froze as he saw the Sandy-like face again, here.

“Nah,” said Fischer, grinning at everybody. “I ain’t got time for any questionnaires. I’m too busy makin’ sure Fawltly Towers—I mean *Busty Towers*—is still in good shape. Maybe she’d fix what’s broke in *me*—if she gives a *hoot—er* two. Ha!”

Professor Weinstein, a matronly African-American with a rich contralto voice, smiled tolerantly and said, “Gentlemen, let’s get this charade on the road. I don’t know about all of the rest of you, but I for one have a real life out there. The two reps from Engineering who aren’t here will have see from our minutes what we’ve covered. If they ever do come in, I’ll let them give their reports after the rest of us finish. Herman, let’s start with you.”

Professor Fischer put the magazine face up on the table in front of him and began to speak: “Nance, I thought I’d wait and see how the others were gonna present their info before I tried to put my section together. I’m still working on some questions, but I don’t have any of ‘em in final draft form yet.”

“All right, Herman. Nothing to report yet. We’ll expect you to dazzle us *next* Tuesday. Put your book of paper dolls away then, please, and pay attention to what the others have. Winston, let’s hear from you.”

Professor Fischer raised his eyebrows and mouthed the word “bitch” in exaggerated fashion as he put the magazine into his briefcase and brought out a pad and pen.

Professor Whitehead opened the manila file folder he’d brought to the meeting and passed around copies of a typed three-page handout. He explained that the chemistry subdivision of Math and Sciences currently wanted additional support in two areas—research into the environmental impact of waste disposal and research into methods of teaching chemistry to undergraduates who were less prepared than students of previous years.

Professor Fischer let out a loud “Ha!” and interrupted the presentation: “Winny, all you’ve ever published since you came here are dinky little articles on how you teach. At least Lem Potter runs hundreds of little tests on the pollution in Long Island Sound with *his* chemical knowledge. So what the hell are you doing with *your* degree?”

Whitehead said nothing but glanced expectantly at Nancy Weinstein who was reading his handout. Usually, he’d recalled, she would admonish people about carrying on cross-talk during her meetings.

Fischer continued: “When I was an undergrad, the biggest joke at my university was the head of the School of Pharmacy. He never wrote anything but historical articles—nothing that was real research in his field. Once he even wrote a piece on the history of suppositories! You wouldn’t wanna know what his nickname was after that! It was sorta like Shhh-Head! But not quite.”

While Fischer spoke, Whitehead recalled that Marlene had often-often-OFTEN complained that his articles are all pedagogical—how to teach chemistry; how to get students to comprehend; how to get them to remember—that he never did any important research after college—how disappointed she was with him—that even his doctoral dissertation from a fourth-rate university announced his life of professional failure: it detailed his *two unsuccessful attempts* to synthesize a complex hydrocarbon.

Whitehead smiled with mild irony as he recalled her grounds for divorce—severe mental cruelty toward her—which he’d not contested. For over a decade he’d tried to explain to Marlene that in science it was just as important to report what wouldn’t work as what would. His dissertation had saved others thousands of wasted hours, just as two other dissertations reporting similar unsuccessful attempts had also done.

Whitehead pulled his suit jacket a little tighter around his chest and

recalled how he'd tried to defend his articles to her: *In times of grade inflation, when students are worse and worse prepared for high school—let alone college—for the good of the future of our country, we have to invent techniques of adapting the subject to the students, and so on. My special mission, my gift, if you will, figuratively speaking, of course, is to maintain the dikes and plug as many holes as I can.* At times he'd told Marlene that he was on the cutting edge of teaching: *I'm devising a way of combining the Gestalt Psychology of Goodman and Perls with the Transactional Analysis of Eric Berne and am adapting them to classroom use.* (In this, Professor Whitehead had been—and was still—deceiving himself. In reality he'd eclectically combined his kindergarten-teacher gentleness with some conditioning techniques derived fourth-hand from B. F. Skinner and some ancient Army techniques dating back to his two years in the Chemical Corps, where he'd taught grade-school dropouts how to don and clear a gas mask—plus the basic practical reason for bothering to do so.)

Whitehead was suddenly aware that Bart Franklin had asked him a question and was waiting for an answer. Whitehead covered up, claiming that he'd skipped lunch and that his blood sugar was now running low. He asked Franklin to repeat his question.

Franklin nodded sympathetically and did so: "I said I was reading a book by that Hawking fellow this weekend—not his *Brief History of Time* that none of us ever finished reading, but the other one—*Black Holes and Baby Universes*. In it, Hawking confesses that he himself doesn't think in terms of equations. Instead, he sort of pictures things in his mind and later comes up with the equations. It's that way, too, with Charlie Sherman and me in physics, and I was wondering which way it is for you."

Before Whitehead could speak, Herman Fischer interrupted and fortuitously gave him a chance to collect his thoughts.

"That's way it is with most mathematicians—except for Ramanujan. Just about all of us *picture* stuff first."

"Rama who?" said Franklin.

"Rama-NEW-jan—a self-taught dude from India who was one of the Einsteins of math. He thought in equations—but that's pretty rare. If he was still alive today, he'd probably be studying black holes in India—like the Black Hole of Calcutta. Or ones in outer space—like the black hole of *Uranus!* Ha! Or the black holes . . ."

"Herman, get a grip on yourself," said Professor Weinstein softly but firmly.

"Or the black holes of yer *spouse*," Fischer finished in a stage whisper.

"We usually think in equations in chemistry," said Whitehead deci-

sively. “It’s just the day-to-day nature of our discipline. We test and measure the elements and compounds that things are made of. Probably the only times chemists think in terms of pictures or images is when we’re fantasizing during mating, but then”—here he smiled broadly and shrugged to reinforce his light humor—“we’re not engaged in chemistry per se, but rather biology.”

“But you’re using a stirring rod, so you’re acting like a chemist,” injected Fischer again.

Professor Weinstein opened her mouth to reprimand him, paused, changed her mind, and said, “In both history and English it’s the most natural thing to visualize a sequence of events and try to get readers to do so, too. I’m not a poet, of course, but I know that with haiku poems a key feature is to express some point with a pair of word pictures or images. In any case, to get back on track, Bart, what were you driving at?”

Bart Franklin said that the two biggest gaps in the curriculum of the college—besides its lack of any art or music courses—were that students had no chance to study how people or other living things function.

“When I was an undergrad,” he added, “I had to take at least six hours of biology—half of it focused on human physiology—and at least three hours each of psychology, anthropology, and sociology. That was minimum—required—a must. I loved that stuff and took overloads to get more of it, but here at Tech we don’t have even one bio or psych course on our books. Most of us here are educated folks, and we had more in our high schools than these kids’ll ever get now in college, and we also got more in our undergrad courses than they’ll get if they go for their doctorates—no, let me finish.” Franklin had played variations of this theme for the past ten years, and now Professor Fischer pretended to fall asleep with his head on the conference table.

Professor Franklin raised his open palms and grinned amiably. “Maybe that is a little too strong, but notice how all of us here—we can carry on discussions across our fields like this—and *most* of us can even talk in complete sentences. Anyway, this next part is new. I was going to ask if any of you might like to try to team-teach a course with me that bridged across, say, two or more subjects. It could be a good, cheap way to develop our students’ minds—broaden them, so to speak—and at the same time keep ourselves pretty sharp, too, and maybe even get a free post-doc education from each other.”

Bart Franklin began to falter as several committee members averted their gaze or made long faces and shook their heads vigorously. He shrugged and concluded, “Anyway, that was just my thought when I was reading

Hawking's book—like what do we have in common beyond being teachers here and what are our basic, central differences? Anyone care to comment?"

No one spoke.

After ten seconds of silence Professor Weinstein said, "We'll include Bart's idea in the committee's minutes, and anyone who has further thoughts can bring them up at the next meeting." She turned to Professor Lucas. "Dick, do you have anything?"

Professor Dick Lucas shrugged his broad shoulders and shook his head.

"The hour now being late," she said, "and your two colleagues being a pair of no-shows, I'm just going to distribute my own handout for you all to take with you to read and think about. And I'll see that you all get copies of the minutes by this Friday. No—I mean next *Monday*. We're coming up on a holiday, people. Well, everyone have an excellent turkey-day, and, Bart, thank you for taking the minutes for us again. Bless your heart. Do I hear a motion to adjourn?"

As they rode down in the elevator, Professor Weinstein said, "Bart, perhaps we should forward your thoughts to the Curriculum Self-Study Committee. That may be the most appropriate body to consider them."

Herman Fischer looked at Bart Franklin and said, "Pretty neat way to find out who are all the really rotten teachers in other departments, Barty! You'd probably think I stink. We'd all be like little—uh—oysters, all opened up on the halfshell. Even if we've got a little pearl or two in us somewheres, we'd mostly look like glucky-yucky stuff—like the stuff that's on the bottom of an emesis basin—if anyone knows what *that* is."

No one spoke until the elevator door opened. Then they muttered vague farewells about having a good holiday. As Winston Whitehead was opening the front door of the library, Herman Fischer grabbed his coat sleeve and said, "Hey, Wind—I mean *Win*—if you ever find a couple more ways *not* to make di-methyl-ethyl-lucy-ricky-n-fred-vaseline, you be sure to write 'em all down for us."

Whitehead, who stood eight inches taller than Fischer, looked down at the mathematician. *Don't be baited*, he thought, smiling. *And don't try to crush his skull*.

With a gloved hand, Whithead gently patted Fischer's bald head three times and replied, "I will, Herm. I will. And when I do publish my findings, I'll make sure to give credit to *you* as my sole source of encouragement and inspiration."

Following this faculty meeting, Winston Edmund Whitehead walked to his office and retrieved his copy of *ZeBra*. He took it to his two-room apartment, paged through it in a mildly melancholy manner for twenty minutes, and then bundled it up with last week's newspapers to be recycled. Around 7:00 p.m., he fed his orange cat and heated a TV dinner for himself. Two evenings later, he took the four students out for a Thanksgiving dinner.

Whitehead was never reprimanded for having repeated his silicon joke at the meeting—nor for the three other times he did so before he retired at age sixty-seven. And neither during all that interval nor during the remainder of his life did he ever mention to anyone or even recall to himself the thoughts he'd once had about the process by which his mind might have been making some of its decisions. As for his litter-box discovery, Whitehead thought about it twenty-three more times, and once drafted a 357-word summary of his findings—which he mislaid later that day.



# The Wisdom of the Ancients

Pat Dixon

“Hey, Matty! How’re y’ doin’ t’day?” says a cheerful female voice behind me.

I half turn my head, not enough to see her but enough to look polite. “I’m getting there, Olga. Every day in every way, getting a little better.”

“You want a cup o’ water yet, Matty?” says Olga.

“You’re too good to me. You’re going to spoil me, Olga. I’ll start expecting Herb to wait on me, and then what’ll happen? Yeah. A cup o’ water would be great, dear.”

I continue doing my set of leg lifts while holding onto the smooth wooden bar that’s almost breast high. I’m slowly raising my left leg to the side for the fifth time when my right knee begins to kill me. So, the first four times were painless, I tell myself. As I wince and take in a deep breath, Gerry Kimbrough, who is exercising next to me, tries to clear his throat, preparing to speak.

“How’s it going today, Matty?” he says hoarsely.

“Great, Gerry,” I lie. “How’s it with you?”

He tries again to clear his throat, unproductively. “Pretty good, Matty. I—I’m going to a—a speech path—pathologist. Learning some—some ways to comp—compensate, if—I can.”

“When it can’t be fixed, Gerry, that’s what y’ have to do. Thanks, Olga. Just set it on the window sill there, and I’ll drink it when I get done with another set of ten. Bless you, dear.”

I glance down at Gerry’s ankles and see he’s wearing eight-pound weights today. Good for him!

“Moving up from five pounds to eight today, Gerry? That’s great! I’ve still got these sissy two-pounders on, and today they’re—” I catch myself just in time. Shut up, motor-mouth, I think. “Today they’re about as much as I can handle.”

“You’re doing—great, too—Matty,” he tells me.

I’ve finished the first set of ten and begin counting the second set, lifting my right leg to the side. My left knee doesn’t begin to hurt until I reach the count of nine, so I go past ten and up to fourteen before shifting to the left leg again.

I pretend I’m kicking the shins of the blonde bitch who backed her \*\*\*ing shiny new Mercedes SUV into me, “Grubmaning” me while I

was putting my groceries into the rear of my little Honda wagon. Seven—uh! Eight—uh! Nine—uh! Ten—uh! The pain seems less this set than the first, so I take it up to fourteen lifts for this leg, too. Maybe it would be good if I come back to the bar and do one or two more sets in another ten minutes, I think as I sip down half of my water.

“Hang in there, Gerry,” I say and walk over to one of the stationary bicycles.

Some half-bald old coot named Michael is sitting nearby in a raised chair, wearing little pound-and-a-half weights on his ankles and doing leg lifts very slowly. He’s about twenty years older than me, maybe more. We nod a greeting to each other, and I begin to pedal. He’s fairly new to rehab. I think I’ve only seen him here twice before today. Last Friday he mentioned to one of the trainers that he’d been in the navy during World War II.

“Don’t run me over with that, young lady,” he jokes.

“Don’t jump out in front of me, new guy,” I joke back.

After five or six minutes of silence, I hear Michael speak again.

“Hey, Brian! Come over here for a minute. I’ve got something important to tell you.”

Brian Cassidy is one of the older-timers. He was here before me, and I’ve been coming three times a week for the past five months. Trying to come back from a stroke of some kind, is Brian.

“Be right there, Michael,” he says, slowly crossing the room in his dark blue Adidas running suit.

I glance up from my odometer and watch his progress. Brian is holding his cane above the floor and is making an effort to raise his affected leg higher than his so-called “good” leg. Michael continues to do slow leg lifts, and I can tell from his moving lips that he is counting to himself while he waits for Brian to get there.

“At your service, Michael. How can I help you?” Brian says when he is about four feet away from us both.

“I’ve got a bit of serious advice to impart to you, Brian. For you and for your whole family as well.”

“Michael, in all the many decades that we’ve known each other, I have always respected you and have valued whatever you’ve had to say to me. I don’t know if you ever knew that, but it is the Lord’s honest truth.”

I shoot a quick glance up at his face to see whether Brian is being whimsical. He has no trace of a smile on his lips or in his eyes.

“I am glad to hear that, Brian, because what I have to say comes straight from my own hard-won experience,” says Michael. “I want to tell you why I’m here now and pass on what I’ve learned from my misfortune

so that others can profit from it.”

I glance from Michael to Brian, back to Michael, back to Brian, and back to Michael. Now Michael has me hooked: I’m curious, too.

Michael sets both his feet on the floor and says under his breath, “Fifty.” Then he begins to rub both his thighs with his palms.

Brian waits patiently, resting part of his weight on his cane now.

“Brian,” says Michael, “I have a recliner chair at home, and five weeks ago I was sitting in it, reading the sports pages after lunch. And I fell asleep doing that!”

He pauses and nods his chin meaningfully at Brian so that he will be certain to take this information in.

After about fifteen seconds of silence, Brian answers, “I’ve got a recliner chair, too, and I’ve fallen asleep in it, too. I don’t think that is anything you should be hard on yourself about, Michael. It can happen.”

“I know that as well as you, Brian. Let me tell this my own way. It’s important, as you’ll soon see.”

Michael pauses for another ten seconds to collect his train of thought.

“At three-thirty, Brian, I woke up and realized I needed to get to the bank before they closed. So I tried to spring out of the recliner the way I’ve done maybe a million times before—only this time something happened to me, something new.”

I continue to pedal at a steady rate, glancing from one man to the other during this next pause. Their eyes are on each other’s faces, and they never look at me.

“Brian, when I stood up, my right leg was as strong as ever—but my left leg was like a piece of limp spaghetti. No strength at all! It just gave way, and I fell down to the floor and broke my hip!”

Brian opens his mouth to speak, but Michael waves his hand for silence.

“I was in the hospital for three days before they did a hip replacement on me. It seems they wanted to know why my leg had gone so weak before they performed any surgery on it. I had seventeen dozen tests done on my muscles, nerves, heart, veins, arteries, and everything else—just so we’d be on the safe side, so to speak. And do you know what was determined?”

After another significant pause, Brian shakes his head slowly and admits that he does not know.

“Brian, listen to this. We figured out that I had been sleeping for two hours with my legs crossed. My right leg was on top of my left leg, and it cut off the circulation to it. Put it to sleep, as they used to say. No feeling in it at all when I stood up! Didn’t know where it was, and it got twisted

the wrong way when I tried to take a step, and I just fell! Simple as that!”

“That’s really terrible for this misfortune to happen to you, Michael,” says Brian, wide-eyed. “I hope that you’re recovering from it all right—with no complications or nothing.”

“Brian, my advice for you and your family is this: never sit in a chair of any kind with your legs crossed! I mean it. Never!”

Brian rubs his chin and nods his head in agreement.

“Michael, I will take this to heart and will pass it along to my whole family. May I tell you something of a related nature?”

Michael looks down at his hands, which are still resting on his thighs, and considers this for a long interval. Finally he looks up at Brian and nods assent.

“Until you gave me this fine advice today, Michael, I had totally forgotten something which I and my daughter had witnessed about two years ago. She had driven me to my appointment with my stroke doctor, and we were sitting in the waiting room, you know, waiting.”

Michael is staring at his own hands while Brian speaks, and Brian is starting to look fatigued and is beginning to shift his weight from one leg to the other.

“One of the other doctors comes out of the door that leads to the examining rooms in the back—not my doctor but one of the others in that suite, you know. And he walks up to a patient who is sitting across from me and Betty, and he slaps the guy pretty hard across the knee, knocking his magazine out of his hands, almost angry-like, you know. Well, he had the guy’s full attention right away—and everybody else’s, too, if I might say so.”

Brian moves closer to Michael and bends down to try to look him in the eyes. After a few seconds of silence, Michael looks up at him.

“That doctor raised his voice and said, as if for all of us to hear, ‘Mr. Smith,’ or whatever his name was—I really don’t remember—‘Mr. Smith! Don’t you *ever* sit with your legs crossed like that! You could put one of ‘em to sleep, and when you stood up, maybe you’d fall over and just break a hip! The only good news is today you’d already be at a doctor’s office when you did it!’ Michael, I had totally forgotten his advice until you were kind enough to give me your own excellent advice.”

Michael glances over at me, and our eyes meet for three seconds. Then he winks at me. I look away, wondering if Brian is being sarcastic in any way with Michael—or if both of them have been. Are they play-acting—for themselves? For others here? I can’t decide.

“Brian, let me tell you something, young man,” says Michael deci-

sively. “That was a valuable lesson which that doctor was trying to impart. I only hope that you will remember and actually heed it—now that you’ve heard it from me.”

Then I sense that he is turning in my direction.

“And I also hope that this young lady here—who may or may not have been listening to either of us whilst she has been speeding down the gorgeous kaleidoscope of the highway of life on her bicycle, perhaps far too rapidly to smell its many small flowers—is herself able to do the same.”

I smile and nod towards them both and dismount from the bike without a word, giving them a little wave with my right hand. My husband, Herb, who has been sitting and reading in the waiting area while I exercised, is now standing, waiting for me with our cab driver near Eva, the receptionist. The bike’s odometer tells me that I’ve “ridden” two miles “farther” than I had planned, and the wall clock behind Eva tells me that my hour is about up.

I take two slow steps towards Herb, who had a serious stroke nearly ten years ago, and then I slowly turn back towards Michael and Brian. They are both looking at me. There is room, I think, in my world for ironic repartee *and* for straightforward, kindly concern. Either can be good. And both can be good.

“Michael? May I call you Michael? I’m Matty. Matty Marshall. Brian—Michael—I’d like to thank you both. I learned something important about health and safety today, and I hope that I shall remember it and apply it. And I will be certain to pass along what I learned to my own family. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome, Ms. Matty Marshall,” says Michael, making a slight bow and giving me a second wink.

“U’re welcome, Matty,” echoes Brian Cassidy with what looks like a very faint trace of a smile.



# children churches & daddies

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