

Slouching Past Bethlehem

Carol Adler



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It is only when we realize that life is taking us nowhere that it begins to have meaning.

--P.D. Ouspensky

.....Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

--From "The Second Coming," by William Butler Yeats, first published
in
Dial Magazine (1920), which owes its financial sponsorship to
Dr. James Sibley Watson of Rochester, New York

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1

Happy Y2K4

As the clock struck twelve, Harold's semen gushed into Gissalayne's vagina, and it was suddenly January First of the Year Two Thousand and Four. The Fourth Year of the Millennium had come at last, and so had Harold.

Gissalayne was a woman of passion who prided herself on being a tiger in the bedroom of every man she had ever loved and there had been a few. To celebrate Y2K4 she had flown from her laptop PC in Rochester, New York to Seattle, Washington to meet her latest Most Significant [sugarcone.com](#) Pen Pal, with every intention of living up to her reputation.

After the few first days, gray clouds had set in, thicker than those that characteristically gloomed over both Seattle and

Rochester, and as far as Gissalayne was concerned, the affair had risen and set.

The letdown was more than she could bear. No wild thrashing and kicking, no toe-locks or teeth-clenching; not even a chance for one of her earsplitting screams that started low and ascended two octaves to an extraordinary High 'C' at the point where she finally reached climax. Poor Harold. Poor Gissalayne. In the two weeks they'd spent together—she had arrived before Christmas, using paid vacation plus holiday time off from her career counseling job at Hook, Line & Sinker, LLC – “We give you the rod, you hook the fish”—nothing. God knows, she had been willing.

“Go,” ordered her best friend Maggie. “You need to see if your keyboards really match. It’s time you found the right stud. You can’t go on forever being single and undefined.”

Maggie was right on one score, i.e., scoring, but Gissalayne was beginning to think her best friend was dead wrong if she really believed Marriage/Partnership and Definition were the same thing. If being single meant being undefined, wasn’t this just another way of saying the bonding with a Partner, Husband/Wife or Significant Someone instantly delivered to each member a Certificate of Life Purpose? Goals?

An Authentic Destiny? For Maggie, pairing up with someone filled the empty Nest and took care of all the nagging from relatives [When are you going to settle down like other girls (women)?] Staying single meant codependence on sex, shopping, food, drugs... anything that plugged up a yawning hormonal hole. Noah of the Old Testament understood. He never would have considered bringing any animal aboard his Ark unless they had a yin for their yang.

Maggie thought the idea of meeting the man of your life over the Internet was outrageous. But then, what was different from meeting him on a blind date or through a dating bureau? argued Gissalayne.

The biological clock was ticking, she reminded herself as she signed up for her sugarcone.com trial membership. If she didn't speed things up a bit, Gissalayne knew she would lose her chance of ever looking like the sister instead of the mother of her children. *What children? What husband? What father?* Maggie had all three. But the problem was, did Gissalayne ever want a husband and father like Maggie's Francis? Did Gissalayne really want Maggie's stay-at-home lifestyle? Isn't that what she counseled hundreds of clients against?

“Get excited about life,” Gissalayne instructed her Hook, Line & Sinker clients. “Do what you love to do and the career (and money) will follow.” Her advice worked well for everyone but herself. Was it not one of life’s little ironies that we choose careers in areas where we may be able to help others but where we’re clueless about helping ourselves? It was a well-known fact that priests, ministers and rabbis often choose to “serve God” and teach God’s ways because they don’t have the foggiest notion who or what God is themselves, except maybe some type of escape from reality: the womb outside the clergy. Psychologists counsel people on relationships and mental problems because they’re so fucked-up themselves. Sex therapists are often impotent or sexually joyless.

The point to all this deep thinking was obvious: marriage and family were neither a goal nor a lifestyle but both were something Gissalayne happened not to have and that she wanted. Desperately.

Gissalayne had certainly done everything possible to teach Harold how to make his penis into her joy stick. Had the computer lied, or was it one of those keyboard miscarriages? That this gorgeous hunk whose passionate electronic emissions had captivated her for almost a year should turn out to be a dud

instead of a stud.... Where had he plagiarized all those educated emails from, she now wondered. Did he subscribe to a sugercone.com ghostwriting service that for a small but exciting fee, enough to re-stock their raspberry flavored massage oil and roll-on pheromones, did all the work except the fucking itself, for semi-literate studs like Harold?

From the bathing suit jpg posted on facecliff.com, virtually Harold was a Grecian wonder: lots of marbling in the right muscles heroically positioned against a backdrop of drapings. Harold was in the dry cleaning business.

In her heart and the deepest part of her vagina where it ached most, Gissalayne knew Harold was never intended to be her time or place. He needed a woman who could be a true helpmate, someone to complete him. Maybe someone with a Laundromat or car wash franchise.

Gissalayne did not want Completion. She wanted Children. "Someone Up There, or Out There, or Wherever You Are," Gissalayne petitioned silently to the filthy wall of Harold's bedroom, "why hasn't the New Millennium come through for me yet, producing, once and for all and for all time, the Man of my Destiny *and* a Destiny?"

Tears stung Gissalayne's eyes, gluing her mascaraed lashes together in big clumps that probably made her look ugly. Why couldn't she be satisfied just being boring, clueless, mediocre and mundane like most people? She already knew it was because of the mind thing. Alas, the blessing and curse of intelligence in the age of film stars and jocks.

After skip-roping through high school in two years, Gissalayne landed in college with a full scholarship, graduating in another two years. Then she'd set to work at the diploma factory, collecting six post-graduate degrees from universities that were only too willing to claim her brilliance in their alumnae bulletins.

It didn't take long for Gissalayne to realize that PhDs in History of Ideas, Comparative Literature, Art History, Creative Writing, Archaeology and Anthropology were useless when it came to putting bread on the table--unless you wanted to spend the rest of your life recycling the same curricula to students whose only goal was to get from Monday morning to Friday afternoon. Gissalayne did it for awhile, but the academic heterogenic male gene pool was either jealous of her brilliance or put off by her sex drive. And fucking the students was, of course, *verboten*.

It wasn't easy teaching people how to think, especially when they hadn't figured out yet why they should do anything in life that they didn't have to, such as earning a living. And the rat race of academia was, well, ratty. She did not like politics, especially when they got dirty. Which was, face it, inevitable. Like panties, drapes and bedspreads, just about anything in life eventually collected some form of collateral. Even drug money needed to be cleaned.

Harold did have one thing going for him: he'd chosen a business that was linked to necessity, at least for Americans, who were notorious for their addiction to sweet-smelling arm- and cockpits.

There was another reason why Gissalayne would never hole herself up in a university. She'd realized a long time ago that only one orifice had real value in this world and nothing should ever compete with the Divinity of that Sacred Hole. Gissalayne had hung around college campuses long enough to know about another hole clearly visible in those musty library stacks overloaded with useless or banal information. That hole was Lack.

The academic version of Lack was a large pit that seemed to collect more emptiness as the years wore on. Academia could

be equated with lack of vision, imagination and emotion: the basic ingredients for a good lay and exciting life. Besides, it had no use for anything that couldn't be validated or footnoted for the next book. And since Gissalayne had learned a long time ago that everything was relative and nothing could actually be validated or proven except uncertainty, all this knowledge and information only represented a large goose egg that translated into "so what?"

Gissalayne was plagued by questions such as: when two people are having sex, what are they supposed to be thinking about? What event should they be attending other than the act itself?

Oral sex was out of the question: Harold was too busy talking, trying to figure out whether he should buy or sell DuPont or Eastman Kodak, or whether Minolta or Hewlett-Packard had the best deal on color laser printers.

Tonight's Intimate Dialogue: "Gissalayne, do you think I can get the same high resolution on those photos of the Grand Canyon at the Food Co-op, or should I spend a little more money and take them to a photo place?"

Gissalayne stopped pumping. Her hands fell away from his balls as she gritted her teeth. "Dear God," she prayed, "tell

Harold he needs to say, 'I love you, Gissalayne,' and make it sound as if he means it."

Harold twisted her right nipple and stroked her left thigh. "The last time I took some film to a more expensive place they turned out lousy. It couldn't have been the camera. It was my Nikon with the special zoom lens attachment."

Teach Harold about passion before I scream out of frustration and bail out of this damn waterbed or puncture it with Harold's nail clippers and drown both of us. And that's a threat.

"Can we postpone this conversation, Harold?" she moaned as Harold let out a soft fart and wheeled his computer keyboard over the edge of the bed. Harold's bedroom was a second office, kitchen and dumpster. The waterbed was floating in a sea of trash--mail order catalogs, coupons, supermarket receipts and breakup letters from other sugarcone.com hopefuls. Probably as many as 32 flavors, Gissalayne concluded disgustedly a couple days ago when she'd plowed through the piles to clear a path to the bed.

It was all so mundane, Gissalayne could hardly bear it. How could anything as significant as Y2K4 be ushered in with anything less than a multiple orgasm (marriage proposal, diamond ring, trip to the Bahamas, et cetera et cetera)? Hadn't

the predictions for this ominous calendar date included everything from record-breaking natural disasters to a major stock market crash, the Explosion of the Hollow Earth, emergence of the 12th Planet that would cause world-wide power outages, and a major bombardment of jockax, the latest biological weapon that was supposed to be far deadlier than anthrax and its other derivatives, since it also infected the ionosphere... as if it hadn't already been pierced enough by military hatpins that no one was supposed to know about? But jockax was far more serious even than the HAARP accidents in Alaska. It was a virtual weapon which would have meant the end of sugarcone.com emails from Harold.

All that fear had been more than enough ammunition to hit the search engines with gusto and shop for the cheapest flight from Rochester to Seattle to meet this gorgeous jpg of a man who had virtually captured her heart and promised by email to give her everything she had ever desired.

How could she have been so wrong, Gissalayne kept repeating as she opened cupboards and roaches crawled out. Where were all the candlelight dinners, music and incense... tub soaks and sexy showers... Harold had never taken a shower with a woman before, and he wasn't about to start now, he informed

her, glaring at her naked body and heading for the kitchen to make his morning smoothie.

Smoothies were one of Harold's rituals that had traveled home with him along with the piles of copious notes filed in the piles of trash on the floor, from one of Ripley Firehorse's Personal Empowerment network marketing seminars he'd attended after the breakup of his third marriage. For three years straight, Harold had invested in Ripley Firehorse's body- and mind-building vitamins, videos and trips to Florida and Hawaii to swim with the dolphins. The only thing that had stuck, as far as she could determine, were the morning smoothies... and *they* certainly didn't have much staying power.

Fruit only in the morning was supposed to open the Magical Door to Self-Actualization—one of Harold's favorite Seminar Titles. From Gissalayne's perspective regarding Harold, these blender concoctions only made it easier for him to get rid of all his shit. One banana mixed with grape juice and a handful of frozen strawberries sent him bee-lining to the bathroom thirty minutes later. She had it timed by now, since there was only one bathroom and she had to work around Harold's schedule. Perhaps, Gissalayne concluded, Self-Actualization was nothing more than a good bowel movement.

Harold lived in the Sunny Shades apartment complex in suburban Issaquah with 450 other tenants, including too many small toddlers and teething colicky children who screamed in the middle of the night and banged on the paper-thin walls.

Harold's Duds Without Suds was in a dingy brick building on Main Street in downtown Issaquah next to a plumber and a dentist. Mini-and maxi-rotor rooters. Issaquah had not yet been historically preserved and was neither rustic nor quaint. Grim would best describe the mile-long strip of half-empty buildings badly in need of repair.

Every day at the sound of the 7 AM alarm, Harold shot up out of bed, yelled "I AM FANTASTIC!!!" three times to the ceiling and then shaved, showered, whirled up his smoothie, checked his emails, performed the shit thing, scrambled down the three flights of outside stairs to his Ford pick-up truck, and disappeared. The exception was Christmas, and today, New Years Eve.

Eager with anticipation, wrapped around Harold's hairy legs and listening to the gentle slosh-slosh of the water beneath her as the digital clock moved to one minute past twelve midnight... Gissalayne waited. For what?

Nothing. Nothing in the next moment except dead silence followed by the soft thump of Harold rolling over and immediately launching into a series of sputterings and snorkelings that would soon level off into peaceful zzz-ing as he cruised into the Land of Perfectly Dry Cleaned Drapes and No Returns that characteristically followed his nightly dump into her tunnel of sweet abandon.

Gissalayne lay there wide-eyed, her nipples smarting from Harold's insensitive twisting and pulling. The sheets felt cold and wet beneath her, and she could feel his sperm hardening on her right thigh, the remainder of his cum still dripping from the tip of his penis as he'd pulled away. Gissalayne had learned long ago not to fake anything unless it was real, so now, at the beginning of the New Year, she was getting her own Y2K4 message. In this auspicious moment, the truth had been laid as bare as she was at that moment.

"Harold, God tells me that we're not right for each other," Gissalayne said aloud to his sleeping form. "I'm leaving. I need to get off this ship before it springs a leak. I'm too young to drown. I'm going back to Rochester early. Like tomorrow."

2

NASA'S Non-Existent Options

Gissalayne knew it was going to be tough to get a flight. Holiday season; every airline booked solid. She also knew Harold wouldn't get it.

"I don't get it, Gissalayne. I thought we had something good going between us. I thought you were having a good time." Genuine tears sprang to his eyes and his hand paused over the pancake batter he was stirring with a broken wooden spoon.

New Years Day buckwheat pancakes from scratch, Harold had announced with gusto. Gissalayne hated pancakes and had tempered her response when he'd asked her how many she wanted by replying, "None. I don't eat pancakes." But that hadn't seemed to matter. Like many bachelors who were accustomed to doing things their way, all other options besides "yes" no longer existed. Harold was a selective listener.

Glopping six perfect circles of batter in one fry pan, he cracked six eggs into the other.

Glassily, Gissalayne eyed the yolks, watching the whites harden. Those were her breasts in the pan. Her nipples throbbed, recalling the painful pinching of Harold's paws.

"It has something to do with backgrounds," she ventured lamely.

"We can change the wallpaper, anywhere in the house." Harold's voice grew husky. "We can even paint, if you like, though I prefer wallpaper. No flowers or fancy stuff. And we don't have to spend a lot of money."

"No, Harold." Gissalayne tried to be patient, but he was trying her patience. "I don't mean walls. I mean *background* backgrounds. Beliefs. Core beliefs, like philosophical concepts, and women's rights. And foreplay," she added as an afterthought.

The spatula paused mid-air and slammed down on the eggs. Harold scraped them onto two dirty plates. Gissalayne winced and sent yet another memo of gratitude to the Great One for reminding her to pack plenty of Echinacea, golden seal, garlic and Chinese herbs.

“If you’re going to bring up The Unmentionable again,” growled Harold, “then I think we’d better Dialogue. And that means the eggs are going to get cold.”

“Dialoguing” was a virtual fetal position that had developed somewhere in the midst of their emails. It allowed Harold to “talk intimately about sensitive subjects” such as oral sex and The Great One, without getting upset. Both of these topics, he’d informed Gissalayne in one of these Dialogues, had unpleasant “Neural Associations” for him whose origins had not yet been disclosed to him in this lifetime. NASA... Harold’s Neural Associative Sensitive Areas. Dialogue emails were formatted in steel blue boldface and occurred whenever Gissalayne happened to plunge into a NASA.

The first email that had triggered the onslaught of subsequent Dialogues was a cartoon she’d forwarded to Harold, sent to her by a friend who had a great sense of humor. A monkey was peeing into the mouth of another monkey. For two days, a yawning hole showed up in her Outlook Express. If any emails were forthcoming from waterbed@haroldscomputer.com she was not getting them. Finally she realized she must not be getting something else, either.

Harold--who was accustomed to writing as many as a couple dozen emails a day, often sourced from the waterbed where the laptop rested on a swivel-arm platform positioned over the spot where Harold slept and they had now fucked for the past ten days (Harold liked to fuck at the same location where he slept, since he said the cum continued to deliver hot NASAs for the rest of the night)--had stopped communicating.

Virtual relationships sucked, concluded Gissalayne, writing down her flight confirmation number. Four hours it had taken, to book a return flight. She could have been almost home already. Anything virtual allowed for so much room to hide the truth and skip over the blemishes. Like the 'Big B' one for Boring.

After a day of no return emails from Harold, Gissalayne went on a fast and lost two-and-a-half pounds. On the third day of her fast, she was greatly relieved when Waterbed trickled an icy message into her Outlook Express about the weather, a car accident at the intersection near Harold's apartment complex and bargain bananas at King's Market. Twelve for a dollar twenty-five. And a report about King's amazing new flip-top trash cans.

Gissalayne was delirious with excitement and relief. She was also starved and on the verge of making a midnight run to the supermarket for some Häagen Daz rum raisin ice cream, rum cake, and rum. Fuck the sugar. Fuck the fat.

The next email was long and steel-blue Times New Roman boldface in which Harold initiated the dialoguing process, informing her that he would break off their relationship if she ever mentioned the "O-Sex" thing to him again. This was followed by a diatribe about a so-called "God."

How was she to know about all of Harold's God-NASAs? How could she have known that Harold's father had been a Bible Belt Baptist minister who'd almost drowned his three-year-old son in the church's Olympic-size baptismal?

"I've never gone near water since," wrote Harold in his long, detailed email. Maybe that's why he'd become a dry cleaner, Gissalayne reasoned.

Harold was so upset he hadn't even bothered with spell check before sending off his ten-page printed-out epistle. "Drown" came through as "Drone," "heart" as "heat" and "fort" as "fart." She'd already concluded after several advanced courses on Freud that there are no accidents.

In the email Gissalayne was impressed, however, by Harold's disclosure of emotions. That was a good sign. Maybe he really did care. Her pelvis did a flip-flop with her solar plexus and she cancelled out the rum run, exchanging it for a prudent bowl of oatmeal with some ginger tea.

Carefully Gissalayne read and re-read the email printout. Even though hindsight was as useless as a three-legged stool, she should have physically examined Harold's hindsight [not his stool] before fastening that seat belt over her floatation cushion. Most of Harold's theological argument was so elementary to her well-trained mind with its overkill academic degrees, she realized now that she must have really been starved for a relationship. And starved, period, after that ridiculous fast, she thought now in retrospect, switching the phone to the other ear and copying down the return flight number to Rochester.

A hundred dollars to change the ticket and two hundred more dollars to book the only flight and available seat that routed her through Columbus, Ohio with a three hour wait. It was worth every extra dollar and even the wait in Columbus, she told herself firmly, fighting back her tears.

Harold's arguments about atheism started and ended in his diapers. He was still an infant who had never moved beyond the

hypocrisy of Pritchard Boxhart preaching morality on Sundays and during the rest of the week sneaking off to his black mistress and their three illegal children. Pritchard was also an alcoholic.

Harold was an only child born out of wedlock and probably the abortion had failed or it was too late for one. His mother, Ina Lou Partiole was visiting her Baptist aunt in Texas when she'd met Pritchard at Sunday church services. The way Ina Lou told it, it was apparently a one night stand or maybe it happened on the nightstand. Harold was just a youngster when his mother had related this story, and none of it made sense then or now.

Harold had shared his childhood between his two illustrious parents, six months on the West Coast with Ina Lou and the other six in Texas with Pritchard, his new wife, Isolde, and three step-sisters. His hatred for all five of them was mutually returned.

Since Harold had always felt like he was competing with God for his parents' attention, of course, it was God who would have to take the blame. "I can lead my own life. God doesn't have to be in the director's chair," he'd told himself often enough.

“Yes, honey, but sometimes God can give you a little boost, a little support,” his mother reminded him, “like a gift, you know. Money, a few words of encouragement...a steak dinner...” Before she died, Ina Lou Partiole had left the Baptist faith to become a born-again Christian converted by her latest lover, a drug dealer in L.A. Before that she was a Wicca. When Harold was still in high school, she’d started getting funny with trees and animals. More than that, young Harold didn’t ask. His imagination didn’t want to deal with it.

His mother’s past had been shadier than an elm tree, and probably just as diseased. She’d spent a lot of time in Vegas, and as far as he was concerned, that was all he needed to know about her. At the time he was born she was managing a hot dog stand and several men at Laguna Beach. It wasn’t a bad place to grow up, but sand was notorious for being shifty, like the men who hung around their beach house. And as for beach life, by the time Harold was fifteen, he’d been there done that, and had no desire to do it again.

Gissalayne was grateful for her mixed background. Her stepmother, Winona Flabido, was a Mormon by birth and had run away from home at age 17 to get out from under the rod of her father. Freely and openly Winona had flaunted her body and

soul, celebrating the joys and efficacies of caffeine, nicotine, chocolate, cocaine, heroin and men. If Mormon men could have several wives, so could ex-Mormon women, she was fond of saying. Winona had paid a hefty price to bribe the adoption agency to release four-month old Gissalayne Chondroitin. The director of the state social services bureau was a client of Winona's, so she took it out in trade.

The adoption of a child gave Winona an excuse to stay in bed all day and added respectability to her boyfriend Zilbert's reputation. Zilbert ran the local bowling alley and pimped on the side.

By the age of five, Gissalayne had already concluded that people enjoyed cutting down other people's beliefs and blaming their own shortcomings and long-term addictions on parents, teachers, priests, rabbis, et cetera et cetera. Organized religion was a good whipping post and the whole thing, like life itself, was a game of Barbie and Ken at best, or Dragons and Dinosaurs at worst. Measuring one religion against another was like measuring penises in the locker room. Futile, since it was results that ultimately mattered. Plus whatever went on in the mind. The mind... the mind... *that missing piece, Harold.* Imagination. And sensations. *Feelings, Harold. Real ones.* God,

how Gissalayne loved her own imagination and feelings. She would have been lost without them.

Where had she read once that in reality no one else can love you except yourself and therefore if you love yourself you will be loved? Why hadn't she clamped this wisdom beneath a magnet on her refrigerator door—or between her teeth, for God's sake? But even if you did love yourself, you still had to deal with this child thing. She was not a biological wonder that could fuck itself. The basic requirement was sperm from somewhere, and besides a bank that produced sperm, she also needed one that produced money for at least a 4-bedroom house two cars boat vacations charge cards including AmEx and Neiman Marcus, and sushi.

The Great One knew all this. S/He'd been teaching her these profound lessons since birth, and if it hadn't been for Their guiding light, Gissalayne knew she never would have survived her childhood. This was no fancy "conversations with God" type of thing. The Great One was simply what Gissalayne liked to call her free roaming cell phone, living inside every cell of her body and everyone else's, including Mother and Father Earth. The Great One didn't need huge cathedrals and monuments, just like

S/He didn't need a gender. All of that was human stuff, loaded with agendas.

Gender, agenda. Close enough to have a definite connection, she'd pointed out to her Etymology 101 professor, Dr. Laura Wischbunn. Gray hair in a bun crossed through with a wooden arrow, long skirts that [s]wished. It would have taken just one good fuck or session with a decent vibrator to convince Dr. Wischbunn that anything could be true, even the existence of ETs. Until that time, however, she was rigid on derivatives.

Sacred space, like outer space, could be created anywhere, by anyone, the Great One told her. And even though scientists might say her she owed her existence to a man and woman getting into each other's pubic hair for a one night shot, Gissalayne had always known better. She really knew her presence here on this earth plane was the result of her own decision while attending a party one day where the Great Being was the featured guest. The Great Being, source of all creation and Supreme enough to put up with all her fantasies and bullshit, but who didn't seem to be giving her much help in finding The Right Man.

The Right Man. He would have to be one of great balls. And if he had an ego like most men and some women, it would

have to be a healthy one that was tough enough to have already withstood the test of his own bullshitting and self-deception. Gissalayne knew that was a big order, but she'd told the Great One she was willing to be patient.

Big mistake.

Like a cold lump of turd that wouldn't go down in the toilet bowl after multiple flushings, Y2K4 reality had put everything into proper perspective. Time was running out.

What better truth serum than the injection of Harold's semen, crusting on the very flesh of her being? All the pleasure of the past ten days had dissipated, leaving only the putrid remainder of a relationship that never should have begun.

Gissalayne now realized the truth was almost too predictable. How in the world could she have produced the right man in her life *until she actually described that man to herself?* Indeed, had she ever stopped long enough between affairs to make that all-important Shopping List? For years, The Great One had been after her to do this, but she'd stubbornly resisted. Somehow this method seemed too much like a budget with business projections and spread sheets. It was much more romantic and magical to spread her own sheets whenever she chose to or whenever the opportunity presented itself.

She was too romantic to make lists—and to stop and think about the Law of Attraction. Yet, didn't it make sense that she could never attract a Man of Great Destiny without having a Matching Destiny of her own?

Face it, Gissalayne. You are intelligent, capable, over-educated and irrational. Hot tears streamed down her cheeks. What really mattered in a relationship? The three S's. Sex, Sex and Sizzle. It was the Sizzle Factor that could transcend morning appearances, unexpected farts, the Toothbrush Cap test, and Shared Diaper-Changing. Sizzle—excitement, adventure, curiosity... hunger to learn everything there was to know... to go everywhere and do everything... Yes! That's what turned her on. She had always known that. All those years in graduate school, all those PhDs, the joy and excitement of opening her mind to new information, new research... when all she really wanted to do was open her blouse and pants to a Manifold Fucker. ["Lord, how manifold are Thy works... why can't one of those four-foot pipe fittings or glorious unending early morning sunrises be mine?"] Was she being selfish, asking for a male counterpart who was every bit and butt as magnificent as she? Was that the problem?

Yes, and no, Gissalayne sighed. Lovemaking was not a destiny or even a career unless she wanted to hire herself out as a playgirl or whore. That was her mother Winona's fate or destiny or final resting place, and it surely hadn't delivered much meaning or purpose for *her*. No, she had no desire to follow in the path of her stepmother's lace undies. And she really did love children.

Gissalayne's heart skipped a beat as she pictured little ones splashing in the bathtub, cooing and waving their arms at a mobile of butterflies hung over the crib, their tiny hands gripping the edge of the table, diapered fannies swaying from side to side as they carefully toddled around it... slowly, fearfully, letting their fingers one by one fall away from the table... until... yes! They were standing on their own two feet! Then, plop! Bouncing onto the floor...

"I don't even mind wiping the doo-doo from their little tushies or snot from their noses. Great One, my Beloved Friend and Mentor, I have strayed for the last time in my life here on this earth plane," mourned Gissalayne. "Why didn't I get the message months ago, when that fateful 'O' mail arrived? Why didn't I know then, how fucked-up he was?"

I understand and forgive you, replied The Great One. You were just following your heart, and that's good. Harold would love to harness you to the bed and beat you. He would love to make you into his slave. You like that, as long as it's only fantasy. You were just responding to your primal sex drive. Your healthy (hungry) hormones picked up Harold's subliminal lust and you thought you could transform his S & M into daily pleasures--but on a more aesthetic level, of course. Everything is in divine order, my dear. It always is.

One thing about the Great One: They didn't question her sexual appetite. How she loved Them! In fact, she loved Them so much, often she wondered why They couldn't manifest in human form to become her husband. "God, you know I'm not Venus or Aphrodite. I have legs that don't match the rest of me; they're too short, and that bump on the bridge of my nose, I know you remember when it got broken at the age of eight during my tomboy years when I was playing baseball with Joe Winters and he accidentally slammed me with a bat."

She wondered if the Great One would remind her that this was her first masochistic awakening. She didn't even whimper because she'd had a mad crush on Joe. She hadn't realized yet that it was his premature pheromones that were the attraction

and not Joe Winters himself, who had flunked second grade and was on the verge of flunking it again. In those days they labeled it "slow." Today they call it "learning challenged." Joe Winters masturbated and never changed his pants; it might have been the only pair he owned. Unlike most of the children's parents in the class who were filthy rich, Joe's parents were dirt poor.

That was another thing they had in common. Poverty. The tickertapes of Gissalayne's classmates' backgrounds were as transparent as fly paper. Walmart and Target clustered at one corner of the playground and Neiman-Marcus and L.L. Bean at the other.

"Great One, I don't know why you gave me stringy hair that doesn't curl, and a head full of colics, but we've talked about that before, and I've learned to live with it. 'Short and chic' works well. And I like Madeline, my new hairdresser. Thank you for bringing her to me. She makes me look like a model, except for the legs part. My breasts are glorious--plump and firm, with nipples to die for! And my thin waist and flat stomach; no cellulite or flab, even at age 31, when it all starts.

"I'm gorgeous, Great One. I know that... especially in Levi's that cover up my legs, and tee shirts and sweaters that show off

my cleavage, especially when it's heaving. I've even been called gorgeous. Brainy and gorgeous. What a great combination. Thank you, Great One! But both you and I know I've been hiding the brainy part. You keep telling me it's okay to come out of the closet and start to be whole with a 'W'. *Whole, I said, not Whore.*"

The Great One knew, and Gissalayne *certainly* knew the proper stud had to be as brilliant, creative, sexy, exciting and outrageous as herself.

A tall order, my dear, the Great One had told her many times. *Do you think you're up to getting married to someone who is your match, in every way?*

"O Great One, of course!" Gissalayne exclaimed instantly. "I wouldn't want it any other way! I don't even care about the money part. That's really not important to me, I mean, as long as he's not living in a trailer park and commuting to work on a bicycle."

Be specific. A Honda with a motor, or a bicycle that you have to manually pedal, insisted The Great One. *Motor bikes can be costly items and a lot of guys prefer them, even when they can afford a Porsche or a Mercedes.*

Harold's foreplay consisted of Gissalayne stroking his penis. "My vagina, Harold. Here's my vagina," Gissalayne whispered, as a bongo drum combo started in the apartment below and a vehicle's security alarm went off in the parking lot. She led his fingers to the already moist inner folds and steered him to her clitoris. His hand curled up in a fist as he withdrew.

"How about your penis in my mouth," suggested Gissalayne.

"Frankly, that never turned me on." The flickering candles on the dresser played over their ghostly humps beneath the sheet, riding the waves of the waterbed. "Lie sideways, Gissalayne. I'm going to sling one of your legs over my shoulder. Then I'm going to shove hard into you. I hope you're wet enough. I don't want to injure myself. I've got some KY Jelly in the top drawer next to you. We can play like that for hours. I have no feeling on the back part of my stem that rubs against you, so there's no danger of my coming. I read an article about this once. It has something to do with placement of the nerve endings. I wrote away for a chart with numbers. They asked me to position my penis geographically on a chart like a map. Each erogenous zone was numbered and lettered."

Did it at least feel good? Gissalayne wondered as obediently she handed him her leg and they assumed the N-46 position. How many women had been part of Harold's training manual, and what were the statistics for success? In N-46, Harold wasn't the only one who couldn't feel anything. Contact was virtually as impossible as virtual sex.

Gissalayne was beginning to wonder about those clandestine emails that she was instructed to delete as soon as she read them. The one about the power of his penis, coming ten times in less than ten hours and his ability to make a woman come over 50 times in succession. *Ripley's Believe or Not*. Big Deal. Who's counting and who's standing in the bleachers cheering? A little blue mouse powered with two triple 'A' batteries (made in China)? Clickety-click. There was something definitely wrong with this picture and Gissalayne didn't want to hang around one minute longer to find out what it was.

3

Oh God, Who Am I?

"So I guess this is it," said Harold at the airport. "You don't want me to stand by with you?"

"No, Harold, I'm used to standing by alone," Gissalayne reassured him, smiling tightly as she opened the back door of the truck and hauled out her luggage. It was bitter cold and had started to sleet; typical for Seattle in January. After ten days of wind, rain, sleet, hail, snow and Harold's drafty house that he kept at 60 degrees, even Rochester, New York would seem like the tropics. Harold was also an energy freak.

"Thank you for everything. It was really a wonderful holiday," she lied, wheeling her luggage away from the truck.

"So I guess this is it," repeated Harold. "Take care," he called over his shoulder.

She knew he would cry, but not over her. Tears shed over himself and his loss. She'd already had enough experience in the department of needy men. Tomorrow he would be on the

Internet again, renewing his sugarcone.com membership and writing up a new profile to see who else he could bag.

But what about her? Where would she be with her emotions? Her life? Gissalayne shivered and her teeth started to chatter as she dug into her purse for her ID. *Who am I? God, who am I? Tell me, please tell me before it's too late.*

Icy gusts of wind tore open her coat flap and whipped beneath her ankle-length skirt, soaring all the way up into her vagina that once again was feeling lonely and betrayed.

"Columbus?" repeated the ticket agent.

"1492," mumbled Gissalayne. "Oh—Yes. Rochester. New York. I mean Columbus-Rochester. (Shit.) The agent eyed her sympathetically. "Has anyone approached you since you packed your luggage?"

"I wish," muttered Gissalayne. "NO," she answered aloud. "Here's my driver's license. The picture ID is me with long hair and no air brushing."

She was so starved for sex right now, even the electronic rod scanning her body shot a sweet sensation up her spine that made her nipples stand at attention.

Gissalayne burrowed into a seat in the waiting area, filed her nails and fought back her tears. She did *not* like public

spectacles. There was no reason in this or any other world for her to fall apart. *We create our own reality. I created this messy realty and now I have to clean it up. I even created my pussy.* She pulled out a tissue from her coat pocket and blew her nose.

So this was it, Harold kept repeating, clutching his car keys until they dug into the palm of his hand. His eyes stung from sleet and tears. This was no time to be a sissy. He hated tears unless they were meaningful, and in the past forty years of his life, he could count those meaningful occasions on three fingers: the time he'd lost a lawsuit against the Wakeup Motels for a bedspread disaster in the dry cleaning machines (trauma), the apartment development's decision to replace the toilet with a new one that didn't drip (relief), and six years ago when his mother died. Since he'd always hated her, he hadn't decided yet whether that one was grief, relief or just gas from a can of baked beans he'd scarfed down before leaving for the airport for her funeral. All that pressure in his pants, holding back those farts during the entire plane trip had made his eyes water.

Harold climbed into the truck, started the motor and headed for the exit. He'd even begun to consider his good looks

and large penis an impediment. How many males would have envied his biceps? He was a superman in the gym. Effortlessly, he lifted weights. It was as if he'd been born with dumbbells in each hand. If they didn't have a double meaning, he could almost have said that he and dumbbells were made for each other. His life could have been a bouquet of women in bikinis.

Structure. That's what people needed in life. Not God or booze or any other crutches. What they really needed was a piece of self-esteem to stand on. Like an indispensable income derived from an indispensable service anyone could perform in his sleep... and that's what he'd gained from his seminars with Ripley Firehorse.

Harold had bought the dry cleaning business from an ad on the Internet. He owed his whole life to the Internet. It was like the greatest thing that had ever happened to him because it was so real. It wasn't like Santa Claus or God or any of those fake statues people prayed to. The Internet gave everyone their own inalienable right to create the life they wanted for themselves. Ripley Firehorse had introduced him to the Internet and its omnipotence. Yes sir, the Internet allows you to be and do and have everything you desire, Harold often said to himself, repeating Ripley's inspiring words from the August 2000 Gallup,

New Mexico seminar. Also, unlike any of those fakes, the Internet didn't force you to deal with anything you didn't want to. One click of the mouse or flick of your thumb and you could delete the whole World Wide Web if you chose. No one came into your home with a check list to determine the last time you dusted the tabletops. Or opened your refrigerator to gasp at the rotting left-overs from Chinese drive-ins and pizza take-outs. You could even do virtual relationships [VRs], Harold had soon discovered, and manifest them in your bed.

That was fine until the VR with Deatte when he'd ended up with VD. Deatte was a nymphet and also a whore and day trader. "In 90 days I can find you an investor and for 17% interest and 25% of the revenues with a three-year exit strategy, you can build a dry cleaning empire of franchises all over the country." Harold winced as Deatte yanked the Excel pages out of the printer. It was a new Hewlett Packard and Deatte had no respect for equipment, either personal or business. He'd never had to deal with VD before, and his exit strategy with Deatte was immediate.

At age 33, it really was time to settle down. Harold didn't need his mother to tell him that. A clean, silent well-lubricated woman would take care of his sleepless nights. She would also

tidy up the house and give him some children; boys. He'd already decided he'd keep having children until he got a boy, and give away The Other Ones [girls] for adoption. Or get a divorce. Of course he might change his mind if any of them turned out to look like him. Daddy's little girl. Paaah. The thought stuck in his throat and made him taste that ugly NASA juice that the guys in his college dorm had forced him to drink straight as part of a freshman initiation. Even the smell of a vagina made him want to puke.

Why should Gissalayne's juice be different, he had the temerity to argue with her. That was a mistake. Before she'd arrived, he thought he'd made it clear to Gissalayne about his NASA and built that fence around those offshore areas. When a woman doesn't take no for an answer and yes is the only other option, he should have known better and not wasted another minute. He shouldn't have acted desperate, like he needed her. Why were women greedy for more than he was willing to give them?

Bottom line: The right partner, the relationship thing for permanency wasn't happening. Of course, there were still times when Harold wondered if there was something wrong with him. After 21 Firehorse seminars and 16 fire walks, he thought he'd

cleared all that stuff out. Fuck it. Fuck it all. Fuck women. Fuck life. Gissalayne was pretty, she had a good body and she was smart enough. But she talked too much, about things she'd never discussed in emails. ETs, for example. And "dimensions," like there was more than just this earthly one. And then this Great One shit. That really did it. Harold blotted his eyes with his fist to clear away the last of the tears...

It was a good thing Gissalayne left early. It never would have worked out. The maid service would have come with a price. Nagging. Non-stop. She would have made him throw his dirty underwear in the hamper. She'd toss out important papers and trash indiscriminately. And as soon as he turned his back, she'd probably ruin his new Hewlett-Packard and the rest of his computer equipment. Probably he wouldn't have been able to trust her, even with the grocery shopping. She'd buy green bananas for his smoothie, and inferior tuna fish just because it was on sale. And in winter the heat bill would be outrageous. Behind his back, she'd always be turning up the thermostat.

Face it, Gissalayne had too many college degrees to be the type of person who would be willing to stay home and take care of a bunch of kids. And he certainly didn't want his boys taken to a day care center. Harold shuddered at the thought of such a

thing. No. The special person in his life needed to stay at home. She needed to be happy at home. Domestic. Domesticated, with none of this God or Great One stuff.

Tomorrow he'd go back on sugarcone.com and write another description of himself. That was probably where he'd gone wrong. His Sugarcone Profile was too positive, too perfect. Most females would never believe a man could be as perfect as Harold Boxhart. No wonder he was attracting the wrong females. "I need to take the honey off my penis," he thought. "Every woman wants to suck it. And they want me to foul up my mouth with all their cunt stuff. Makes me want to puke."

NASA again. Now he really did feel like puking. Instead, he rolled down the window and spat out the ball of phlegm in his throat. He spat at the passing car, spat at Gissalayne, spat at this dismal, desolate empty life and his empty bed. Now the tears flowed, full force. He needed windshield wipers inside the car, on his forehead.

It was all in the languaging, Ripley Firehorse always said. You just have to know how to frame it. His new Sugarcone Profile should be short and snappy. Macho. That was part of it. He probably sounded too feminine, too sickly-sweet, like cherry Kool-aid or chocolate double fudge brownie Baskin-Robbins ice

cream that Roselyn had craved. Or was it Cheralynne? Jo-Allen, Maralynne...and now Gissalayne... All of them, down the drain. The tears flowed faster. He needed his own drain. The large salty drops paused on the tip of his nose before landing on his pants.

The new Sugarcone.com profile would have none of this bear rug snuggling stuff in front of the fire. He was allergic to animal fur anyway, and roaring fires were expensive and dirty to clean up afterward. Like women after sex.

No campfires on the beach with a full moon. He was too old for that stuff. That was for teenagers. It now occurred to Harold that his sugarcone.com profiles were focusing on too much fire. The write-up of Achievements included his ten years as a volunteer fire fighter, and then all those fire walks. Six years as a Boy Scout Leader didn't help, either. Probably no woman ever thought about Boy Scouts without doing a NASA on rubbing two sticks together. Two legs, two lips, two tits and the clit...

"You are who you are," someone said once. He sure as hell knew he wasn't Ripley Firehorse, at least not yet. But he was getting there, he told himself each day when he awoke, stretching his hands to the ceiling and shouting: "I AM FANTASTIC!! MACHO!" The macho part was his own invention

and when a woman was in bed beside him, he omitted it. He'd never heard Firehorse use that word in a positive sense, but he liked it. It reminded him of men's locker rooms, without the smell, of course. The word MACHO was like testosterone. It delivered a message of power to his biceps.

The car interior reeked of coffee. Harold grimaced at the lipsticked Styrofoam cup half-filled with the Starbuck's large latte (three and a half bucks with a coupon, plus tax!) that Gissalayne had left in the holder between the seats. He hated the smell of coffee. It was almost as bad as the smell of sex and perspiration on the garments that were dropped off at the store to be cleaned. A clean house wasn't everything, he reminded himself. A clean body and minty breath were far more important. That was one thing Gissalayne had going for her. She didn't have bad breath.

4

What Kind of a Name is Jonas Foreplay??

"Hi Maggie, it's Gissalayne, Happy New Year, I'm calling from the Seattle airport."

"You're *where*? The airport? You coming back early? What happened? Are you all right?"

Gissalayne breathed deeply. "It's a long story. Or a short one, I haven't decided yet."

"Long? Short? You mean--?"

"No, no Maggie, that part was fine. I mean structurally," Gissalayne fought back the tears, "or at least Harold wasn't impotent like Warren. And he wasn't a cripple, or an epileptic."

"Ah, yes, Warren Bergdorf, I remember." Maggie's sigh traveled through the phone.

"Bergman. Not Bergdorf. Bergdorf is a department store. Anyway, what difference does it make? Happy Y2K4, Maggie. What did you and Francis do last night?"

“What do we do every New Years Eve? The usual. We watched The Big Ball drop on Times Square and then we put the kids to bed. Eggnog and black-eyed peas with Sue and Stan, toasting to non-violence, higher wages and lower taxes.”

Maggie was amazing. How could she be happy when her life was so mundane? Why couldn't she, Gissalayne, also be happy and mundane? Gissalayne knew she was begging the question. It was all that education that had done it... the Archaeology, History of Ideas, Women's Studies... “Follow your bliss,” read the poster over her desk at Hook, Line & Sinker. What the hell did that mean, anyway? She pulled a tissue out of her coat pocket and dabbed her eyes.

Surely the world, or she or both together were going to hell in a hand basket if there were no other options for earning a living except planning futures for the clueless. What was there to look forward to except more toys, more boredom. No wonder it was desperately important for Y2K4 to come in with a bang. It was almost like wish fulfillment to get rid of the Old because it was so insignificant, and bring on the New, even if it meant blowing up the whole world and leaving nothing but survival to focus on or be concerned about.

Bang, bang! Nearby the airport repair crew were fixing some lights on the ceiling. Gissalayne covered her exposed ear with one hand so she could hear Maggie's news. Maria had pulled off her diaper and pooped on the new carpet, Michael had swallowed a hairpin and had to be rushed to emergency, Steven had tied his crib sheet around his neck and almost strangled himself...

God how mundane. Everyone seemed to be on a treadmill going nowhere, working their asses off to pay for mortgages, cars, country club memberships and affairs... doing whatever they could, just to make enough money to do what—go where? Where was it getting them? To another month of bills to pay? Another mouth to feed or college tuition to pay for? Maggie's husband Francis was a good-looking Ohio State jock and Maggie had already been knocked-up when they'd walked down the aisle and taken their vows during Maggie's sophomore year. They were both devout Catholics.

What Hook, Line & Sinker, Inc. did not reveal is the fact that 80% of their clients left their job placement six months after starting to work, if they weren't fired first. Either they were bored or the job dried up as the economy grew worse and the U.S. continued to export most of its manufacturing.

"Gissalayne, are you still there?"

"Yes, Maggie, I'm here." Gissalayne blew her nose loudly into the soggy tissue.

"Are you all right, honey? He didn't beat you, did he? Or tie you up... I mean, against your will? He didn't take you out somewhere and leave you by the side of the road or do anything cruel like put a knife to your throat... Tell me what happened, honey!" Maggie breathed heavily into the phone.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Maggie, none of the above. That would have been too civilized."

"Oh God--so you mean--it was worse than *that?*" gasped Maggie. "STOP IT! Steven, STOP HITTING YOUR SISTER! PUT THAT TRUCK DOWN! So tell me...what DID he do? It's okay, honey, you can trust me. I won't tell anyone except Francis, you know that."

Yes, Maggie, I mean no, I mean I'm all right. I'm just sad. Disappointed, I guess. I guess we all expect the New Year to deliver a miracle, from one minute to the next, from 11:59 to 12:00 midnight, everything is supposed to change. And when it doesn't--there's bound to be a let-down. That's all it is." *The only miracle in this world is the birth of a baby. Mother Mary and Baby Jesus were on the right track, even if it was all a myth*

plagiarized from the Sumerians and ETs... But so what? So what? Who cares when Jesus was born or if he was born at all, bless him or the authors of the Sermon on the Mount and other inspiring words that were created to try to align us poor humans with spiritual values, such as "Do Unto Others As They Would Have You Do Unto Them".. "As Above, So Below"... Bless Mary and her virtual virginity. I wish I'd thought of something like that to peddle, I'd be a billionaire like the Pope. Sorry I'm offending you, Maggie, you bought all that religion and Catechism shit and I bought all this education and PhD shit what difference does it make? We were both suckers. I know too damn much, that's the problem. A big penis isn't enough anymore.

"I'll call you when I get home." Gissalayne clamped down the cover of her cell phone and dumped herself into a hard plastic seat in the Columbus-Rochester waiting section.

Suddenly she felt lighter. A huge burden had just been lifted from her shoulders. Harold was gone. Here she was in the Columbus, Ohio airport on January 1, 2004 at... she squinted over at the large clock on the wall... 2 PM, Eastern Daylight Time, free again, and Mother Mary was not and never had been a virgin except before she had conceived Baby Jesus who wasn't even her first child. Thank God.

Why had she insisted on paying her own airfare to Seattle? Harold had offered. She could have put the money toward a new computer. Speaking of God, God knows she needed one.

No. Her first instinct had been right. It was better to have spent her own money rather than deal with the detritus of indebtedness. "The Detritus of Indebtedness," she repeated the phrase several times. It had a nice lilt to it.

Gissalayne was glad she hadn't printed out most of Harold's emails, all that wasted paper and toner. It would feel good to clean out her Inbox, better than an enema. The Enigma of an Enema. Another catchy phrase. Just one hard tap on the "Delete" tab and Harold would float off into the toilet bowl of the universe. Then she would truly be free again. Free to grow, free to... be lonely—and terribly hungry. With only peanuts or pretzels and juice on the plane trip, she'd better pick up at least one candy bar. Gissalayne's sweet tooth always kicked in as soon as she went into Break-Up Mode.

While she was waiting in line to pay for her candy bars, a midget in a tutu wearing a colorful a stocking cap roller skated by and handed her a printed piece of paper. Gissalayne unfolded it and read:

As you mature, the ego becomes stronger and more sophisticated and the distinction between the truth of who you really are, and the ego, becomes more and more blurred. After a while the ego thinks it is you, and so the game becomes one of protecting itself and its role as your protector. When you become fully present, it is a kind of death for the ego, and even if you successfully reassure it that it is not dying, it is still very unwilling to surrender its role as protector and controller. The ego is sitting in the throne of God and it loves it.

That last line was exquisite. Gissalayne repeated it slowly to herself. *The ego is sitting in the throne of God and...*

"Happy New Y2K4," greeted a blond-haired man in a leather jacket, Levi's and Nikes. He removed the Classified Autos section from the attached chair next to her and sat down.

"The same to you," Gissalayne sniffled, searching in her coat pocket for another dry tissue.

"Well, at least it's a clean start," he added cautiously as she blew her nose.

Gissalayne took a better look at him. Probably her lipstick had rubbed off and her hair was a mess. "Are you going to Rochester, too?" she ventured when he didn't offer any further

conversation. Not bad at all. Tanned and athletic, *Gentleman's Quarterly, Esquire...*

"Yes. I mean, no. Columbus, and then I change planes for Lexington, Kentucky."

"Ah, Kentucky. Fried Chicken."

"Well yes, yes, indeed, and no." he smiled broadly.

"Actually, I'm an architect and I've been commissioned to develop a museum that will display all the memorabilia connected to America's fried chicken industry. Since KFC is one of the bastions of America's fried chicken, I wanted to see where all that grease originated, heh-heh, and possibly incorporate it in my design. Kentucky and the countryside, not the grease."

Interesting. Well, sort of. At least he seemed somewhat literate. Articulate, clean, well-spoken. Gissalayne studied his Nikes and Levi's. Her eyes traveled upward to his wrist. Rolex or good imitation. "I once read a book about Colonel Sanders and how the business first got started," she offered.

"I've read the same book. In fact, I have it right here." He opened his briefcase and pulled out a book. On the cover was the familiar jolly whiskered white-haired Santa Claus figure known as The Colonel to millions of Americans. The Colonel's

face flew on red-bucketed franchise rooftops throughout the world.

“Who would have known a military man could become famous just for his Secret Recipe,” he marveled.

The plan was working, just as Regina Diebleed, CEO of Diebleed & Cuthrot said it would. *Talk about something mundane, something to pique her interest to get her talking, but sound intelligent,* Regina had instructed Jonas Foreplay.

5

Diebleed & Cuthrot, LLC

Diebleed & Cuthrot, LLC., or “D & C,” as it was fondly referred to by the D & C “family,” was dedicated to telling the people what they wanted to hear. In 2000, directly after the success of the Y2K propaganda panic that had led to a large segment of the American population hoarding food, water and condoms sometime in the late summer of 1999—another brilliant move to boost a sagging economy--D & C launched its campaign to Save the Planet.

In a globally televised speech, D & C founder Ronald Diebleed declared D & C planned to transform the planet into a People’s Paradise. By 2012, declared Diebleed, the job would be completed.

This declaration was made well before the 9/11 holographic Light & Sound gala that had toppled two Big Apple twin towers, burnt a hole in the (D.C.) Pentagon and justified its sequel, the spectacular Shock & Awe gala in Iraq.

"A few more wars, epidemics, artificially conceived hurricanes, earthquakes, tornados and volcanic eruptions, political upheavals, manufactured economic crises, imploded public buildings, increased biological and biochemical warfare and mind control centers, and our Mission will be accomplished," announced Diebleed at Board meetings between hot tub soaks, massages, porn flicks and orgies with his seven "temple goddesses," Alpha, Beta, Delta, Gamma... etc. ["No need for real names," he was fond of joking, "I'll know them by their deeds."] Alpha was a good cock sucker, Beta an expert galvanic skin tester, Delta had a beautiful scented delta, Gamma had a g-spot to die for...

Exactly what that mission was, above and beyond destroying the planet and its people was unclear, just as it was unclear what "job" would be completed and what "paradise" would look like. Not that it seemed to make much difference, D & C board members agreed among themselves. After all, their loyalty was to The Company and their monthly stipends, not to a world population that for the most part seemed too remote and rather unsavory to hold their attention for long.

"We must have peace, prosperity and equality for everyone," declared Ronald Diebleed to millions of viewers

during his weekly D & C "Cleanse the World" telecast. "And for our own people here in America, plenty of air and water are basic for survival. We must also cultivate unity for all."

Diebleed's words were reminiscent of some Hollywood's most successful actor-politicians. They were loaded; and indeed, Ronald Diebleed was loaded. The family had a long history of questionable liaisons in the areas of business, law, politics, insurance, weapons manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, the media, etc. The name 'Cuthrot' after 'Diebleed &' was merely an extra chiseling on the brass door plate. D & C was a one-man act and Ronald Diebleed was that act.

In spite of Diebleed's money and connections, however, it wasn't as easy to carve a niche in the power block of elitists as to etch a fictitious name on a door plate. Like mosquitoes already anticipating a feast of virgin flesh, corporate cabals were hatching in even the remotest swamp lands and maneuvering to get their names on the salvation list.

Competition was keen, with many ways to skin a pig and many brands of toothpaste, deodorant and breakfast cereal. Besides, by now the world was highly suspicious of heroism. With the advent of the Internet, too many people knew too much. The information highway was heavily trafficked with truth

seekers who could easy weed out the pests. Anyone who spouted forth platitudes was automatically suspect.

It was also becoming increasingly self-evident that the controllers were out of control, especially on long weekends. And then there was a problem with multiple allegiances getting tangled into tedious yarn balls. How could one be expected to remember, for example, which secret handshake belonged to which society? Codes and passwords were becoming a nuisance. How they were supposed to be used and abused, etc.?

This was more than a cat's cradle; it was a hornet's nest. Cross-allegiances to different nations, banks, intelligence agencies, industries... spying, counter-spying, disinformation, misinformation... with all the spin-doctoring and cross-purposes, often it seemed like the strong were manifesting their own weaknesses. Lies begetting lies, greed feeding on greed... Another major concern was bodies.

How could anyone predict there would be enough healthy bodies left on the planet after all the war games were played out? Someone had to park vehicles, open hotel doors, empty the dumpsters and fill the paper toweling and toilet paper racks. These "someone's" also had to be healthy enough to serve as slave breeders. But with the uncertainty of uranium depletion

hazards and spread of viruses, vaccinations and other biochemical weapons that by nature were non-discriminating and democratic, clearly there was a problem. No one could isolate the healthy from the sick.

It was one thing to spread propaganda to keep people fearful and desperate or passive and complacent, and quite another to spread viruses that would literally kill them off. How could the elite be assured of immunity for themselves and their loved ones? Bipartisanship was deaf and dumb when it came to disease.

How many emperors could there be? Ronald Diebleed chewed on this issue more thoroughly than any of the others and successfully digested it as proof that he was the only person suitable to rule the world.

Assiduously, Diebleed studied the world's most brilliant chess moves. To date, a proven strategy that worked every time was to continue to spawn cluelessness and delivery of partial information with a controlled media and a few "incidents," in order to keep ramping up the fear quotient. Add to this was the uncertainty of where tomorrow's bread was going to come from, and weapons of massive destruction weren't even necessary.

Diebleed next studied the 21st century American profile: To most Americans, what did The Good Life mean? A fat bank account, lottsa lattes and sushi, sex on the side with a churchgoing family as a front and early retirement with a Winnebago, time share, condo or cabana on the links.

One thing that was both good and bad, thought Diebleed: throughout the world, Americans were hated, feared... and admired, even worshipped.

Ronald Diebleed was ambitious. How he longed to become president of something more than D & C. How he longed to be king of the mountain before the mountain itself imploded. If only he could outsmart all the other groups vying for Numero Uno before it was too late.

Ronald's most valuable asset was an excellent right-hand man named Godzilla or 'Godz' for short. For some time, Godz had been working on a viable solution to the current global crisis. A short dark surly looking man with a fierce temper and sour disposition, Godz was a godsend, which is another justification for his nickname. He also had *saichel*, a Yiddish word for common sense laced with shrewdly calculated diplomacy.

No wonder. Godz had been well trained by one of the most powerful intelligence groups on the planet. Lesson One that had

been handed down through the generations and was well known on the streets was the Price Law. Discover a person's price and make them pay it forward with a gun at their throats if necessary.

Godz knew knowledge was power, but knowledge for the sake of knowledge was worthless. Godz also knew that based on the latest information, even all the well-engineered underground tunnels and cities, even the Nazi stronghold at Antarctica didn't stand a chance of survival once nuclear war was engaged as a method for "controlling the population." Earthlings were about to annihilate themselves. Thus, the creation of a race of humans that would be impervious to Earthling forms of self-destruction was the only solution.

Godz wrote Ronald Diebleed's speech for the Conference on Global Salvation where he'd bought himself a speaking position.

"Genetics is the science of today," declared Diebleed. "Immortality is the only solution for survival of the human species. It is the only way to combat all the insidious terrorist agendas. D & C will cleanse the planet inside and out. We will create a new super-species of humans, a Super-Race that will no

longer have to be afraid to die because they will live forever! We will no longer tolerate murder and annihilation!"

Unfortunately, corporate trust on the planet was at an all-time low. Also, the term "Super-species" had dangerous overtones of another era less than a hundred years ago of a short angry mustachioed German waving his hands and ranting to the crowds about a creating a "Superman." Memories of that rabbit hole were still fresh in the minds of those who had managed to flee before being shoveled live into their graves. Over sixty years later, the survivors and their children were still digging up memories, determined that "no one would ever forget."

Added to the claim that anyone besides our Creator could possibly produce immortal beings on Planet Earth, even if 21st century scientists with all of their cloning and stem cell research had advanced far beyond human expectations, and Ronald Diebleed came off sounding like a raving lunatic. Nevertheless, that's what Hitler and Mussolini were called, and they certainly got a lot of mileage out of it. Some of the world's greatest geniuses were considered raving lunatics.

As for the elite already in control and what they thought of all this: *who was this mosquito Diebleed anyway?*

Perhaps it should have been no surprise that shortly after his memorable speech, Ronald Diebleed, Godz, his entourage of goddesses, his cook, masseur, barbers and personal trainer—the magical thirteen—were killed in a plane crash over the Himalayas.

“Ronald Diebleed and Godz are dead,” read a small article on the Internet squeezed between vacation getaways to Disneyworld and the latest sports scores.

Regina Diebleed, Ronald’s first-born, inherited the keys to the kingdom.

“A travesty,” declared Regina’s three younger brothers, Richard, Roger and Roland, who were identical jugs and gifs of their father. “Totally unfair!” “That bitch!”

True to character, each already had a plan to do away with Regina. But the universe had another agenda. In less than six months, Richard had poisoned Roland and Roger came down with a rare blood disease. Before drawing his last breath, however, Roger hired an assassin to do away with Richard. Three Diebleed funerals followed each other in close succession.

Throughout all this scheming and foul play, regal Regina seemed impervious. It was as if nothing and no one could ruffle her benign disposition. Beautiful, kind, gracious and forgiving of

all who may have wronged her, Regina even delivered glowing eulogies for each of her brothers, praising them for their beneficence and ignoring the fact that they'd murdered each other.

Indeed, Regina seemed to saintly and angelic to be human, so, perhaps, people speculated, she wasn't.

Exactly where *had* Regina Diebleed come from?

Ronald Diebleed, Sr. was not your ordinary Texas cowboy. No, ma'am. One day he was out drinking with some of his cronies at Big Bossy's, a classy oak-paneled beef and drug establishment located several layers beneath a suburban shopping mall in one of the country's prominent cities. A hangout for billionaires, it came equipped with all the amenities that billionaires enjoy and have come to consider a necessary part of their lifestyle.

Some of Big Bossy's women were unusual in the sense that they were 'e's; 'e' standing not for bra size or 'ease' but for 'electronic'. Although they had all the same sexual parts as humans, they had none of the emotional baggage. Some thought they had been artificially created by male chauvinists because they seemed to act like slaves and they were such good cooks and housekeepers in addition to their other talents that

were, of course, Ex-traordinary. Indeed, these goddesses had qualities that could not have been simulated or re-created from human DNA. They'd never heard of PMS, for example, and the idea of bitchiness never entered the hypothalamus. Also, since they had everything they needed, they had no use for shopping sprees. Money had no meaning for them, nor did they have any understanding of credit cards or charge accounts. Never whining or complaining, these e-goddesses didn't even ask for birthday/anniversary telegrams, roses, cologne or any of the other trappings common to what was considered necessary for maintaining a good relationship or marriage.

The most endearing quality was the e-goddess innate knowledge of how to pleasure a man. E-goddesses were commonly known as "heelers," because they were irresistible, and men of all ages, nationalities and backgrounds usually fell head over heels in love with them.

Such was the case with Ronald Diebleed when his brainis first set eyes on Natasha Mignon. Natasha was not only beautiful with significant cleavage, a tight butt and beguiling way of letting her tongue tickle her top row of teeth whenever she thought something Ronald said was particularly clever (which

was often) she was also malleable—or so Ronald perceived. Big mistake.

Natasha knew well what Ronald and most needy men needed besides the basic B & L (blowjob and lay). In addition to dealing with their horny brainises, Natasha knew needy men needed someone who didn't talk back and who listened to and hung on every word that dropped from their larynxes. Afterward, when requested or at the appropriate conversational interlude, a clever woman could repeat verbatim exactly what they (the men) thought was brilliant and ingenious without the use of a hidden recorder.

Natasha was a virtuoso at male-pleasing; a perfect partner for any man and particularly for Ronald, who had not been breast fed as a child and had been sent to military boarding schools from the time he was old enough to draw stick figures and go to the potty without wetting his diapers. All his life, Ronald carried indelible memories of punishments at boarding school for a series of leaky plumbing incidents.

No one knew Natasha was the mother of Ronald's first child. At the time he'd met her, Ronald at age 31 was the most eligible bachelor of the Diebleed clan and about to be paired off in a business arrangement with Deeter Witehouse, an 18-year-

old nymphet and eldest daughter of Witehouse Wine & Liquor. They were a perfect mismatch with nothing in common except Lego; ergo, fitting round pegs into round holes.

Deeter had no desire to ruin her perfect figure with a lump in front, so it wasn't difficult for to say yes to Ronald's mother-switching proposal. Daddy Witehouse arranged for a five-star celebrity wedding ceremony in Fiji and promptly built a beautiful underground entertainment center for his precious daughter. For the next nine months, Deeter did her disco/drug thing, blocked from the media and paparazzi while Natasha dealt with the motherhood thing. Three more forged birth certificates followed shortly after the first ones; who would have ever guessed—or cared, actually?

The fourth child was a girl named Regina. "You are my completed mission, my love," Natasha Mignon cooed to her infant daughter before taking off for her home planet of Googleez-TiT. "Trust me, you will be known as Earth's Oracle. And forget all this immortal Diebleed shit. We are all immortal to begin with, and we always have been!"

Regina gazed raptly up at her mother, her mouth quivering in the usual infant sucking 'O' modality.

Regina was indeed an exceptional child. Outwardly quiet and reserved, she spoke sparingly, but when she did talk, her sentences emerged in iambic pentameter. They had their own special lilt and often contained hidden or multiple meanings. Even simple statements such as "I have to go to the bathroom now" seemed to have special significance, as if she were quoting from famous bards of the past. Usually whatever Regina said seemed to be profound, or she had a way of making it seem so. "This is profound," she was fond of saying even before she was one year old. "I'm teething," was one of her most prominent statements of wisdom at that young age.

A paragon of lovingkindness, Regina seemed to be the perfect angel for the task of saving the planet. Even the smallest housefly refrained from teasing and annoying her. Mosquitoes affectionately passed her by, sucking other people's blood and leaving her virgin skin as white as the popular infomercials for bath soap and cream cheese.

At an early age, Regina started to gather information about her father's underworld activities. At first the little girl did not understand what Ronald and his wealthy colleagues were up to. Many of the alphabet names sprinkled throughout their conversations did not relate to anything she was familiar with.

Soon, however, she became an expert researcher. In her locked diary hidden under the West Wing staircase, she kept her carefully penned glossary of names and terms: CIA, KGB, MSSD, MI6, NSA, CFA, etc. Regina perfected her ability to spell out these initials in daily bowls of alphabet vegetable soup. She liked these intelligence games and became an expert decoder.

Innocence broke long before Regina's hymen when her father started to hit on her at the young age of seven. Like most males of the 21st century or perhaps any era in history, Ronald believed money and power gave him permission to take liberties outside the realm of accepted mores. These liberties included sodomy and incest; the idea of breaking his daughter's hymen was exhilarating. But alas, Regina was already clever enough to outsmart him. Born with extraordinary mental abilities that included knowing how to mesmerize others, whenever Ronald approached her, in a matter of seconds she transformed him to a thumbsucking two-year-old.

6

The Oracle

As she blossomed into adolescence, regal Regina held her head and breasts high, her nipples pointing a straight path for her in all her forward movements. Although her steps were light and dainty, she was far from frail. Five foot 10 inches, with long legs and firm calves, she could have been a ballet dancer. At age three, however, she chose to become a martial artist. Already at age nine, she was a good match against warriors much older and more experienced than she.

“The entire earth has become a corporate cesspool of foul deeds that reek of treason and betrayal,” mourned thirteen-year-old Regina at her father’s funeral. “We will not seek revenge, however,” Regina affirmed over global TV and radio networks that re-ran her speech ad exhaustion, “nor will we turn any of our cheeks or consider the lilies of any of the remaining fields on the planet, for they are already dying from carbon monoxide fumes, Chemtrails and uranium depletion.”

Regina remembered well her mother Natasha's parting speech about the 'O' Oracle. Shortly after her father's departure, Natasha began to appear to Regina in her dreams. "Consult the Oracle, my beloved daughter," advised Natasha. "My services to your father must not be in vain. You have work to do on the planet. You have a mission, a goal, a life purpose."

Regina wasn't sure what her mother was talking about, but she listened obediently as Natasha continued.

"A mission or life purpose is something to live and die for," continued Natasha.

"And what would that look like, Mama?" Something to live and die for sounded exciting. A primeval voice stirred deep within Regina's groin. "*Earthlings have forgotten how to dream, and failure to have dreams is at the source of all this killing and drug-dealing, pimping, slave trafficking...*" Excitedly Regina interrupted the primeval voice. "So, where is the Oracle, Mama? Where can I find that big 'O'?"

"Deep within, my daughter. Do not attempt to look for it outside yourself. The big 'O' is your greatest source of wisdom. Let yourself go and allow yourself to experience Extreme Rapture, O-ver and O-ver an O-ver until eventually you *become the Oracle* yourself! It is the merging and the consummation that

is important. I promise you it will be an experience you will never forget. Once you've had it, you will know forever after, what really makes the world go around."

"But Mama, what do I need to do first in order to experience that 'extreme rupture'?" Regina suddenly felt an urgency deep within, as if indeed, the Oracle had already awakened.

" 'Rapture, my darling, not 'rupture'!" giggled Natasha, blowing a good-bye kiss to her daughter. "Just remember always to be open to receive, Pretty One. Ciao!"

That evening while Regina was in the bathtub spraying the soap from her body with the hand douche, Oracle gave the beautiful willing ripe young maiden a heads up about more to come by paying her a surprise visit.

"I will be here for you whenever you need me," promised Oracle, turning on the hand spray full force and instructing Regina to spread her legs.

Over the next few months, Regina continued to refine her visits with the Oracle until she fully understood the meaning of "following her bliss," which is how she expressed this extraordinary experience to others. They were certainly curious

to know why Regina always seemed so content and went around with a dreamy smile on her face.

Then one day, without notice, Oracle plunged deeper.

“Regina, it is time to search for something to live and die for.”

Regina, who was stretched out on a chaise lounge reading a book of poetry, paused in the middle of a Robert Blake poem about a lamb. The poet was asking the lamb who made him.

“Tell me more, Oracle. Is this what Mama was referring to when she said eventually I would *become*—”

“Ahhh, indeed it is,” swooned Oracle, sending Regina into spasms of ecstasy, then waiting for her to calm down again.

“Love is the answer,” she circled the topic gently, first in one direction, then in the other. “It all begins with self-love. The trouble with most people on the planet today is that they have forgotten how to love, or they simply aren’t making time to ‘intend’ it or build it into their lives. Nothing is as important as love and loving. Love yourself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, and your life will be complete. I will now demonstrate the most basic principle or the first step. Just relax and let me show you how to play your keyboard.”

“But Oracle, how can I teach love and loving to others?”

Regina asked a few hours later, rising from the chaise lounge and feeling greatly refreshed and ready for the next challenge.

“You will see how easy it is,” responded Oracle. “As long as you stay in a state of self-love, enjoying that state to the utmost, you will be irresistible to others. But I realize if you’re doing this all by yourself, it can get boring after awhile, so the Great Creator provided diversion in the form of creatures of the opposite sex called ‘males’, which you already know about from your three brothers and the rest of those creatures with testicles and outdoor plumbing.”

“Oh yes, I do know about them, Oracle,” Regina frowned, “but it seems to me the Great Creator fell way short of the mark, if those rogues were the best he could do in making a creature that would be complementary to females.”

“Remember, the word ‘male’ has its origins in the word ‘mal’ meaning ‘bad’ but also referring to ‘malleable’, or ‘to mold’,” continued Oracle. “Even though the male sex is endowed with one mind, one thought and one direction, namely Eating & Fucking—essentially two variations on the same biological theme--you or any other female who knows how to shake and wiggle can easily mold that mind, thought and direction.”

“Just like that delicious gelatin tasting dessert,” mused Regina, “that while it’s going down, makes you feel like you’re eating something real--and in so many different flavors!”

“Indeed,” Oracle smiled pleurably. Regina was a fast learner. “But never expect one hundred percent commitment. One flavor is never enough for any male. And as for their interest in spending time with females: five percent is enough. The rest of the time, let them go hunting and fishing or drinking and gambling with the boys. Anything except shooting each other down. They can be so destructive, you know. Just accept that they are lesser creatures and you will never have to get overstressed about high expectations.”

“But that really isn’t fair,” protested Regina. “Isn’t there any way to help them become equal to us?”

Long silence from the Oracle. “Why would you want to do that?” asked Oracle finally. “Remember, I said the name ‘male’ is derivative from ‘mal’. And remember, too, that your brothers wanted to kill you. Don’t you know already how competitive they are, with their Type ‘A’ hunt-to-kill mentality? Haven’t you already learned from the past about S & M, how they love to tie up women and make them squeal or scream, whichever pleasures them most, while they take over the world and rule it

with an iron fist? Remember, it is the male species that transformed oral history into a local pastime. They then proceeded to transform the written version of *her* story into *history*. It didn't take long to change loving, nurturing matrilineal societies into male-dominated sweat-infested locker rooms and football stadiums. It is the male psyche that interpreted 'tit for tat' as 'an eye for an I,' if you get what I mean."

Oracle let out a long sigh that echoed throughout the universe. "The problem, my dear Regina, is that only a handful really knows they are inferior. You see, they have been taught just the opposite from birth, by these written *anals*—"

"*Annals*," corrected Regina.

"*Anals*," re-corrected the Oracle. "...by these written *anals* as well as religion, government, politics... you might say it is a conspiracy against females that was cleverly executed several centuries ago. These dumb animals really *believe* they are a species superior to females! So we're talking about major mind control that would have to be reversed in order for them to start understanding their worth, especially in the age of artificial insemination."

Regina listened attentively to the Oracle. It was a lot to take in and swallow but she had to admit she liked the taste; it

was a cross between tapioca and tofu with an interesting fragrance. "Is it worth it?" Oracle asked rhetorically. "Yes! I want to say that this is indeed a species worth saving, for there is a type of inner growth that stretches far beyond the male imagination of what growth should look like, in terms of organ measurements. It is called a mission, a goal or life purpose, and even males are capable of having one. Unfortunately, most females have succumbed to male propaganda. Women are weak today because they *think* they are weak. It's an artificially inseminated mindset. Everything is mental. *She* can't see beyond this era in *his*-tory because she has either become a super consumer of male marketing—the dumb blonde/bitch syndrome--or she's chosen to make a charade out of herself, imitating what she thinks is the Rolls Royce of humanity. Ask any female species between the ages of 18 and 35 what they want most in life and they'll rattle off the shopping list from the latest media commercials and reality TV programming. 'The Biological Clock is Ticking' should be the title for a popular country music hit."

"Oh dear, this is so sad," sighed Regina, tears forming at the corner of her beautifully mascaraed eyes; smacking her lips as if to dispense with an interesting aftertaste. "But tell me,

Oracle, where does each person, male or female, *find* their life purpose or mission? How do they connect to it?"

Oracle became silent. The sun suddenly disappeared behind a thick rain cloud and the sky seemed gray and tentative. When at length she spoke, her tone was muted and cautious. "Surely you remember all the biblical stories of the Ark of the Covenant, Regina."

"Oh yes, Oracle!" declared Regina, immediately launching into a series of quotes from the Old Testament about Hebrews wandering in the desert, carrying this precious hand-carved piece of furniture with them.... and then the magnificent description of King Solomon's temple, etc., etc. "Are you going to tell me I need to find that Ark, Oracle? Haven't we had enough books and films produced already, about that farce? Think of all those poor losers who've spent thousands of dollars and whole lifetimes in the desert, digging and sifting and scraping!"

"No, no, no more of that stuff, heavens no. No need to find the Ark itself, which is just more mind stuff anyway--or at least let's leave it at that for now. It is what the Ark *represents*," continued the Oracle. "That's where everyone seems to be missing the point. The point is... the point is..." Oracle paused,

lost in the geometric concept of what she was attempting to describe, "... that somehow females on this planet have forgotten to look to the stars to find eligible young men from other planets who fully understand the value of having powerful positive goals and a life purpose. Regina, I want you to help me with this. An Ark *is* the Covenant, it is not *of* the Covenant!" Oracle was now back on track and waxing strong with her agenda. "We must inspire our clueless females to understand the geometric significance of the Ark in relation to the womb, and thus seek other worlds, spacemen so to speak, in order to capture that significance in the form of a unique life purpose."

"Unique Life Purpose. Oh my," exclaimed Regina dubiously. "Where does one begin to find these space cadets?" This was a big assignment. Regina wasn't sure she was up to it, but it did sound like a lot of fun.

"ULP—U-LIP!" sang out the Oracle. Unique *Positive* Life Purpose! I predict," continued the Oracle, "that after each of these highly capable yet clueless young females breeds with one of these superior males from outer space and is injected with new blood, they will be inspired to become who they really are instead of spending all their time and energy fighting cellulite

and flab. They will start to focus on creating a life that is purposeful and joyous and exciting and..."

"Ahhh... Regina's heart skipped a beat. Finally she saw where Oracle was going with her plan. "*The time of the U-LIP Goddess is here!* But--Oracle, why me? Why are you choosing me for this ominous task?" Without waiting for the Oracle to respond, Regina stretched out on the chaise lounge for more illumination.

Working closely in alliance with 'O', Regina and her carefully selected board of D & C "illuminated workers" set to work collecting qualified space cadet studs to initiate the infusion process.

The easiest place to find intelligent, physically fit U-LIP-less females was on the Internet. Regina herself located Gissalayne Chondroitin on sugarcone.com. Young, sexy, single, over-educated and clueless about a purposeful life, Gissalayne, an employee of Hook, Line & Sinker, LLC – "*We give you the rod, you hook the fish,*" was at the top of the D & C list of breeder candidates.

"Ms. Chondroitin will be returning from another sugarcone.com rejection on January 1," Regina phoned Jonas

Foreplay, one of the star-studs on the ET U-LIP male breeder list.

Regina was excited to have Jonas working for D & C. He was a pedigreed Biburnian from Gistopholes II cluster, a star-studded troupe that had been traveling back and forth between Earth and Rigaletto 699 ever since Babylonian times. Adolf Hitler had tried to capture Jonas' parents and use them for his own genetic experiments, but Babette and Francois Foreplay had outsmarted him and escaped back to Rigaletto 699 where they had opened up a highly successful papaya juice enterprise. Rigalettans loved papaya, since most of them had a congenital constipation problem.

Regina invited Jonas to join D & C after meeting him at the 2003 Antarctica Mind Control Convention. Jonas was one of the guides at the opening of a special South Seas aborigine holocaust exhibit sponsored by one of the better known alphabet agencies that had hired over fifty thousand agents to pose as anti-war activists who would create an uprising outside the event. Arrests, arson and a few assassinations were on the agenda. With his expert telepathic skills, Jonas identified the ringleaders and pre-empted each event. All participating psy-ops

agents were soon under lock and key, including the organizers of the exhibit, also agents.

In the D & C Life Purpose training program, Jonas went to the head of the class.

Regina liked Jonas and felt an affinity with him, as if they'd already shared several lives together on other planets. They probably had. In fact, Regina almost liked Jonas too much, which was a hormonal thing she wasn't accustomed to. Until now, self-love was the only experience the beautiful 18-year-old goddess had ever known. Regina didn't particularly like cold showers, but suddenly she felt a need for one. Everything is The Mission, she reminded herself sternly, noticing that even her nipples were blushing. "Everything. The Mission... every...thing...."

"I've already booked a ticket for you," she informed Jonas telepathically, poking the posts for her diamond earrings through each of her pierced lobe holes and gazing steadfastly at the portrait of Saint Rhododendron, her favorite Master for Mondays. "You need to get to the SeaTac airport in time to catch AmeriCola Flight No. 2004 for Columbus, Ohio. It will be overbooked. We just bought 15 seats and the flight was already filled. You will opt to forfeit your ticket and stay over in Seattle... with Ms. Chondroitin. Her first name is--"

"Gissalayne. Yes, I know," Jonas said.

7

Layover

Why was he such a sucker for women who cry, Jonas wondered. That meant he was probably going to be a sucker for every women on the planet, since humanoid females were known to have overactive ducts. But no, Gissalayne wasn't like any other woman he'd met so far, he decided, appraising her delicate chin, high cheekbones and large violet eyes. Although her body was wrapped in a bulky storm coat, miraculously, her legs were visible. She was wearing black tights that emphasized the shape of her calves. It was those calves that held his attention. They were thick. And heavy.

In spite of himself, Jonas felt a sweet pain in his groin. There were breast men, face men and legs men, like himself. But not matchstick legs or legs that only looked well when propped up on six-inch-heels. They had to be strong peasant legs. A woman with thick calves and heavy thighs tended to be a delicious lover capable of multiple orgasms and brilliant. Unlike many men/ETs, Jonas Foreplay considered that a plus. Jonas

was easily bored by perfectly proportioned females who played dumb or actually were. Good sex required imagination.

“Do you like fried chicken?” this luscious woman was asking. Violet eyes. Deep and rich.

“Not really,” admitted Jonas. “But of course, it’s fast. And instant gratification has become a way of life these days. That seems to be the reason why I sat down here, and why we met. Why we’re talking right now. By the way, with whom am I speaking? My name is Jonas Foreplay, and your name is, Ms.--?”

“Gissalayne Chondroitin. Gissalayne with an accent on the last syllable. Gissa-LAYNE.” Gissalayne crossed one leg over the other, her storm coat opening and sliding upward, revealing more of her thighs. She was wearing a short red Stewart plaid kilt. Stewart plaid was Jonas’s favorite, although he hadn’t really encountered more than one or two of the earthling Scottish clan plaids.

“The Colonel had an interesting life. It was rumored that he had two wives, two families. I suppose it could have been true, but then again, rumors are often started by jealous competitors,” Gissalayne continued. “Women are the worst, I mean the most jealous. They don’t like men who are unfaithful.

They want the whole box of chocolates for themselves. I'm sure the Colonel's wife would have been upset about her husband's double life, even if he *was* the Colonel."

"Ahh, so you equate two wives with unfaithfulness. I rather like to compare women to fried chicken. Many varieties. Original recipe, extra crispy... But when it comes to chocolates, I like Austrian chocolate, myself. Hand-dipped. I know a place in Bad Gastein where they make their own truffles. They have great bath tubs there, and even better casinos. And chocolate to die for, that is, if you believe in mortality. Why on earth—or in heaven--did you keep 'Chondroitin' as a last name? I would have thought you'd have changed it at least to 'Arthritis'."

"Because I've never been married," Gissalayne heard herself saying.

"Ahh, so when you get married you get arthritis. I hadn't thought about that," mused Jonas, crossing and uncrossing his own legs and shifting to his other cheek in the uncomfortable plastic seat. "I guess that means when I get married I have to give up Foreplay, ha ha! Oh well, at least with my own name, people don't have to wonder what type of business my ancestors engaged in. Goldsmith, Carpenter, Carter, Forester... Those are all predictable."

"Yes, you do have a point," Gissalayne nodded, shifting in her seat and resting her weight on the cheek opposite Jonas's; her storm coat opening even further and revealing all of her thighs and Stewart plaid mini-kilt. *These plastic airport seats are so uncomfortable.* Gissalayne had an aversion to anything plastic: chairs, food, men... "But of course, you're joking. That's not your real name!"

"Ahh, but it is." Jonas grinned. "I've never been married either, although that doesn't really make a difference for a male, in terms of names. A male keeps his sanity, or his same sane identity after marriage, but a woman is supposed to be transformed by her husband. Usually it's the other way around. The husband becomes hen-pecked, excuse the chicken thing again, ha ha."

"Yes, most women don't have cocks, I mean cooks, and they do like to fix their husbands," agreed Gissalayne. "But not me, although I am a good cook. But I don't have a husband. I've thought of changing Chondroitin without getting married. Some women keep their names these days of course. Times have changed."

"Yes, of course," agreed Jonas. "And of course, Chondroitin is so natural."

"Yes, and so is nature," mused Gissalayne. "That is, if you want it to be. It can be synthetic, too."

"Synthetic nature...?" Jonas stared at Gissalayne's legs and mind, transfixed. She really was an incredible specimen.

"Well you know," Gissalayne continued, her eyes following his, "as the Good Bard said, what's in a name? Gissalayne Smith, for example." *SMITH. Short for Marriage, like Foreplay. Austria. Architecture, Expensive wrist watch.* "Mr. Foreplay—"

"Jonas."

"Jonas--are you from this planet? Forgive me for asking, because you certainly *look* human, but with all the hybrids walking, or should I say, flying around these days, especially on television and in the movies..." Gissalayne flicked her hand toward one of the lounge TVs where two ETs in their familiar white bunny suits were advertising toothpaste, "one never knows who one can run into. Whom, I mean."

"You really are an amazing person," Jonas chuckled. "I'm glad I decided to introduce myself, Gissa-LAYNE."

"So you ARE from Somewhere Else? I mean..." The ETs floated around the screen, small hairless white balloons with black holes for eyes. One of them was scrubbing his teeth with an electric toothbrush. "You're from...Up--or Out There?" Maybe

he would start to shape-shift; maybe his gorgeous face would start to crumble and become cratered and pock-marked and he would start to turn gray and his eyes would glitter and fill with darkness and evil... *what if he wasn't real and the chair next to her was empty? Was she hallucinating?* Could it be that she was so desperate she'd started creating imaginary lovers? Husbands?

"I'm real, first of all." Jonas interrupted her reverie. "You can even pinch me, if you like. But we can get to that later, if you wish, ha ha!"

Gissalayne felt herself blushing. Somewhere deep inside, she felt a ray of hope like a door opening. The feeling was so trite she could hardly believe it was authentic.

"Don't you think you deserve a break, after all these false tries?" Jonas eyed her soberly. "But what makes you think I could be the right one? And furthermore, where do you think *you* came from? Besides your mother's womb... and what a delightful place that must have been! *Of course* I'm from another planet! All of us are. But I don't want to be misleading, and I certainly don't want to give the impression that I'm rushing you."

"Oh but you are," Gissalayne smiled sweetly, "and I honestly don't think you're living up to your name, but that's perfectly all right, I mean, no one said you had to."

Gissalayne honey, you might as well show him your body.

After all, it's the least you can do, under the circumstances.

Gissalayne stood up and removed her coat. "Jonas, Mr. Foreplay, Mr. ET—Did you ever stop to think about the fact that we might be in our Last Days?"

"I never stop to think," smiled Jonas, admiring her sexy nipples. Her navel would also be incredible, if her nipples were that sexy. Jonas adored cute and quirky navels. Besides the peasant leg thing he was also a Navel Man. "What I mean is, I'm thinking all the time," returning to the topic at hand, "and quite frankly, this Last Days material is outdated. It's been happening for centuries, but we're still here, isn't that so? *Don't* think about it and stay in the Now and you'll understand what I mean. And incidentally, forget about the 2004 presidential election next November. It's rigged."

Gissalayne nodded. "I know," she agreed. "Politics, like foreign policy suck. We're all prisoners and the Gulag is right around the corner. That's why everything... is really... an illusion..." She finished breathlessly. Gissalayne pressed her fingers to her burning cheeks. "Let's get back to reality again," she suggested. "There's still a half hour before boarding time, so maybe we can straighten that out between now and then. Would

you—kindly repeat for me—that you’re real, I mean ‘real,’ but not real-illusion real? I mean, you’re here, but in another dimension at the same time? And you’re neither a Republican nor a Democrat?”

“Hmmm. I see this reality thing does upset you. All of us are from the stars at some time or other, as I said. Even the President of the United States and the Secretary of State, the Attorney General... even the Vice President of the United States... although that may be difficult to believe.” Jonas paused, drinking in her slim sexy body, the plump breasts (C or D?) and narrow waist. She could have been an Egyptian water bearer. Mentally he outlined her large violet eyes in charcoal and cut her hair in bangs. Yep. She could be parading across the potteries of zillions of jugs in practically every Antiquities Museum in the world.

All this and more—if you wanted to count the bonus of those short, thick magnificent legs. He cleared his throat, making a valiant attempt to hide his excitement. Fortunately, Gissalayne was busy adjusting herself inside her sweater and folding up her storm coat.

Jonas played the game well; he’d studied the rules and even memorized a script. What was the best way to attract a woman?

It's all in the marketing, Regina Diebleed wrote on the first page of the D & C handbook. *Women are jealous and possessive.* "We are a microcosm," he swallowed the lump in his throat. "Wherever we are, and whatever 'time zone' we happen to find ourselves in. So how could you, or anyone for that matter, possibly limit yourself to one partner, one special relationship, one—"

Gissalayne clutched her purse in front of her. She had to hold onto something, anything that might keep her from going down this road that she'd traveled many times before. She already knew where it led. Heartbreak. Weeks of crying and lack of self-esteem until she was able to pick up the pieces again. Was there any tragedy greater than unconsummated love... any wound deeper than the knife of an unfaithful lover? Besides anti-Bush films and 9/11 disclosures, was there any greater box office draw than beautiful (sexy) broken-hearted women? Why couldn't she just pick up her stuff and walk out of this Matrix, this inevitable loop-knot of wildly insane attraction to every man who hated monogamy?

"MAY I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE." A uniformed attendant had stepped up to the Columbus-Rochester check-in desk and was clutching the microphone. "We are sorry to report

that Flight Number 2037 is overbooked. Do we have any volunteers who would be willing to take the next flight to Columbus, going on to Rochester, in exchange for a \$300 voucher and free hotel and dinner?"

No one ventured toward the desk. Gissalayne was on fire... she hoped Jonas Foreplay hadn't noticed.

"Oh dear." Jonas clucked his tongue and feigned distress. "I certainly can postpone fried chicken for a couple days. It sounds like a good idea to me, to take their \$300 voucher with all the trimmings. Would you like that also, my dear--or are you being picked up--expected by, perhaps your fiancé or boyfriend? Is. He--is someone waiting for you at the other end... I mean in Rochester, to pick you up?"

The airport was suddenly bathed in a pink cloud and tiny tinkling angel bells were ringing everywhere. Gissalayne had never felt so pink and ready in her whole life, even though she was acutely aware that she was asking for trouble to spend another minute with this exciting man. First of all, she knew nothing about him. Second, he might be an ET, third he probably was an ET, and fourth, undoubtedly he was great in bed. With a name like Foreplay... Jonas' invitation felt like cool raindrops on

her cheeks and lips and she felt her nipples harden. Jonas must have felt them too, since she realized he was staring at them.

Husband... waiting for you... pick you up... "No, I mean yes—I mean—let's take one question at a time," she stammered. "Yes, I—uh would I would uh like that. Two. Is someone expecting me. Am I expecting to be... No. No. I mean, I usually take an airport limo or shuttle. It's easier, faster..." Her voice drifted off as she made a quick inventory of the clean clothing left in her carry-on luggage. Two pair of bikini panties, the new bra with nipple holes she'd bought in honor of Harold and Y2K4, virgin, never been worn, the strapless leopard sleep suit with a snap crotch... Harold had informed her on the first day of her visit that he hated sexy lingerie.

"So?" asked Jonas, standing up and smiling at her.

"I mean, what I mean is, I'm early. I mean I'm not late. And I'm not really expected back until Wednesday, and today is Sunday."

"Yes, today is Sunday," declared Jonas, removing the plane tickets from an inner pocket of his blazer and displaying a splendid chest. Herringbone, real wool (jacket, not chest), it even had leather elbow patches, Gissalayne noticed pleasurably. A distinctive category of men wore wool herringbone blazers with

leather elbow patches. Usually they had money or brains or both. Together they rose and headed toward the counter.

8

What on Earth or Any Other Planet Was She Getting Herself into?

Great One: is this another mistake, or is it going to turn out to be the Big Bold Adventure I've been looking for?

My dear, that part is up to you. After all, haven't you parroted to enough people that "we create our own reality?" I do my share and you do yours. You wanted a perfect stud. Are you going to back out now?

"No," determined Gissalayne as she fumbled in her travel bag for her ticket and handed it to the desk clerk. "Not on your life—I mean, mine, I'm not."

"I beg your pardon?" asked the agent.

"Ahh... nothing. Nothing at all." Gissalayne smiled sweetly. "I was just talking to myself about life insurance, I mean life, I mean, yes, I would like a voucher."

"Your reservations will be waiting for you at the Wintergarden Suites," chirped the agent. "Happy Y2K4, and thanks so much for helping us out."

Two vouchers rolled out of the printer. The agent ripped them apart, handing one to each of them. *Why?* wondered Gissalayne, wincing. *Why did she have to rip them apart? There was no need to do that anymore. It was already a done deal!*

"Done deal," chuckled Jonas, grinning at her as he tucked the two vouchers in his blazer pocket, slung his computer case over his shoulder and picked up Gissalayne's carry-on luggage. How pleasant it would be to place her hot hands in that pocket to retrieve those tickets and then into his other pockets to--

"This will give us plenty of time to continue our dialogue about jealousy and multiple--er relationships," Jonas was saying. "And of course, learn more about each other. But first things first. Are you hungry? Let's get out of the airport and settle in at the hotel, have a leisurely dinner. In fact..."

Gissalayne was too excited to be hungry. She was too happy to be hungry. In fact, she was too ecstatic to be anything at all, even though she knew at some point she'd have to deal with that other logical part of herself. Already the orchestra was tuning up and producing those familiar raucous *screech-screech-*

screeches: cause and effect, truth or consequences, clarity and consequence... What are Jonas Foreplay's assets? Bank balances? Credit cards, stocks, holdings, where he came or did not cum from, colleges, listings, degrees, organizations...
screeeeech-screech-screech...

Maybe he owned a few estates around the world, suggested her right brain. Consider a building that housed only servants, hundreds of them to dress her, do her makeup and hair and dust her books, even take her blouses and silk dresses to the dry cleaners. *Dry cleaners*. NASA. No, no, no, she shuddered. Cancel. *Delete delete*.

Was it too good to be true? True, and good, too, her right brain insisted. Jonas was tall, slim and fair, possibly British or Scandinavian...Dutch... a few years older than she, or about the same age... the same age was good. She'd already learned about older men. Heart problems, cholesterol, prostate and premature wilt... But then, she reminded herself, if Jonas Foreplay was an ET, he could be any age. Ageless. He could even shape-shift. Maybe he was a monster beneath a handsome rubbery head covering, and as soon as he pulled off the rubber... *As soon as he pulled off the rubber...*

What brand of condoms would he use? Was he into the kinky ones with the ribs and knobs? Costumes and toys? Belts and straps and other (Exciting) Devices? Perfumes? Flavored Oils & Videos?

Did ETs have the same physical detail work underneath their clothes? Or maybe they had computers inside, instead of the usual human stomach, liver and hormones. God knows she'd seen enough movies about ETs and their inner clockwork. And all that goo. She shuddered inwardly.

"You can pinch me anywhere you wish, if you're wondering," joked Jonas, interrupting Gissalayne's racing monologue. He nodded toward the escalators that led down to street level.

Gissalayne giggled nervously. "So you read minds, too?" Gingerly she stepped on the escalator after him.

"I suppose you could call it that," Jonas grinned. "But actually it wouldn't take a rocket scientist to guess that you are a proper young woman who doesn't ordinarily spend time with strange men who happen to sit down next to you in the airport. So you're wondering. Your brilliant mind is racing."

"Thank you." Gissalayne was aware of the catch in her voice as suddenly something gave way inside that must have

been pent-up tension, anxiety, fear and who knows what else. "You could be wrong, of course," she added, her eyes misting over.

"I don't believe I am," he replied, gently squeezing her shoulder.

Multiple personalities were not out of the question. Maybe he was a chameleon as well as a shape-shifter. One personality today, another tomorrow... but, after all, what difference did it make? Who really cared? Wasn't this Y2K4, when everything was supposed to be different? Didn't she deserve something different from all those sugarcone.com lonely heart-Harolds she kept attracting? Why not an ET, and even if he didn't believe in commitment and monogamy, the same woman and man together forever...

"I suppose you want to know what 'forever' looks and feels like to an ET," mused Jonas, picking up on her thoughts. She was a rapid processor. He could even see the red flags waving before her lovely violet eyes. He'd have to take it slowly, since it was obvious that Gissalayne didn't understand what was going on. Ah, these Earthlings... so stuck on control and possession!

He tuned in to her mind racing on: *There's a reason for everything, my dear. Remember that. No one said you have*

marry Jonas or any other ET in this universe. But you have a right to have a good time. There's nothing wrong with that. You're on the pill anyway, so you won't end up with one of those dreadful looking large-headed almond-eyed ET babies, unless... unless of course, the pill doesn't work with ETs.

But why on EARTH was she thinking about such things? She didn't even know this man (or ET). Gissalayne followed Jonas through the revolving doors outside the airport to the hotel shuttle depot. Only afterward did she realize that Jonas had not even pushed on the revolving doors before they had started to move. Nor had she pushed on them, either.

But that was the least of it. Why was she jumping to conclusions, jumping into bed already? What was this all about? At the expense of the airlines that rarely gave away anything these days, she was going to have a leisurely dinner with this man, take a long tub soak (alone, her own room) and then fall into a blissful sleep (alone in her own bed) and head out to the airport (shared ride)-- *What about breakfast? What about waking up, and the morning shower?*

ALONE ALONE ALONE, tolled her Edgar Allen Poe Inner Voice. *Shut UP!* Sometimes that Inner Voice was such a nuisance, especially when it acted just like an inner child. She

loved it so much it was difficult to be angry with it. And after all, she did love Poe, too, with all his fatalistic 'Nevermore's. Even if he *had* done his best writing when he was on opium... who cared? "O God! can I not save/One from the pitiless wave? /Is all that we see or seem /But a dream within a dream?"

Gissalayne had always stayed away from drugs, but she was well aware that without heroin or opium or just plain old alcohol to get them on, many artists seemed to need the "dream within a dream" in order to create their masterpieces. Who was she to judge? Had *she* written a masterpiece, or done anything significant *at all* in her life so far, except chase men and try to bring the right one to the altar so she wouldn't end up in a cold bed... ALONE, AND NEVERMORE? What about her five PhD's? What had she done with them except throw the framed certificates into a carton to molder with her first lock of cut hair, baby pictures and baby teeth that the fairies had probably recycled by now?

Who was she to judge anyone else, anyway? Especially if they'd become famous. But then, how did she feel about fame? How did she feel about anything, besides sex, of course. *Paaah...* Tomorrow she would be home again and she could

forget Jonas. Forget Harold. Forget all of this. It would be Past History. Y2K4, fuck the New Year, fuck the New Millennium.

“What is his name?” asked Jonas, breaking into her reverie as the Wintergarden Suites van pulled over to the curb and the driver hopped out to open the door for them. He reached for her hand and gave it a sympathetic squeeze. “It’s okay, my dear. The past is over. Now it’s time for something new and different.”

Tears welled up in Gissalyne’s eyes. This is not a time to cry, she scolded herself as the tears started to come faster, rolling down her cheeks, splashing off the tip of her nose and ruining her makeup. Jonas handed her a soft clean linen handkerchief. It felt cool and delicious, like the hand he slipped into her hot sticky one. Gissalayne was glad they were the only ones in the hotel van. Jonas was also glad.

“Is all that we see or seem /But a dream within a dream?” murmured Gissalayne to the doorman.

9

Jonas is an ET... or is He?

Before heading for the hotel, Jonas had excused himself and headed for the men's room to telepath Regina.

"Heading for the Wintergarden, are you?" enthused Regina. "Wonderful! Good work, Jonas!"

"And you, too, Regina. She's a masterpiece," declared Jonas, unzipping his fly and peeing into the urinal. "You're the best!"

"If you do well with Gissalayne, there will be many more like her," promised Regina.

Jonas' pee stream suddenly diminished to a trickle, then stopped. *Many more like her...*

Jonas had never considered the possibility that he could ever be strongly attracted to any of the women who were to receive both his seed and his worldly wisdom about Missions and Goals. The thought of Actual Attraction was so fresh and

interesting, it was even powerful enough to stop the flow of his urine. "Thank you, Regina," Jonas managed.

Regina was intuitive and she was also a gifted tinkle reader. As she listened to the bell-like tinkle tones of Jonas' pee, she was immediately alerted when the bells suddenly stopped ringing. "Jonas, you do remember the terms of our contract, right?" she asked briskly.

"Of course, of course, Regina," Jonas responded meekly. Regina's opening speech from the first SS training session pounded in his ears. *"Gentlemen, your goal is to give as many qualified females as possible an exciting opportunity to realize their dreams and goals. You will be their Spiritual Stud—their cockpit, coach and mentor. You must never become personally attached to your clients. Stay focused. Your sperm and their day dreams are equally critical to our mission to save planet Earth from total destruction."*

Regina winced. "Whew! For a moment, I was worried we were going to lose you at the first station stop." Her voice was laced with sarcasm and Jonas knew she already knew that she had.

"Not a chance not a chance, everything's fine. Talk to you soon, Regina."

At the sound of Jonas's telepathic *click* signaling sign-off, Regina was overcome with an uncontrollable itch. A quick check confirmed that every part of her face and body was covered with itchy red spots. Regina could scarcely keep from scratching herself even in her most sacred territories. The itch beneath her two perfect breast blooms was unbearable.

At once, Regina consulted the Oracle.

"You are experiencing jell-itch," boomed the Big O. "It manifests itself among all living forms that experience serious bouts of R & C."

"And what exactly is 'R & C'?"

"Resentment based Control issues. My dear, describe what you are now feeling in the pit of your stomach. For example, is it a cross between that roller coaster 'down' feeling and a bolt of bitterness that zooms up into your chest near the left breast nipple?"

"It is the feeling of 'I want,'" snapped Regina. "I want Jonas. For myself. He's mine!"

"Ah yes," sighed the Oracle. "Jell-itch is that hybrid part of you that's human. I can recommend some topical cream, but I

don't think the spots are going to go away until you go to the source of the problem and do something about it."

Oracle vanished without giving Regina a chance to ask exactly WHAT she was supposed to do.

Jonas tapped the last drops of urine from the tip of his organ and tucked it back into his briefs. *Behave, Herman*, he warned it. "*Herman?*" his penis snapped back. "*I don't recall hearing that name before. Since when am I a 'Herman'? I thought my name was 'Rascal'.*"

Jonas scowled at himself in the mirror above the wash basin. He looked too radiant, too excited to be in full control of himself. This was not good at all. Why should he waste his life here on Earth playing corporate pimp, "spiritual stud" or whatever euphemism Regina Diebleed wanted to use? When it came down to basics, Project D & C was still just another selective gene pool or professional breeding society. How did it differ from the late Ronald Diebleed's "scientific" agenda to create a pure human race? Or Hitler's? Or anyone else's?

Interference with God's work, that's what it was, Jonas sighed. Why should anyone, even Regina Diebleed think God needed help being God? If someone didn't want to have a "life

purpose," wasn't that perfectly okay? If God created them, S/He knew what they were or were not capable of. Anyway, how could anyone except maybe God be certain if his tadpoles contained the right résumé for inspiring female vision quests?

So what if Gissalayne didn't have any aspirations other than finding a mate and having children? Was that so unacceptable? Did everyone have to be a Mother Theresa or Regina Diebleed?

What a poetic name: Gissalayne. He'd have to do a Wiki check on the internet to find out who 'Gissalayne' was in ancient literature. It sounded King Arthurish. Why couldn't he remember who she was? A computer chip seemed to have momentarily slipped out of his holographic hard drive, and right now, it was hard all right, and driving.

One thing was certain: regardless of who she might be named after, Gissalayne was one of the most exquisite female specimens he'd encountered. Just thinking about her thick calves hardened Jonas' resolve even more.

Good raw material, that's what D & C wanted. A shiver raced up and down his spine. All those college degrees, all that experience counseling others... so much of her past had to be peeled away to get to who she really was. Gissalayne was going

to be a challenge, but she was ripe for challenges. She was like a perfect peach in August. His mouth watered just thinking about that first bite.

Jonas let his thoughts wander, enjoying the sensation they were delivering as they landed on different parts of Gissalayne's external portals. He was pleased with the new life purpose denial program he had just created, and more than a little excited about the pleasures that lay ahead.

Poor Gissalayne. Yes, poor Gissalayne, Jonas thought excitedly. Her aura was so dark and dreary, it was as if she had just been just waiting for him to come along and save her. Jonas couldn't be happier about his Kent Clark assignment. Clearly Gissalayne hadn't a clue about how to get from aleph to omega or even from breast feeding to the bottle. The analogy of breasts and weaning caused Jonas's hopes and penis to swell once again. With growing enthusiasm, he knew as never before that he had come here to Planet Earth to be Gissalayne's liberator from bras she needn't wear all the time, and expensive lingerie that did a dishonor to the magnificence of the naked archetypical female mound(s). Did a turkey really need dressing? Couldn't it be eaten all by itself?

The Supreme Being was Gissalayne's ally. Proof enough was her great body and face and lovely chestnut brown hair... Jonas was rising fully to the occasion at the mere thought of running his fingers through all of Gissalayne's different hairs. *In time, in time*, he reassured himself, even though he knew time played absolutely no part in his life and never would.

Hadn't the Creator informed all souls from the Confluence of Beginnings that reconstruction and make-overs were not to be part of anyone's agenda if they wanted to align themselves with the all-prevailing energy and activity of Love--the only reason for being? Wasn't the world, including Planet Earth and Gissalayne, perfect just as it was?

Rascal was already standing at the podium, waiting to dialogue. *"Dear Jonas, you are absolutely right. Let me remind you that according to the most sophisticated counselors and therapists on the earth plane today, one enters into a relationship with the understanding or unspoken agreement that both parties should be allowed to remain as they are, with all their flaws and flavors--which, of course, are a deception anyway, since every one of God's creatures is perfect. Deception is only in the eyes of the beholder. You know this*

almost better than I do. So what exactly do you mean when you use the term 'rescue'?

Rascal was heating up. Jonas felt heated up. Those legs... the violet eyes...

"First of all, she's been going after the wrong type of men," Jonas retorted, his cheeks burning. "She needs someone multi-dimensional, from another planet, so she can learn how to time travel back and forth among parallel worlds. One world is much too small for this angel. She needs an extra-terrestrial being like myself, who offers her more... er gifts, than what she's found here on the Earth plane. Someone like myself, who can help her remove her... *remove* her... er layers of doubt, fear, confusion--and reservations, inhibition, about her tremendous capabilities. She is a suppressed woman, hiding behind her greatness and that goddamned bastion of a storm coat."

"Ahh, so you have appointed yourself to be her 'mentor.' Her Chiron or oarsman to row her across the River Styx," teased Rascal. *"Now let me ask you a serious question. You don't have to answer it, of course. But let's suppose she didn't have those magnificent legs and thighs, those high pointy breasts, the Egyptian waist and smoldering violet eyes."*

"Jonas, my boy, isn't this just another turn-on? The pulchritude..." (Rascal liked to use uncommon words that caused people to run for the dictionary if they were so motivated)... *"the pulchritude and voluptuousness of this woman—one of God's most magnificent creatures, a woman of Goddess stature... a Woman who surpasses all other Women thus far whom you've met since you've been here on this planet... is simply blinding. Is that not true?"*

"Shut up."

"Legs. Ahh, those legs," Rascal pressed deeper. Herman was straining to come out of his box again. *"The legs Gissalayne is so ashamed of, because they aren't long and Twiggie or Barbie Doll enough. Jonas, you abhor skinny ET bodies and tall starved-looking beanpoles."*

Rascal knew only too well that Jonas was bored with ET bodies that were nothing more than clothes hangers. Here on a planet of robust bustiness, the typical female runway model was also bulimically unhealthy, doomed to premature death, loss of teeth, hair, menses, bones and breasts... How much meat was there on a chicken wing or dried fig? Where was the red blood? Unlike most Earthling men, the thought of any of the varieties of female blood that emerged from a woman turned Jonas on, lit

him up. After all, menstruation was a sign of the miracle of The Great One. New Life. Gissalayne's menstrual blood symbolized her fertility and the thought of Gissalayne giving birth was more exciting than Jonas and his hungry organ could bear.

Imagine the power in those large thick limbs and what it would be like to have them wrapped around his hips and waist! Imagine hoisting her up on his groin and... *Bristle bristle.*

"Why couldn't Gissalayne run for U.S. President?" Jonas tried changing the subject. "And besides being a strong healthy baby machine, Gissalayne is also a great cook. Her minestrone soup is a masterpiece, and so are her chicken curry and flaming flambolina.

"*What's that?*" asked Rascal curiously. "Shut UP," barked Jonas, pulling the flaps of Gissalayne's storm coat over his crotch.

Rascal was so limited. He understood nothing about the higher planes and lower subtleties of human existence. He was too stuck in the root chakras of sex and bowel function. Nevertheless, Jonas tried to be patient with him. After all, without Rascal, he wouldn't be here today in human form, seated next to this beautiful creature, on their way to the

Wintergarden Suites to have her, or her-she-he have dinner with him-her.

"All I meant was: All those eons of female slavery have done their thing. Gissalayne is brilliant--far more capable than most males on the planet today, or ever, for that matter." Matter again...ha! Mind over matter... "– for that matter, most of my ET brothers and sisters."

"So you really want to admit that!" declared Rascal, folding his hands over his chest. Jonas folded his hands over his chest. Gissalayne was probably one of the most exceptional individuals he had encountered since he'd been here, and Rascal was trying to make a fool out of him. Trying to make him into a cheap, conniving *rooster* let loose in the barnyard of his imagination.

Hadn't he demanded of the Supreme Being to show him one of his best and most precious jewels? Hadn't he told Him/Her he was sick of all her zircons? (That sounded so close to 'jerk-off', he had to be careful. Language was such a sensitive thing and his bristling state was already out of hand.) *Hand!* There he goes again. *Keep your hands folded in your lap, as far away as possible from Herman,* he warned himself.

"Continue," commanded Rascal, enjoying every minute of this dialogue with one of his favorite clients.

"The layers of confusion and despair surrounding this poor captive being..." Jonas was winding up. He would make a good politician himself, thought Rascal. Or used car salesman. "... this magnificent work of art, this Goya Reubens Rembrandt DaVinci Michelangelo... those legs are so heavy with possibility. That chestnut hair is so rich with—with lanolin..."

"Sounds good to me," beamed Rascal. Jonas felt himself beaming. *"So, my dear Jonas, it appears that your major challenge right now is to try to stay cool. As they say here, 'Stay cool, Man. No involvement.' No emotional baggage, right? Just your carry-on computer and briefcase. Keep it simple. As soon as you get involved with naked underwear and dildos and vibrating butterflies..."*

Jonas' stomach started to flutter... Rascal grinned. Jonas grinned. *"Words are so powerful, aren't they, my friend?"* Rascal teased. *"As soon as you get involved emotionally with one of these budding goddesses, you know you've had it."* Budding all right. Budding big.

"Rascal, you know I've been on my best behavior, until now," Jonas reminded him.

"Ahh, right. But there's always a first time. Even Goethe knew that, when he made his plea bargain with his own Rascal-

Mephisto. We've learned nothing since then, have we? And today Faust isn't even mandatory college reading."

"I don't anticipate any glitches or hitches," retorted Jonas hotly. "Until now, I've learned how to behave and keep myself well under control. As an ET, I understand the holographic perception of the universe, here and elsewhere. I am well-schooled in the full range of human emotions connected to this humanoid phenomenon referred to as 'earthly love' and ..."

"Jonas, you are so damn BORING when you get off on one of your philosophical tangents. Tsch, tsch!" scolded Rascal. *"Why don't you just shut up instead of trying to smart ass yourself out of this thing that's happening to you that I don't dare give a name to, for fear of being called a hypocrite?"*

Angrily Jonas shut down on Rascal. Enough was enough. He turned toward Gissalayne, crossing and uncrossing his legs.

"Do you like Seattle?" He watched Gissalayne dab at her eyes with a tissue and wondering if her make-up had started to smudge. Earthling females were so adorable with all their nocturnal emissions.

"I—really haven't spent much time here," she smiled, deciding to enjoy the ride, even though she wasn't sure she was supposed to. "We, I mean I, didn't see a whole lot. I did check

out all the tourist spots on the Internet before I came, and I ordered the 'TRIPLE A EXCITING SPOTS PACKAGE,' but --"

"But *he* wasn't into Exciting Spots. Am I correct? Er, that is, external places to visit. Or maybe even internal ones," he added. "But for the most part: you're talking about theater, art museums, chic restaurants and coffee houses... He probably didn't even own a TV."

Tears again. Gissalayne blew her nose. "Rhoda, his ex-wife left him a broken one about ten years ago and he never had it fixed. Harold hates television. We even missed Times Square and the Big Ball. How did you guess?"

Before Gissalayne could stop herself, the rest tumbled out: "Harold was not only a bore; he was an absolute monster of a bore. And besides that, he's a dry cleaner."

"A -- ?"

"Clothes. Drapes. Bedspreads. 'Our cleaning won't clean you out' is the company slogan. To me it sounded like an ad for a laxative. But Harold thought it was clever." Gissalayne rolled her eyes. "His only goal in life was to tie up some poor creature with apron strings so she could be barefoot and pregnant for the rest of her life." All of this gushed out her so rapidly, Gissalayne felt herself shaking from the aftershock.

“Well at least he was into tying *something* up, or down,” Jonas offered gently. “Tell me—did you know beforehand—that he was a dry cleaner?” Jonas tried to keep a straight face, but his objective was to make Gissalayne laugh at herself. And she did. The two exploded into gales of laughter.

“You couldn’t possibly be human,” Gissalayne gasped for breath. “You’re too fucking perceptive. Harold had no goal of becoming a famous dry cleaner, just as I’ve never considered Hook, Line & Sinker my destiny. Perhaps that’s what drew us together. Two inner tubes bobbing on waves of confusion in a vast and stormy ocean, expecting the Inter-Sexual Coast Guard to come along and pick us up.”

“Very nice, very nice,” Jonas rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “You have a knack for metaphors and language.”

“I should, after five PhD dissertations,” retorted Gissalayne. “Call the Internet the ocean. Call the inner tubes our inner life. And call me, Gissalayne Chondroitin Confused and Already Worn Out with a sore bottom from too many hot air balloon rides with assholes or dumb pricks. So I decided to go virtual. For six weeks I corresponded with a man who owned a waste management business. After several thousand emails about the hazards of dioxin, I’d had enough. I had my own

hazards to deal with, and at that time I wasn't ready to take on the rest of the world's as well. But this man had a mission. He was determined to transform all the world's excrement into hotels, hospitals, libraries, schools for the deaf and blind..."

"Ahh, yes, shit. I understand," sympathized Jonas. "You found your Romeo on one of those romantic match-making websites. Hmmm. I've seen some cartoons. Two incredibly ugly-looking people sitting at the computer, unwashed, in their pajamas, eating left-over pizza and marketing their good looks, money and Success over the invisible waves of desperation. Gissalayne, you're really not into that, are you? You're too smart for that!"

"I tried the physical dating bureaus," Gissalayne sniffled. "The videos and résumés--I never met so many needy people in my whole life. All they wanted to do was get laid or married."

Jonas didn't respond immediately. He didn't have to. Gissalayne was listening to the playback of what she had just said, and the color was rising to her cheeks.

Jonas watched her with increasing admiration and hunger. She was even more beautiful when she was flustered. "Oh dear," he entered the pause when it started to grow awkward. "Which means you had something else in mind?"

Damn! Why had he said that? *Rascal...*

Gissalayne accepted it well. "Of course, you're right, yes, you are very right," Gissalayne blushed crimson. "What I mean is... Oh, I don't know what I mean! I'm terribly embarrassed about mentioning all of this to you... my laundry list of failures. In fact I don't even know *why* I'm talking about this to you, except that you asked and I couldn't resist. Not that you're irresistible. I don't even know you! You'd think I'd start to trust the universe to bring me men who were intelligent, intellectual, interesting, adventuresome--"

"Like yourself." Jonas beamed. "What kind of image did you put forth, my dear, to attract waste management entrepreneurs and dry cleaners--not that there's anything wrong with these professions? God knows, these people make a decent living, and from a marketing standpoint, they're essential to every household. Disposing of one's excrement inside and looking spiffy clean on the outside is..."

"...not important. None of this is important," sniffled Gissalayne.

"Then why are we wasting time talking about it... speaking of waste?! Let's talk about better things. Like us. Being here and driving on this magnificent expressway toward our destination of

desire. Notice the magnificent network of highways and expressways that we're traveling over. It's truly a marvel, isn't it? The webs of concrete braiding over and under one another. It's amazing how we physical creatures have found a way to get from one place to the next without teleporting."

"Without --?"

"Well, you know, my dear, at one time that's how we all traveled here, and everywhere. Unlike the theories most scientists put forth, actually we've been moving backward, not forward, on this planet for many generations. Surely you know about Atlantis."

"Of course. But I don't usually talk about it with strangers."

Jonas squinted sideways at her. "Well then, perhaps we needn't classify ourselves as such. Perhaps this is a moment of Truth for discovering who we really are. Friends, for example. Or even lovers or mates, from eons ago, maybe from Atlantis, who have finally come together in this mess and snarl of Seattle expressways in a Wintergarden Suites hotel van, where we're headed toward the pleasure of each other's company and an unforgettable evening."

Gissalayne felt a distinct tingling in her wrists and thumbs. Her head was spinning. "Who *are* you really?" she asked hoarsely.

"Who do you want me to be?" laughed Jonas, squeezing her hand. Even though she was wearing gloves, she could feel the sensitivity of her inner thighs and hot spots on her buttocks where they liked to be stroked. "Incidentally, I'm not a big traditional pizza fan, it's the tomato sauce thing," Jonas was saying, "even though they do remind me of flying saucers all red and lit up. But I do like Seattle's gourmet Greek and gorgonzola pizzas. There's even a sushi pizza place down by the wharf."

If only she would relax a bit instead of being so suspicious. The word 'sushi' did cause a stir, he noticed. Poor dear, she couldn't figure out all of this yet, and where it was going. But then, neither could he.

"You don't have to ask questions," Jonas changed the subject to see if this would help. "Like most horizontal people—I mean, linear, heh-heh!--you're already asking where all of this is going. Or where it should go. Or what's next?"

"I can't help it," Gissalayne sighed. "I was born without a mother."

Now it was Jonas's turn to grin. "Oh, my, you *are* quick--I like that. But I should. I always have... since the beginning of timelessness."

"I've always thought it rather interesting that the expressways use the patterns of sacred geometry and crop circles," Gissalayne mused aloud, as the van ascended over a maze of ramps and side-exits and onto another expressway network. "Cloverleaves, for example... or is it 'leaves'? It's so... so neuro-predictable."

"So what, my dear? Neuro-...? But isn't the entire world patterned on sacred geometry? Even sacred geometry is patterned on sacred geometry. There are no errors in our universes. Snowflakes and water crystals are kissing cousins. And as for crop circles, well, they are what they are, no mistake about that. Just as it's no mistake that we met, for example. All of this was pre-destined."

Gissalayne let out a long and happy sigh. It had been a long time since she'd invited Plato, Aristotle, Berkeley, Kant, Hume, Hegel, Schopenhauer and the rest of the busts and books of these wonderful men to join her in the think tank for a swim. She'd buried them in the bureau under layers of frilly underwear or in file drawers of vocational seminar tapes and job

applications she'd never filled out. How many years of trying to determine what she wanted to do in life until finally she decided it would be best not to think about it and just DO IT...

"Do what?" Jonas interrupted her reverie. "Isn't that, after all the issue, and what made a sneaker and running shoe corporation millions? Look at those huge blackbirds up there on the telephone wires. Amazing creatures, they are."

Could he really read her mind? How could she carry on a conversation, or even be friendly with someone who could—

"No," Jonas reassured her, lightly patting her shoulder yet wishing he could do more. "No, I really can't. I can only guess."

The van halted in front of the hotel entrance and the driver opened up the side panels to let them out.

10

Rooms 1311 and 1313

*Amazing what earthlings put themselves through. Jonas's mind was racing right along with his eyes that were busy devouring every part of Gissalayne as he followed her to the check-in desk. Burying the best parts of themselves in storm coats of not being good enough. I believe we could probably converse on almost every subject, and this woman would have an interesting, valuable opinion. Waste management and dry cleaning... **paah!** Gissalayne was going to make an excellent presidential candidate. Managing the waste of centuries of corruption, taking all the criminals to the dry cleaners...*

"Where do we go from here?" Jonas asked the desk clerk.
Yes, where do we go from here, Gissalayne wondered.

"The elevators are over there." The receptionist pointed left. "You are both on the thirteenth floor."

"Ahh, interesting." Jonas picked up the two card-keys and handed one to Gissalayne. "I'd thought hotels still avoided a Floor 13."

"We are the first hotel chain that is not constructed on superstition," said the receptionist proudly.

"I hope you are constructed on concrete blocks, however, ha ha!" joked Jonas.

The clerk frowned. "Do you object to being on Floor 13?" he asked.

"Of course not!" declared Gissalayne hotly. "We're all still alive after the arrival of Y2K4, aren't we? Why should we shrink from medieval hexes when we've just passed the greatest hex test in history? We were supposed to be gone by today. Wiped out."

"Then maybe we actually were, my dear," smiled Jonas, turning away from the desk and steering her toward the elevators. "Now *there's* something to think about! Where are we? Are we really here, or anywhere, for that matter? I'd like to freshen up a bit, and I'm sure you would, too. I'll ring you in about an hour. Is that all right? How convenient that our rooms are next to each other... just a mere digital geometric away!"

Jonas didn't have to look at Gissalayne to know she was blushing again. Gissalayne knew she was blushing again, and furthermore, she knew Jonas knew. That was awful, all this knowing. It was also reflexively confusing for any outsider.

Not really, my dear, Jonas smiled to himself. You are such a little girl in so many ways, and I find that so charming, so endearing... If you only knew how adorable you are!

Neither of them spoke as they rode up the elevator shaft to the thirteenth floor. It was a long shaft, thought Gissalayne, her heart thumping.

"Ahh, rooms '1311' and '1313,'" murmured Jonas, as the elevator gonged musically and they stepped off. "To the right, the desk clerk said."

Right, right, the word rang in Gissalayne's ears echoing with the sound of the elevator gong. Harold was rapidly disappearing from her consciousness along with the dirty house, NASA, the putrid odor of his smoothie poops and farts, and above all, his unfeeling penis... "Y2K4," she breathed. "The beginning of a New Era."

"Are you frightened?" murmured Jonas, sensing she was going through a mental cleanup, or dry cleaning of her most recent past, he quipped to himself.

"Are you?" she returned, suddenly realizing how much she was enjoying this game of ping-pong. What did she have to lose? Certainly not her virginity.

"I've never been afraid of anything or anyone for as long as I can remember," responded Jonas, "although memory is really not part of my analogue. Well, yes, with the exception of one thing. Yes," his jaw tightening noticeably, "I do have one fear—fear of a beautiful woman with a brilliant mind and tremendous capacity to feel deeply."

Did he really think she was beautiful and brilliant, wondered Gissalayne as she watched Jonas insert the key-card in Number 1311. Her breath quickened as she deeply inserted her own key-card in 1313, waited for the green light and pushed open the door.

The king-size bed was an inviting field with many pillows fluffed up at the headboard. She strode over to the exposed windows and pulled hard on the plastic stick at the corner that controlled a mess of white gauze that was attached to the heavier outer layer of a musty-smelling floral-patterned drape. (*Did it need dry cleaning? Oh, yes!*) Soon all traces of the parking lot, dumpsters and air conditioning generator disappeared.

Nightstand light on, remote control on for the TV, bottle cap of water from the refrigerator off; Gissalayne flicked through the channels. Talk shows, sit-coms, X-Files re-runs, news. CNN.

"We are just receiving the latest report from SeaTac International airport that Ameri-Cola Flight Number 2004 from Seattle, destination Rochester, New York with an intermittent stop in Columbus, did not make it off the runway," the red-haired flawless-complexioned newscaster was saying. "It headed back to the gate after receiving an emergency report from flight control that a passenger carrying a vial of anthrax concealed in her er..."

Flight 2004... Columbus... Rochester...anthrax!!!!

Gissalayne froze. The screen had already flashed to commercials for canine fur spray and diet turkey gravy. She felt sick, exhilarated, and then she didn't know what she felt. After the 9-11 Twin Towers tragedy of 2001 followed by anthrax and other terrorist scares and the long and dreary game of "Go Find Osama bin Laden," which was like searching for a missing sock from the clothes dryer--was she or anyone supposed to have any feelings left at all about the world situation, except maybe gratitude to still be alive?

Was there any American today who wasn't in serious financial debt and scared to think out loud—if they did happen to be into thinking--in the presence of strangers? Almost every ordinary person knew what could happen to them if they got caught thinking for themselves and becoming vocal about their discoveries.

Fear was too close to the word "feel." In fact, they'd become kissing cousins, narrowing down the choices. Harold was the only person she knew who brazenly claimed he was afraid of nothing. No wonder. His major concerns were the neighbor's new trash cans or a difficult ketchup stain on a silk cocktail dress. Ever since he'd become addicted to self-improvement seminars, morning smoothies and Affirmations, Harold had stopped reading the newspaper and watching the news. Even if it *was* censored and spin-doctored, at least newsprint and telecasts affirmed the existence of something outside Issaquah. And of course, for Harold, Internet news websites except for emailing, were conspiracy catch-alls. "Negative nutcases," Harold called them.

His walls were posted with peeling sheets of scribbled Affirmations and bumper sticker slogans surrounded by rainbows and stars: "You are Wonderful!" "Today is the first day of your

life!" "Picture Peace Inside!" "Believe in your world and your world will believe in you!"

But what difference did all of this make anyway? Why was she even thinking of Harold at a time like this? Why would she ever think of Harold anymore? Gissalayne broke into a sweat. What was "news" anyway, except something rooted in time and space--two quantifications that were evaporating from her consciousness as rapidly as a string of Chemtrails or microwaves targeted to choke off the human body's life force, if carbon monoxide or humanly contrived earthquakes, tornados and hurricanes didn't do it first. At times, or lack of them, one was not supposed to see or even consider outcomes.

And now, if there *was* such a thing or being--or maybe that's *all* there was--now--she was about to spend the evening with an ET. She needed to meditate. She needed an aspirin. She needed a good fuck.

The news report continued.

"... All carry-on luggage is now being searched," the red-haired manikin continued her report, "but airport authorities are now saying there's a possibility the passenger was not on board, after all. Apparently the flight was over-booked, and directly before boarding, the airlines asked for volunteers to accept

vouchers and take a later flight. The suspect could have been among those passengers who had accepted a voucher. The question of course is, why that person decided not to board the flight, unless that passenger did not know the vial was in her possession. Of course, in a case like this, it would surely be self-evident. Others are saying the vial could have been secured in one of the many passengers' orifices."

A scream went off in Gissalayne's head. As if sleepwalking, she picked up her carry-on case and dumped the contents onto her bed, half expecting knives, box cutters and a gun to spill out. Nothing except books she hadn't read, sweats, tee shirts, sweaters, Levi's... No one had touched or intercepted her luggage or sexy lingerie. In fact, it hadn't been touched by anyone since she'd packed it in Rochester. Harold with his negative NASA would never know about the positive NASA he'd missed out on, the schmuck.

Everything was intact except her nerves. Again, Gissalayne did a quick review. She was absolutely certain that no one had picked up anything she was carrying on board except... except...

She sat down on the bed. She stood up. Sat down. Was Jonas Foreplay an ET hijacker, international spy, counter-spy, suicide bomber.... mind-controlled assassin...? Forget the ET

stuff. *Was she about to get laid by a man who was wanted by the FBI, CIA and God knows who else?*

"Stop panicking, Child," reassured The Great One. "These things happen every day."

"But not to me," Gissalayne wailed. "The FBI, CIA, Mossad and God knows who else are going to be knocking on my door any minute and demanding to inspect my vagina. It is *my personal property! I won't do it. I won't let them do it!* It's unconstitutional, it's..."

"You wanted some excitement in your life, didn't you? Some Adventure?" charged The Great One.

"Not like this," moaned Gissalayne. It was difficult not to break down and cry, especially because she knew what a good cry would do to her eyes. They'd be red and puffy for hours afterward, her cheeks would be blotchy and her nostrils would swell like they'd been attacked by a hornet... no, this was not a time to cry. Even waterproof mascara wouldn't help.

Furthermore, Gissalayne reasoned, she really was jumping to conclusions. How could she possibly accuse Jonas of being a terrorist without evidence? He was one of the nicest, most handsome, *intelligent* ETs she had ever met, especially since she'd never met one before. Finally and most important,

Gissalayne knew a hard-on when she saw one. Her breasts had immediately responded, just like right now. A tremor of excitement passed through her nipples and lighted like a butterfly on her clitoris, sending a shiver up and down her spine.

Wasn't that proof enough that he wasn't into suicide bombing?

Surely Harold wouldn't have placed a vial of anthrax in her vagina, not even when she was sleeping. She would have known about it. No, Harold was too much of a States Righter and fundamentalist to do anything like that. Furthermore, anthrax in her vagina meant anthrax on Harold's erection. She stripped off her clothes, stuck a finger in her vagina just to make sure nothing foreign was inside, and headed for the bathroom. It felt too good for her to determine.

Gissalayne decided not to tell Jonas about the CNN report, unless of course he'd seen it on the news himself. Did ETs watch CNN or any news reports, for that matter?

11

Agendas and deep shit

"We have a choice," said Jonas as they headed toward the elevator. "I mean, about where we want to eat. We don't even have to stay here at the hotel, of course. Although, why not? It's so cozy and convenient. At least for this evening. You certainly do look magnificent, my dear. I do like those earrings. They sparkle. You sparkle!" Jonas was struck by the size and colors of Gissalayne's aura. Rainbows were streaming from each nipple and making a magical prismic triangle with her delta. She was a walking metaphysical wonder.

"They're anthrax, I mean amber," Gissalayne smiled, blushing. "I'm really not dressed to go anywhere, or even Somewhere. Levi's were the only other thing I had to put on." Gissalayne flicked her hands over the lower part of her body.

Jonas' eyes followed. "My dear, clothes never made a woman. Only men do that. Or, of course other women if they're into that sort of thing. And your legs," imitating her flicking

gesture, “probably would look even more wonderful without any clothes on them at all.”

“My *legs!*” Gissalayne eyed Jonas incredulously. “You must be kidding! I mean, you haven’t really *seen* them.”

“I’d like to. Is that an invitation? When? After dinner? Forgive me. We don’t have to get ahead of ourselves. I tend to be impudent and outspoken. But please understand, I’m only teasing. I’d never even *think* of taking advantage of a good opportunity,” Jonas’ eyes flickered with naughty innocence as he grinned broadly at her.

Gissalayne was enjoying herself more than she cared to admit, but was ready to admit it anyway. Forget the caring. She really couldn’t help it. This man, this stranger, this ET, *this potential killer* was charming, exciting and gorgeous. All the necessary ingredients for a good lay and potential father of her children—*so how could he possibly be a terrorist?*

Great One, we need to have a talk, Gissalayne begged silently.

Why, sweetheart? Great One responded immediately. *Isn’t it true that all your life you’ve been waiting to meet a man who’s your match? Someone just as unpredictable and outrageous as you? You don’t have to pretend anymore who you are... because*

you know he'll understand—and celebrate it. Celebrate you. Are you frightened because you know Jonas can easily break down that thick hymen that you've built around yourself?

Great One was always right. She did have a membrane that had been protecting her. From—what? Getting hurt? Or forgetting the first time her step-father had tiptoed into her bedroom and removed her nightie?

“Don't remember us this way, sweetheart,” Winona had pleaded with her as she joined Orville for the little party.

“I want you to remember our good times together, always, sweetheart,” her step-father had said once when Gissalayne was seven and he was bouncing her naked up and down on his knee.

Winona had died on Gissalayne's tenth birthday. She'd found a note on top of her schoolbooks. The handwriting was unmistakably Winona's, although the message sounded like it had been written by someone else. “Don't *ever* let anyone, man or woman, interfere with your dreams,” she'd scrawled. “Go for your goals, Gissalayne. Show the world who you really are... and remember, you don't have to be rich and famous to be happy.”

Indelibly stamped in her memory was the picture of her step-mother sprawled out on the bed, unconscious. By the time the ambulance had rushed her to the hospital, she was gone.

Gissalayne changed her mind. She needed to know who Jonas was before it was too late--for what, she wasn't sure. But by bringing up the CNN newscast, she was sure she'd find out.

"Jonas, we do have a situation to discuss. I mean, an *in situ* situation," Gissalayne interrupted her own reverie. "Did you happen to catch the report on TV just now, about our flight, I mean the flight we were supposed to be on?"

"Let me guess." Jonas frowned, placing a finger on his forehead. "*It didn't take off,*" said the voice in his forehead. "It didn't take off," he said aloud to Gissalayne. It was delayed. Hijacked. A bomb was found in the baggage compartment... In other words..." he gestured toward Gissalayne's Levi's, "...no clothes except these... and maybe a few panties, if you decide to stay on here a few days with me?"

Gissalayne was stunned.

"Don't ask, my dear," Jonas winked at her, dismissing Regina. "I think we have a serious shopping expedition coming up, first thing tomorrow morning. That is, unless you really have to get back to Rochester. What a ghastly place to live, especially in the winter. Although Vienna is beastly cold this time of the year also. But then, there's the Black Sea and so many resorts

nearby with tropical temperatures and lovely spas. I think probably your best color is red. Maybe coral. Am I right?"

They stepped out of the elevator into a corridor lined with a book and gift shop, art galleries, antique stores, clothing shops and a perfumery.

"Oh my!" Jonas paused before a handsome display of casual winter sportswear. The models were at a ski resort. Through the windows of their chalet one could see the snowy peaks (delicious peaks, thought Jonas). Two couples in cozy expensive winter sportswear were warming their hands in front of an artificial fire.

"That ski sweater would be perfect for you. And those matching slacks." He steered her inside. Gissalayne resisted, pulling back on his arm. "I – Jonas, this is, this is absolutely..."

"What? Wonderful? Has no one been kind to you lately and wanted to give you your heart's desire? Or at least, what you *think* is your heart's desire?" Earthling females could be so timid and playful. They came on like a ton of bricks but underneath, it was all soft and furry, like... well like... The vision of Gissalayne naked flashed before him. She really was a divine creation of God. Those violet eyes and nipples... Jonas' fingers buzzed at the

thought of touching them, twisting them with just the right pressure that would make her swoon...

"We'd like to see that outfit in the window, in--what size, my dear? 8? 10? 12?"

Gissalayne felt a strong urge to cry but managed to control herself. Jonas held the coral sweater in front of her and removed the matching coral slacks from the hanger. For a moment Gissalayne wished she was the hanger and Jonas was removing the slacks she was already wearing.

"Gissalayne, you are going to look both adorable and ravishing in this outfit," Jonas grinned.

Gissalayne searched for the price tag. "How much is it?"

"Does it matter if I'm paying for it? It is my gift to you because you are my gift to me. Ahh... no strings attached." He placed a firm hand on her arm. "It's not what you're thinking. I have unlimited resources, my dear. All of us do, if we only allow ourselves to tap into them. Try them on," he urged gently. "Or, better yet... if they're the right size, after dinner, we'll have a fashion show. Let's stay right here in the hotel for a cozy dinner and then afterwards, if you don't mind, I'd like to see how you look in this stunning outfit."

"Oh, look--look at this dress!" Jonas had already moved to another part of the store. "The color matches your eyes! May we have these two outfits, please? And look at that beautiful wool tweed blazer. It would be perfect over your Levi's! I admit, I've never shopped for a woman before--it's really quite easy, and fun--that is, if you like my taste." Jonas paused, watching Gissalayne finger the blazer. He placed a hand over the price tag. "Do you like my taste?" Jonas gazed into her eyes.

Gissalayne's heart fluttered. What on earth was she getting herself into? Surely nothing on Earth. This was other-planetary stuff. Only yesterday, Harold was standing in front of a pyramid of tuna fish cans, cursing at the cost of the chunky white albacore brand that was no longer on sale and cost ten cents more. *"Ten cents is too much money to pay the government,"* Harold told the cashier. *"Don't tell me to have a good day, whatever you do. We all need to fight the rise in prices when it comes to quality tuna fish. It's an insult to the tuna industry, an insult to..."* At that point, Gissalayne had stopped listening and so had the cashier. She did, however, feel a twinge of guilt about the giant overpriced chocolate covered mint pattie by the cash register that she'd almost bought. Hastily she replaced it on the candy rack before Harold could catch her.

To Harold, candy, like cigarettes and alcohol, was an addiction and a deadly sin. It was even worse than MSG.

“And now, if you’re not too hungry,” Jonas was saying, “I think I should take a bit of time and buy a few things for myself as well, at the men’s store across the way. Both of us certainly have a luggage problem if our plane never took off. I do have toiletries and all of the basics--I assume you have those, also? I like the cologne you’re wearing... do you need more? I wonder-- do you have your jewelry with you? Look at that magnificent pair of earrings. They would be a perfect match for the sweater and slack outfit, don’t you think? We’ll take those earrings, too. Am I going too fast for you?”

“You mean you could go even faster?” stammered Gissalayne as he held up one of the earrings against her cheek.

“Ahh, your mind is reeling,” Jonas grinned pleasantly. “And no wonder. You’ve got lots of questions. First of all, is this real or some kind of joke? Who am I, and why am I being so generous? Surely someone told you a long time ago there are no free lunches. What’s the trade-off? What do I want from you? Don’t worry,” Jonas squeezed her hand, “one doesn’t have to be psychic to see all those questions floating around in that beautiful head of yours! That’s okay, you have a right to wonder,

and surely you don't want to be associated with some mad hat lunatic ET, do you?" he chuckled, pulling open the large glass door to Lezat Bouchée hotel dining room and following Gissalayne her inside. "We have much to talk about, and even more to think and feel and do about. It will probably take us several years to cover everything--years in Earth time, that is."

Gissalayne's head was spinning. She was also starved, for both food and sex. What would it be like to have sex with this incredible man? And what if it weren't just sex, but *love*? Other issues were also cloudy, such as: what was the real attraction? The way he sprinkled her with compliments and openly admired her? The gifts? Unlimited money? Jonas was right. Questions were spinning so fast she felt dizzy. She'd never heard anyone make a bald statement such as the one Jonas had just made, about unlimited resources. And furthermore, he had a full head of hair. Beautiful curly blond hair. And such expensive taste. In less than ten minutes, Jonas had picked out exactly the shirt, sweater and pair of slacks that she would have chosen for him if her check book would have allowed.

Is the money part of the honey, wondered Gissalayne, following the waitress to a table by the window, overlooking the city. Lit

up like a Christmas tree, Seattle looked different, bearing no resemblance to dumpy provincial Issaquah, although now she began to wonder if even Issaquah would look different from a high rise 5-star hotel restaurant, seated opposite a wealthy romantic being—leave the ET part for later--who appeared to be fatally attracted to her. Gissalayne also felt fatal and magnetic, like she was covered with thousands of iron filings all shouting *Yes!* Money represented success and power, but wasn't it true that many people were both successful and powerful without it? *Name One*, demanded Left Brain Logical.

"What is money anyway, but a passport to pleasure?" asked Jonas, studying the wine list. "Let's see. We want a Chablis, maybe, with lobster? I suppose one can equate it with Power and Success."

God, she was beautiful. Jonas looked up from the menu. *If she only knew about her inner radiance, and that mind of hers... so precious... always wondering and asking questions... so human. Humanly trained at all those grim universities.*

"In our society, money is everything," answered Gissalayne. "It can buy everything from friendship to position."

“Ahh, but it can’t buy love, can it? And it can’t take away pain, or serve as a substitute for loneliness. It can’t create beautiful music, poetry, paintings, screenplays...”

Gissalayne’s heart thumped.

Jonas reached for her hand, holding it between his palms. “This isn’t a very good way to start off the evening. We’re getting philosophical way too early in our relationship. Forgive me.”

“But there is no start or finish, wouldn’t you agree?”

Gissalayne heard herself say, plucking a celery stick from the dish of *hors d’oeuvres* and stroking it between her fingers. “I’ve already accepted the fact that you know everything about me, and that you can read my mind. I find that a bit scary, but after all, I’m open for new experiences. As I said, I’ve never met an ET before. Are all of you like this?”

Now it was Jonas’ turn to grin. She really was adorable, and so innocent. “What makes you think you’re not an ET too? Maybe we all are. Who’s to say?”

“Well, let’s put it this way,” Gissalayne sighed, curling her tongue around the celery stick before clamping it between her teeth and taking a loud crunchy bite, “you seem to be more ET than most. For all I know, in the next instant you’ll start to peel

off your human skin to reveal a lizardy looking reptilian, or worse yet, all the innards of a computer. No blood, muscles, veins and arteries, just wires bells and whistles. Or maybe you're one of the latest versions that doesn't need all the paraphernalia."

"Ah, yes, too much sci fi and propaganda." Now it was Jonas' turn to sigh. He shook his head, eyeing her with amusement. "Latest version. 'Time' again. It seems to be the only measurement earthlings have, besides the tape measure for their waists and penises, and stock market tickertapes that record virtual bank account balances. Which is all a game, as you may or may not know." Jonas dipped his knife into the *pâté* and spread it evenly over a cracker. "Tell me something, Gissalayne, my love, love of my life as you always have been-- what would happen if time, space and money were non-existent? How would you like to write a novel about that, with the two of us as the main characters?"

Gissalayne felt a buzz in her head. *My love? Love of my life? Novel?* "I've never written a novel, Jonas. And philosophers have written about these things, lectured about them, theorized about them, ever since..."

"...the beginning of time," finished Jonas with a chuckle.

"And that's the whole point. Back to 'time' again. Sartre finished it off by writing about nothingness, and just by writing about it, he brought it into existence. So why can't we start there, or, er, not *start*... or even do--but just *be*?"

"But there *is* a biological clock... isn't there?" countered Gissalayne. "At least for humans--earthlings, who are here, right now. Whatever 'now' is."

"And that's the second point I want to make." Jonas closed his eyes, chewing slowly. "Mmmm, good *pate*," he remarked as soon as he'd swallowed and cleared his palate. "Excellent, in fact. For some reason, people on the earth plane have created rules and regulations that they think they should live by. And guess what? That's exactly what happens. The rules come into existence, proving nothing more than the fact that someone has created that reality."

"And what if they didn't?"

Jonas shrugged. "Who's to say? Is it really important?"

"In other words," Gissalayne grinned, enjoying this more than she cared to admit, "this conversation is or is not occurring. This meeting is or is not occurring. It is not really important."

"It is *very important*." Jonas leaned forward, eyeing her intently. All trace of humor had vanished from his expression, causing Gissalayne's stomach to do a flip-flop. "Tell me, Gissalayne, what would you like to have more than anything else?"

Jonas watched the shock wave, a bolt of lightning shoot through the beautiful woman seated opposite. She was clearly confused and even more enticing in her state of panic. "You know those books that appear all the time on the best seller lists and in the store windows and on the Internet that ask all those deeply penetrating questions. Deeper and deeper they penetrate."

"Yes?" Gissalayne felt herself squirming. Where was he going with this?

"Here's another question: what would you like to do more than anything else?"

"Why, uh, help match--help people--match people I'm a matchmaker, for jobs, 'We give you the rod, you hook the fish' Hook, Line & Sinker, LLC I write their résumés, contact potential employers I also play the guitar and dance and I make hand puppets and I cook excellent minestrone soup and lasagna and--"
" She gulped for breath.

"What I meant was, what is it you really *want* to do?"

Jonas picked up the menu, leaned back and squinted at her.

"Have babies, I suppose."

"Well, yes, of course..."

And a husband. Babies bottles and the usual poop stuff, yelling and screaming all night, and then the birthday and Halloween parties, music lessons, soccer practice, car pooling, Sunday School birthday parties... is that it? Is that what you want? Did you ever consider, for example, running for U.S. President?"

To Jonas' amazement, Gissalayne didn't even giggle, as if she thought his suggestion was ridiculous. "I'd have to have a platform, of course," she answered.

Just then, a man in a U.S. Army uniform approached their table, pointing a gun at them.

"Excuse me, are you Gissalayne Chondroitin?" The man's mustache twitched to the left as his right shoulder twitched to the right. A dark cloud seemed to circle his head. Gissalayne froze inside.

"Yes, I am."

"Would you mind stepping outside with us? Excuse me sir."

"But--? Why?" faltered Gissalayne. "I'm sorry, I don't understand, I—"

"That's an order, ma'am." A second man in uniform yanked Gissalayne away from the table. He pulled her arms behind her back and snapped on a pair of handcuffs.

At once the restaurant was cleared out and a third man in uniform weaseled through the door with a spool of yellow ribbon that he tied onto the door handles. As the two armed officers pushed Gissalayne toward the Ladies' Room, she tried to twist around for a final glimpse of Jonas but a large hand blocked her view.

"Strip!" commanded the shortest of the two men, closing the door of the Ladies' Room behind them.

"Excuse me?" gasped Gissalayne.

"You heard me. Take off your clothes."

Two medics with a gurney banged through the door, hoisted her onto their shoulders and laid her out flat. They then proceeded to cut away her Levi's, bra and panties and strapped her to the table naked.

"Careful, Walt," warned one of the medics. "You don't want the fuckin' dame to spit in your face. Spread her legs and hold her down. Put this in her mouth."

"Regina, you are not playing fair." Jonas was furious.

"I'm sorry, Jonas, the connection is poor. Is there a problem?" Sweetly Regina's voice sailed into Jonas' telepath.

"Did you say something about playing fair? Did you or did you not sign a contract with Diebleed & Cuthrot to **support our mutual goal of delivering a U-LIP to a threatened female species? As you know, we discussed at length that these underdeveloped females have two goals in life: to find a man and raise a family.**"

"Ah, but they may have a third goal, Regina," interrupted Jonas, who was now shrieking into his inner ear. "They may require that man of their choice to be faithful... to them alone."

"That will never happen!" Regina was shocked at her words that seemed to just slip out of nowhere. She was so angry—*why?!*

"I'm beginning to believe that the problem may be more male than female then," mused Jonas. "Possibly it is the man who needs more focus, more, er—passion for one of these beautiful creatures rather than acting like a grasshopper or a bumble bee, pollinating flower after flower..."

“You are on assignment, Jonas Foreplay. Have you forgotten?”

“Yes, Regina, I mean no, I mean, yes, Gissalayne Chondroitin is my assignment, and—”

“She is about to run for President of the United States or else,” snapped Regina.

The “or else” was an interesting threat. Jonas pondered this for a moment as he rolled over and eyed the beautiful violet-eyed angel sleeping soundly next to him. She stirred, whispered something that sounded like “now” and then drifted off once again.

Gissalayne opened her eyes. The room was dark and quiet and she was alone. For a moment she didn’t have a clue where she was, and then, as it all came back... the airport waiting area, Jonas, the hotel, shopping, the restaurant... how confusing, how strange. Her hands slid over her naked body, breasts, hips, belly button, thighs... In the dimness of the room she made out her closed suitcase on the floor next to a television.

It was apparently a hotel room, several stories up, she discovered, pulling herself out of bed and padding over to the window. She parted the drapes and peered out at the top of an

air conditioning generator and cars in the parking lot far below. Then she turned on the TV, flipping to CNN.

On the screen was the interior of a restaurant that looked familiar. It was cordoned off with yellow ribbons.

"... possible bomb," the male newscaster was saying, "that had been secured in her vaginal tract. Fortunately, the jet flight, that was traveling from Seattle to Columbus, Ohio, was cancelled, and the woman who at this time remains unidentified, was apprehended at the Seattle SeaTac Wintergarden Hotel Lezat Bouchée restaurant."

Gissalayne shifted in the hard plastic waiting room seat. Her rear end was getting sore. God, she was bored. Like a bad hangover, the separation from Harold still clung to every part of her being. Sticky, sweaty and sweet. Sweeter than semen, more like cotton candy.

Suddenly she was overcome by sweet and painful remorse that caused her stomach to do a flip-flop and left her feeling somewhat air-brained. Why oh why had she wasted six months of her good time...?

She gazed up at the TV screen several yards away, tilted high over the row of phone booths. "...white Caucasian with

chestnut-colored hair and deep blue eyes, more violet than blue, wearing Calvin Klein jeans and a tweed blazer was apprehended at the Seattle SeaTac airport..." droned a red-haired female manikin.

Gissalayne bolted up in her seat and stared at the photo of the young man now flashing on the screen. Her skin started to prickle and she broke out into a cold sweat. Why did he look so familiar? *Apprehended for what?*

"... was carrying a weapon that for some reason managed to slip by security," the red-haired manikin was saying.

The screen went blank.

"May I have your attention," blared a voice over the loud speaker. "Would everyone please take a seat even if you are already seated. We want no woman, man or child to be left behind. Make sure your seat belts are fastened and check your neighbor's air bags behind and in front of you. We are about to take off and we have just been informed that there seems to be considerable turbulence in the somnambulist hemisphere. This means we can expect an intermittently rough and rocky ride. Please note that we are now in Red Alert."

"Excuse me, is this seat taken?" A large perspiring elderly woman with long gray braids plopped down in her lap.

"Yes, yes, it is," retorted Gissalayne. "I'm sitting here. It is definitely occupied."

"And who are you, my dear? Do I know you? Did we meet in the last lifetime? Are you back again already?" The woman tossed her braids over her shoulder. Her breath smelled of garlic. "No, I don't think so, because I would have recognized you. Don't you have any plans? Any goals? Your head is empty. Can't you even turn on the TV and look for something interesting to do, instead of just sitting there?"

"Here," corrected Gissalayne. "Sitting here. And this seat is taken. **Can't you see?**" she shouted.

"... That's all right, Armanda, you can get up. We've got her." Two uniformed men hoisted the woman off Gissalayne's lap and whipped out a pair of handcuffs. Before Gissalayne knew what was happening, her hands were bound behind her back and she was being marched into a brightly lit room.

So I created all this, dammit!! Gissalayne turned off the TV, threw down the remote control and headed for the bathroom. *This is my reality, my own fucking reality!*

"Surprise, darling!" Jonas Foreplay slid open the sliding glass doors of the shower.

"What you are looking for," crooned Jonas, fondling her breasts as he turned toward her in the bed, "is exactly this moment, forever. This fucking pulsing single already passing passed past pissing-perfect pluperfect moment that you are determined to make last into eternity. And let me tell you something, let me tell you, Gissalayne, before you try to tell me, let me tell you... *you can do it!* You really can! You just have to concentrate on the little glass ball that I am now going to wave before your eyes. Let your eyes follow it, back and forth, back and forth...."

"Ouch! Let me go!"

"Spread your legs wider, Miss. This will just take a minute."

"Biochemical weapons," droned the red-haired manikin, "that can be found in any orifice of any human body if you just look long and hard enough."

12

Rochester, New York

"Gissalayne, are you sure you're feeling all right?" Maggie eyed her friend anxiously. "You look pale."

"It's just a fever, Maggie. Nothing really," Gissalayne reassured her, placing the back of her hand against her burning cheek. "It has something to do with goals, I think."

"Goals? Like what? Maggie asked suspiciously. "Like winning the lottery? Getting married and having kids?"

Gissalayne absently fondled a toy fire engine parked on the kitchen table next to her coffee mug. "I think when I grow up I want to be a fireman," she mused. "It's so heroic. All those hoses. They're so... so..."

"Gissalayne, be serious. What went wrong? What was wrong with Harold? Too big? Too small? Too soon? Not soon enough?"

"Who?" Gissalayne smiled dreamily. "Oh, Harold. Yes. Yes, I need to do something big in life. Something no one else has ever done before except maybe Mother Theresa."

"Or Buddha," Maggie rolled her eyes.

"Maggie, I just can't explain it, it's just... just... I think I've had a Visitation."

"A what? Steven, take your finger out of your sister's ear!" Maggie pulled Steven and Maria apart and settled one of them on her knee. "You had a *what?*"

"I'm not the same, Maggie." Gissalayne twisted the large opal ring on her wedding finger. "I didn't have this ring before yesterday, and before yesterday I had bare fingers and a bare life. Naked. Barren. And furthermore, I think I'm about to run for U.S. President."

"Gissalayne, you're not making sense. What do you mean, 'Visitation'? You mean an Abduction? An ET ABDUCTION? Or a Visitation from the President of the United States? Oh God, Gissalayne, did you just take a... test? Sugar, leave Mommy and Aunt Gissalayne alone, go play, we need to talk without being interrupted."

Maggie rolled two-year-old Maria off her lap and leaned forward, eyeing Gissalayne as if she had just swallowed a live

frog. "I'm not sure I understand, Gissalayne. Did you meet someone else after Harold, I mean between then and now? Did you meet the President? And did he give you that ring?"

"I don't know," Gissalayne smiled dreamily. "I honestly don't know anything except what I want."

"And what could that be?" grinned Jonas, pulling back the bedcovers to reveal the two/three of them naked.

"This story started out sane," Gissalayne sighed, gazing mournfully at her laptop monitor as if it were a psychiatrist. "It was intended to be a simple case of wrong time wrong place. No other agendas. And suddenly I'm about to become a candidate for the U.S. President."

"But don't you understand, my dear, that we are in the midst of a terrible war?" the computer talked back from one of the chat rooms, leading her to several of the emails from alternative news sites where the Real Story was coming forth about the actual numbers of American soldiers killed and wounded in Iraq... about the horrible torture the U.S. had inflicted on its so-called "enemies"—innocent women and

children... stories that were causing people all over the world to hate Americans even more than before.

“When haven’t we been in the midst of a terrible war?” Gissalayne shouted back. “War has become our way of life, our backbone, our spine, our major means of support, our—”

“Do you know who you’re talking to?”

“Whom,” corrected Gissalayne. “To whom.” It would be great if some of these Internet reporters could take a course in English usage. No one seemed to care anymore about such trifles as objects of prepositions or even object themselves. “No. No I don’t. Does it matter? Does it matter how many thousands of people are killed every day, cities bombed, cars and buses blown up, people tortured, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes... What’s that got to do with me running for U.S. President?”

“Everything. It has everything to do with you,” continued the computer voice. “You ARE the earthquake, the hurricane, the woman whose arms and legs get blown off, or whose baby dies in her arms from a hand grenade. You ARE the people whose houses are bulldozed, the soldiers whose plane gets shot down, the whole damn brigade that gets captured by the enemy. *You are all of those, Gissalayne. You are even the woman at the*

ticket counter where you purchased your airline ticket or checked in for that flight you took today."

"Today? What day is it, for God's sake? Tell me I'm also Harold Boxhart and I'll really freak out," shrieked Gissalayne.

"Unity," the computer voice continued. "Your goal is to establish balance and harmony. It is the goal for all of humanity to have compassion for one another. As President, your mission is to deliver the message that *we are all one*. There is a power group that wants to destroy Planet Earth and all of its inhabitants except for a Select Remnant that will be secured in their underground bunkers. For some reason they don't understand they cannot escape from themselves. You have a responsibility, Gissalayne, to send them a wakeup call. To let them know they are as doomed as everyone else. Essentially that means..."

"Essentially that means I'm calling myself an asshole if I make a judgment call on that asshole group that wants to destroy the planet," interrupted Gissalayne. "Or it means that none of us is taking a stand. We're just letting these freaking things happen while we bumble through our mundane nine-to-five existences. Is that what all of this supposed to be about?"

Are you trying to convince me to choose something to do in life besides being a baby machine or corporate roboton? Exactly what do you have in mind? What is my purpose, goddammit?"

"What is my purpose, goddammit?" exploded Gissalayne's voice over the loudspeaker.

"What is my purpose?" echoed the housekeeper at the Saccharine Suites on Long Island. "What is my purpose?" queried the janitor at Saint Nicolas High School in Juneau, Alaska.

"Der Zweck?" shouted Adolf Hitler from his grave.

"Ah, extáze," chuckled an 18th century virtuoso Austrian pianist, popping a Mozart kugel into his mouth and flipping up his tuxedo tails as he seated himself at the piano and launched into *Elvira Madigan*.

"Jonas, why am I here? Would you please tell me?"

"Freedom growth and joy, freedom growth and joy," cackled Maggie's parrot from the other room.

"We're all out of eggs, except for one that's cracked. You can't hard boil an egg that's cracked." Maggie shrugged, holding up the egg carton as Exhibit A.

"Well why don't you un-crack it then?" exploded Gissalayne. "That's what I don't understand. The lack of creative out-of-the-box thinking in this country is downright **Down Right**. Why doesn't someone come up with an original solution?"

"In spite of what they try to tell you, take it from me: each of us is made in our own image," confided the convenience store clerk, returning Gissalayne's change. "Did you want a lottery ticket too?"

"No, I've no time for games," retorted Gissalayne. "I have an appointment. I'm going to be late for the Presidency." As she pushed open the door and headed toward her car, she wondered where she was supposed to be going.

"So what is it about freedom that you like most?" inquired the sales clerk at Nerdstrom's.

"Madness," shouted Gissalayne, shoving all the dresses on the rack to the left, then shoving them back again to the right. "The opportunity to go mad. To go around freaking mad like a lunatic and not give a shit what anyone thinks. Do you have any red lace underwire bras in size 32D?"

"I have a bachelor's degree in chemistry and I have sat for Donald Trump for six months," said the gorgeous 22-year-old perfectly proportioned leggy olive-skinned brunette seated before her at Hook, Line & Sinker, Inc.

"Have you ever tried modeling?" asked Gissalayne, looking up from the application form in front of her.

"Oh, could I?!" exclaimed Ms.... Ms... Gissalayne looked down at her résumé, searching for a last name. Dee. Suzanne Dee.

"Dee. Why not?" Gissalayne shrugged. "Who's to stop you, Suzie Dee?" Why didn't she tell her the truth, that she'd make more money selling her body to a pimp instead of to an advertising agency promoting mattresses or SUVs? Or suggest that she go to Japan and see how fast the mafia would snap her up? Complete package deal, with apartment, furs and diamonds... Actually, any mafia would do. *Mafia*... Was Jonas... is that what he...

The spider that now crawled up Gissalayne's spine felt like fear or a run in her pantyhose except that it was happening on her back instead of her leg. But Jonas wasn't real. He had disappeared, slipped through the cracks of another dimension... Where *was* he? "Jonas?" said Gissalayne absently aloud.

"Excuse me?" asked Ms. Dee.

"Modeling clay. I mean modeling academy," Gissalayne smiled sweetly at her client. "Perhaps you could get a scholarship, or at least a student loan. They have excellent online modeling schools, or you could enroll in a night program and work during the day..."

"But I couldn't pose nude," objected Ms. Dee. "That would be against my religion. And my daddy told me never to sleep with another man except him and my husband."

"What about your mother? I mean, not *sleeping* with her, of course, but how does she feel about your posing in the nude?" asked Gissalayne.

"What was that all about?" Elaine Dorfberger, the office manager, poked her head in the door. "What did you *tell* that poor girl that made her run sobbing out the door?"

"I told her to go fuck herself," muttered Gissalayne under her breath. Gissalayne smiled sweetly at Elaine. "I think maybe she was on drugs or something. Perhaps we should have better screening procedures before we conduct these interviews."

"I want you to know right up front, I am a professional killer," announced Rusty Thrustwiler, striding through the door. "I want to be hired by the best security agency in town."

"Did I see your résumé?" ventured Gissalayne. No killer was going to intimate her, not even a professional one. Was she not running for President of the-- "I don't see it anywhere on my desk, I don't seem to remember—"

"I don't have no fuckin' résumé," retorted Thrustwiler. "I don't need none of that shit. I am Rusty Thrustwiler and I'm in great demand."

"Then I don't understand why you came to us," Gissalayne stared at the bulge in his left front pocket. A gun, or...

"Honey, you're cute, real cute. You know somethin'? I'm a wanted man, you unnerstaand? **Have you been to the local post office lately? Whatta you gonna offer me?"**

"Let me see," Gissalayne swiveled sideways to check the computer monitor, typing briskly and keeping a close eye on Mr. Thrustwiler's left hand and his bulging left trouser pocket. "We don't usually deal with criminal placement, but maybe I can come up with something in the er security division."

"I'll give you exactly thirty seconds to find me work or I'll rip off your panties and show you who's boss."

"Ahhh, yes! I have the perfect position for you," Gissalayne declared triumphantly as the lump emerged in the form of a cell phone that looked more like a pistol. "The Pink

Lotus. It's a pick-up bar on Main Street, they're looking for a bouncer and a pimp and a drug dealer. I told them we'd screen three different employees, but I think you could do just fine for all three positions and make three times the money plus commissions on the side, the networking would be invaluable, don't forget to have your parking ticket stamped on the way out, and here's a tootsie pop." Gissalayne handed him a printout of the address, a cherry lollipop and dialed 911 as soon as he slammed the door shut.

"Hi Honey, another one?" Charlene Wu Mu from the Doldrum & Brooks precinct was cruising two blocks away.

"Right on," sighed Gissalayne. "He's on the way to the elevators."

Charlene stuffed the remainder of a jelly donut into her mouth, made a sharp U-turn and positioned herself directly below the 36-story building where the Hook, Line & Sinker offices were located. "We've got it," the officer reassured Gissalayne.

Gissalayne stood near the window, waiting for the killer to appear. Rusty Thrustwiler grinned up at her, gave her the bird, waved at Charlene Wu Mu's squad car and galloped down the street, Charlene in hot pursuit.

Jonas was on line 4. "Gissalayne, I've reserved a hotel resort in Fuji just for the two of us. Can you meet me there at 5 PM tomorrow evening?"

"The whole resort, Jonas? You reserved the whole resort?"

"Is that okay? Is it good enough for the next President of the United States, or do I need to reserve the one next door also?"

"Where is this headed?" Gissalayne asked the person in the mirror before closing the door of her apartment, suitcase neatly packed with bikinis, suntan lotion and straw hat.

"Make a plan," Maggie instructed the kids as they scrambled into the car. "We can only go to one zoo, one amusement park or one junk food place today, so what will it be?"

"I wanna hot dog," Michael piped up. "Without mustard."

"Maria, fasten your seat belt, Steven, stop teasing your sister! No more bubble gum for any of you. And STOP FIGHTING!"

"... at war again," said the anchorman in the mini-TV in the front seat. "It looks like this war will never be over," droned the spokesman on location. "The terms of the agreement are

unacceptable to all parties, and now there is a danger of another nuclear threat, according to the latest reports in..."

"I need somebody to kill," muttered Rusty Thrustwiler, stalking into a Burger King and casing the joint for possible victims. It was 2 AM and they were just closing up.

"We're just closing up," 16-year-old Jessica smiled sweetly from behind the counter.

"Oh no you're not," Rusty retorted.

Jessica tapped her cash register and a spray of tear gas arched in Rusty's direction. He tried to duck but it was too late.

"We need to declare martial law," announced five-year-old Johnny to his mother, turning away from the TV. "Things are getting out of hand."

"But we won't. I mean we can't. Not without a plan," protested his mother, laying aside her knitting and letting out a sigh as she patted Muffie the cocker spaniel's black head.

"So as the future President of the United States, have you made your list yet, of everything you need to do, prioritized of course, to save the planet from its current voyage toward self-destruction?" Jonas hugged her warmly, then held her at arm's

length. "You look more appetizing than ever! Did they ever find that anthrax in your vagina?"

"Not yet," Gissalayne smiled lovingly at Jonas. "I've reserved that pleasure for you."

"Good!" Jonas rubbed his hands together. "Have you been to Fiji before? Neither have I." He pulled out his Boysenberry cell phone and typed "Fiji" into the Horsemanure.com search engine. "Go get'em," he barked at the Boysenberry.

"Jonas, I had a dream. It was about a woman who calls herself the Oracle," Gissalayne snuggled into the curve of his body.

"Not the Oracle of that popular film series? You're not recapitulating or regurgitating America's popular culture?" Jonas teased her left nipple with his tongue.

"It has more to do with 'O'," mused Gissalayne. "'O' like in 'orgasm'."

"Now?" murmured Jonas.

"Jonas, do you believe in the Hundredth Monkey Principle?"

They were lounging in cushiony beach chairs on the sand, watching the sun set over the ocean. Life couldn't be more perfect, thought Gissalayne dreamily gazing at Jonas' perfect body and perfect cock sleeping blissfully inside his swim trunks.

"You mean the sweet potato story about Critical Mass? If enough people pray or meditate at the same time, the Iraqi war will stop, or the Israeli's will stop terrorizing the Palestinians?"

"If enough people acknowledge that orgasm is the great pleasure on the planet and if they decide to make a commitment to having more orgasms more often, this world would be a different place," Gissalayne continued.

"But this world is always a different place, every minute we're alive... especially since *we* found each other again," Jonas smiled, stroking her hand.

"No, I mean *different* different," Gissalayne insisted. We can say all these terrible things that are happening right now... all the wars, poverty, disease, earthquakes, tornadoes, that these things didn't happen, and try to ignore them, but where will it get us, especially when there's evidence? And today, how long can anyone hide evidence?"

"Yes, it is a planetary problem, or situation. And yes, of course we make everything happen. We made *us* happen... and yet, ants get stepped on. Some insects eat others. Cats eat birds... what if all of this human war and suffering is a hologram, created by the best of Hollywood's artists? What do you plan to do about it? Travel to all these depraved enslaved countries,

freshly coiffured and cosmetised in designer outfits, and preach about the importance of 'O'? Your captive audience will be dressed in rags and loin cloths, their dirty hair hanging shoulder length or braided to keep it out of their eyes, their wrinkled faces and beady tired eyes peering curiously at you as you talk glowingly of the joys of sex and multiple orgasms... Maybe you'll pass out candy bars and gum to people who haven't had a decent meal in months or years..."

"Jonas, what *should* I do? We should *we* do? What CAN we do?"

Gissalayne opened her eyes and gazed at the painting on the wall in front of her, a Klimpt nude. It wasn't there before she'd fallen asleep. But where was she? Wasn't this her bedroom in Rochester, New York? Wasn't that where she was? Or was it Fuji? Or Harold's waterbed? Gissalayne shuddered.

The phone was ringing. It was Maggie.

"Gissalayne, I need some help. The riots have begun, they said they were going to start soon, but I hadn't expected them today, don't look out the window, they're tearing up streets and looting stores... everyone is looking for it."

"Looking for what, Maggie? What are they looking for?"

"The Plan!" wailed Maggie. "It's terrible. They're all saying everyone needs a Plan in order to get out of here. But where the fuck would we go? You know better than anyone else that I've never had a Plan. I never had time to make one. I met Francis, I got knocked up and I've been wiping runny noses and changing diapers ever since. You know I've never dreamed, Gissalayne, I was afraid to. Dreams are for dreamers, people with time; and Lord knows, Francis doesn't have the brains to come up with anything that even *resembles* a Plan. He's just a jock, I've always known that and I accepted it, dammit, I accepted it, I accepted *him*, just as he was, because I had to... and now look what's happening! Honestly, Gissalayne, I don't know where to start looking! I figured if anyone would know where to find one, it would be you. Do you happen to have a spare one that you wouldn't mind—"

"Maggie, what the *fuck* are you talking about?"

"Gissalayne, please, I beg of you--look out the window, wherever you are... It's happening everywhere!"

Gissalayne hopped out of bed and peered through the drapes of the hotel window over the top of the air conditioning generator. Maggie was right. A huge crowd had gathered in the parking lot and many of the people were carrying signs. Some

had clubs and rifles and others were dressed in robes and wearing hoods and masks. Still others were almost naked (Gissalayne shivered; it was well below freezing out there) and their bodies and faces were painted with strange symbols.

“Everyone who doesn’t have a Plan is going to be rounded up and arrested and sent to a gulag,” sobbed Maggie on speaker phone. “Men, women and children... all of us, not just Muslims and Mexicans!”

Gissalayne shook her head, watching the size of the crowd spill over from the sidewalks onto the streets. Now they were blocking traffic.

“‘Conscious!’” sobbed Maggie. That’s the other word They used. ‘Conscious.’ Conscious Thoughts! Francis and I haven’t had a single Conscious Thought, ever... has anyone? I mean, maybe one time people were conscious, maybe the aborigines or the Native Americans, but certainly no one I know in my lifetime or even my parents’ lifetime, for that matter. Thank God they’re dead so they don’t have to go through this! Oh, what am I saying? I’m wishing I was dead myself, and I really didn’t mean to say that, either, I don’t know what I mean... We need Kool Aid and Froot Loops and we’re all out of Jiffy Whip... we don’t have enough toilet paper to last longer than a week!” Maggie’s’ voice

faded into the rising din outside that was now penetrating even the thick layers of hotel window glass.

Gissalayne turned on the TV and watched large tanks roll down Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. It was a regular Macy's parade, with the National Guard, police and military in full regalia, prancing horses, motorcades... the only difference was that all the uniformed participants were wearing gasmasks and body shields and the tanks were not World War I relics hauled out of a museum.

Quickly the military worked the crowds with laser guns and tear gas. The sky outside and on the TV screen was suddenly blanketed with the arrival of large triangular black aircraft.

Where was Jonas? Surely Jonas would know what to do about all this!

"Jonas?" Her voice echoed into the emptiness.

No response.

"Jonas?"

Maybe the Great One could help.

Gissalayne crawled beneath the covers, twisting a corner of the blanket into a peak and sniffing it, pretending it was mommy's nipple, the way she used to when she was a little girl.

A long time ago, began the Great One, when people lived to be hundreds upon hundreds of years old, they were considered ancient even when they were youngsters. But that didn't concern anyone because they had the one great gift on the planet that meant more to them than anything else. And that gift was Consciousness. In those days people fondly referred to it as "Con."

Gissalayne sniffed pleurably at the twisted piece of blanket and tried to keep from playing with herself as the Great One continued.

Since these people lived for so long, it really didn't matter what they thought, or when they thought it. In fact, they were so self-conscious about being conscious they were conscious, consciousness was almost a detriment. Every act, every thought, every emotion was a conscious one. Finally, it became so difficult to keep track of all this consciousness, they decided to make a plan or a game. A "Con game," they called it. They decided to pool all their extra Con and put it into a special holding place, like a bank or a warehouse.

The problem was, which part of their Con should they deposit in the bank, and how much of it? Rather than try to figure that out, it seemed much easier to put all of it there, like a

money management account, so they could just draw out what they needed when they needed it.

The Great One let out a sigh. And that's exactly what they did. But the problem was, once they had delivered all their Con to the House of Consciousness or Mental Asylum as it came to be called, they had literally emptied themselves of their own consciousness. And because they were no longer conscious, they had no way of finding where all their Con had been stored. They literally lost their minds.

"Great One, all of this is bullshit." Gissalayne released the blanket corner and pulled her fingers out of her vagina.

Not all of it, Gissalayne, retorted the Great One. Please be patient with me. There's more to this story than meets the I-AM. In fact, this issue of con-consciousness has been the greatest conspiracy in the history of Earthly humankind. Notice the confusion between con game, con-consciousness and con-tamination. The common people had to be con-vinced it was important to give up all forms of con-consciousness and in order to do that they had to be con-ditioned. They had to be con-vinced it was harming them and their offspring.

With the help of the media, the Anti-Con Cabal (ACC) created an impressive propaganda campaign. For every ounce of

Con that was turned in, people received food stamps, pharmacy discounts, movie passes, 2-for-1 17-inch pizzas.... If the ACC controllers could capture all the Con on the planet by making it illegal to have it in their possession, then they could issue fake or fiat Con-consciousness. Fake Con of course had no intrinsic value, since it would never be redeemed by the ACC.

By forcing the mentally challenged or spaced-out losers to borrow this fiat Con-consciousness at a high interest rate, the takeover would be complete.

The Great One paused. *You can well imagine it wasn't long after that people started to realize fake Consciousness served no other purpose than to buy products from the ACC Catalog, shipping extra, of course. And if they couldn't afford these items, that is, if they didn't have enough ACC purchasing power, they were given ACC Credit Cards, which was another method of convincing the people to borrow more fiat Consciousness, and of course at a high interest rate...*

"Great One, I see now where you're going with this! We need to put a stop to it," Gissalayne interrupted. "Someone has to do something about this! It's time we took back our consciousness!"

*Yes, dearie, but first we have to find out where the ACC
Con-trollers have hidden it. Right?*

13

Happy New?

Gissalayne's clicked on a hyperlink on the home page of the Dredge Report to the *This is London* website and a story about an Australian woman who tried to smuggle a dozen tropical fish in her trousers worn underneath a skirt, from Singapore to her home in Melbourne. The flip-flapping sound as she went through customs gave her away.

In the same Dredge Report, a 19-year-old teenage boy slit open his 17-year-old pregnant girlfriend's stomach in order to destroy their unborn twins because they couldn't agree on what to name them.

These two stories were only two of thousands of similar incidents proving people had given away their consciousness, concluded Gissalayne. They were trying to drive their vehicles on an empty tank. For the first time Gissalayne realized how serious the problem was, and for the first time in a year she thought

about Harold. What was his last name, that shmuck from Seattle? Harold *Boxhart*.

Gissalayne drew a circle, placed a C in the center and slashed a diagonal line through it.

On the left side of her chest below her breasts, she felt a slight tug. It wasn't Harold's fault that he was addicted to firewalking and dot.com matchmaking bureaus. He was a typical case of Circle C mind control. Poor Harold. *Poor Harold????!!!* *Look in the mirror, my dear!* Who was she to judge? It wasn't so long ago when she'd spent several hours weekly herself, licking up sugarcone.com.

"Gissalayne, I need to see you." Jonas breathed heavily into the speaker phone.

"Where are you?"

"In jail, on Broadway and Main."

"Where? Which city? What are you doing in jail?"

"I don't know which city," Jonas moaned. "They won't tell me."

"So how can I—"

"Just tune in. Tune in and you'll know where to purchase your e-ticket."

Gissalayne tossed and turned, turned and tossed; tried sleeping horizontal instead of vertical, drank more water, peed two more times, tried to get another fast orgasm with her larger and more powerful dildo. It was useless; she couldn't sleep. And no wonder. She was awake. Conscious. *She was conscious!*

So that's it! Consciousness is a state of being not only awake, but aware under the influence of insomnia. Like a 911 Twin Towers implosion. Something from within. Consciousness is a major cataclysmic "thing" similar to a bomb or missile, boring into the virtual cranium of the mind...

Gissalayne sat up in bed. What the hell was a "virtual cranium of the mind"? *And how did she really know she was conscious?* Wasn't she, like Harold, a product of the Circle C Cabal?

Suddenly the absurdity of it all was starting to make sense. Above all else, she realized, it was important to set priorities. First, she had to rescue Jonas so they could start to search for the stockpile of hidden Con. Excitedly Gissalayne pieced together all the puzzle parts the way she used to put together thousand-piece jigsaw puzzles when she was a little girl. As soon all the hidden consciousness had been recovered, by the very nature of what that consciousness was, she was now

certain the large cache of stolen Plans would also turn up. These Plans would save the world from being destroyed.

The public had been duped; stolen from, lied to and slowly dumbed down by a mind-controlling media collaborating with the Circle C Cabal to take over every last vestige of human brain power.

It was never too late. They had to fight back. No wonder most people were flopping and floundering on their brain decks like a pack of starved seals at Sea World.

Something had to be done. But what? How?

Then suddenly Gissalayne had a hot flash and “the light dawned.” How could she be aware of all this unless she herself were conscious? Unless somehow she had escaped having her Circle C confiscated? Or... unless Jonas Foreplay had been sent to her as an infusion, or—er—as her wake-up call. And if that were so, would it not be her responsibility, her mission, to find out where all that consciousness had been buried? It was a recovery mission! While helping other recover their consciousness, she would discover *her own Plan!* Was this not part of the holographic universe, as Jonas had so patiently tried to explain to her? Jonas—Jason--Just a letter scramble away from the Golden Fleece! Why had it taken her so long to figure out?

Blond above and Blond below...Quickly she showered and dressed and headed out to the parking garage.

"Conscious Plan, Conscious Plan, "her mind hummed excitedly as she turned the key in the ignition.

Where did Jonas say he was? Broadway and--? He didn't. So, where on earth was she headed? "Tune in," he'd said. She flipped on the radio. Only country music, evangelical preachers, talk shows and rap. This was bound to be exciting. There was a code here that she had to figure out, just like a DaVinci Code or pirates' map that would lead to the buried treasure or the Ark of the Covenant (God forbid)! The Story that was buried in the basement of her consciousness was deeper and more important than anything she'd ever encountered before... in fact, it was so deep and so thrillingly delicious, it might even lead to a best-seller...

At this stage of her mental masturbation, which was probably what this process could be called, she decided, it seemed logical to speculate that a huge stash of missing consciousness must have been carefully concealed in one of the many underground cities built over the past hundred years... and probably heavily coated with many different forms of astral

shellac to protect it from being detected by even the most sophisticated mental detectors.

Certainly she didn't need another academic degree to accomplish her mission or find Jonas, so there was no point in heading toward any of the area universities to inquire about admissions procedures, scholarships, etc. But some training *did* seem to be in order. After all, she had enough common sense even though most of it had been knocked out of her by academia, to know one cannot just embark on a Plan involving map-finding work without having some advanced techniques or skills. Also, it seemed highly unlikely that *all* the consciousness on the planet had been stolen. All her life she'd known that absolutes could only be relative. Surely some consciousness remnants had been stashed away in Swiss bank vaults with secret combinations, or buried deep in the sands of several of the many offshore getaways.

Suddenly Gissalayne had another hot flash. *EBay!* Why hadn't she thought of it before? Surely someone would be auctioning off some consciousness on EBay without even knowing how valuable it was. After all, they auctioned off everything else there, did they not? Gissalayne turned off the ignition and dashed across the parking garage toward her

apartment. Quickly unlocking the door, she raced to her office where her PC was already booted up and waiting. Suddenly she wondered if she'd remembered to remove the car key from the ignition. But then, she concluded, she must have, because her car keys were on the same chain as her apartment key. She would not be sitting here at her computer, unless...

14

Curtain Going Up!

As soon as the country went into red alert, Regina telepathed Jonas Foreplay. "Honey, how's it going with Gissalayne? I haven't heard from you since you left Seattle."

("Honey?" Regina was calling him "Honey"?) "I haven't left, Regina. I'm right here where I was before." Jonas rolled over in bed and stroked both of Gissalayne's left cheeks.

"At the Wintergarden?"

"At the Wintergarden. Gissalayne is right here beside me. Gissalayne, do you want to say hello to Regina Diebleed, the President of Diebleed &--?"

"The streets are filled with blood, Jonas. Have you looked out the window?"

"No not recently, Regina. What do you mean, 'blood'?"

"It's a revolution! We didn't make it in time, we didn't get enough seeding and breeding done before They started the Roundup!"

Gissalayne sat up in bed, pulling the comforter over her breasts just high enough to leave her cleavage still showing. "Jonas, what's going on? What's all that noise outside? Who's Regina Diebleed?"

BLAM!! BLAM-BLAM! A loud noise followed by flashes of light... then more **BLAM!! BLAM-BLAM!** "Jonas, those sound like gun shots!!" Gissalayne ran to the window. "My God!" she gasped. "This must be an illusion!"

"It is not enough to counter war and drugs and poverty and oil prices by just saying no. We have to have a Positive Conscious Plan that stands on its own, like a two-legged mammal," Gissalayne adjusted the mini-mike on her collar bone. She was getting used to the TV cameras and all the hairdressing airbrushing and primping before each telecast. "But the problem is, no one knows what Positive Conscious Goals looks like, we have been so long without them," she continued. "For so many centuries, almost since the beginning of civilization on this planet, we have been in a war economy, focused on fighting The Enemy in order to pay our bills by manufacturing weapons and other military equipment. We have not stopped to consider who that Enema-Enemy really is, because it doesn't really matter, as

long as there's Opposition we can gear up to fight against, just as it doesn't really matter if there's a way out of all of this, without that way out being a way in."

Gissalayne smiled disarmingly. "Now, that may not make a lot of sense to you, but let me tell you a secret: it's not supposed to. By now it should be apparent to some of you that nothing makes sense anymore. We are living in a senseless universe of fractured, distorted compartmentalized dis- and mis-information." *Cheering, people throwing balloons toward the ceiling, much shouting and whistling.*

Gissalayne turned away from the window. "What's going on, Jonas?"

"It sounds like a revolution." Jonas sat up, naked and hard. "Gissalayne, sweetheart, we have to make love, not war."

"I know." Gissalayne stared hungrily at his extended organ. If only she had a ruler.

"There's nothing to prove anymore," Jonas murmured. "*You* know that and *I* know that."

"Yes, Jonas, so what's our next step?" Gissalayne curled up next to him, stroking. "Did you call room service for some

champagne? I think we've come to the end of the world, at least this world, so it's time to celebrate."

"Regina, you are being too hard on her and hard on me. Gissalayne has only skipped one period."

Regina paced the palace floor, pencil between her newly straightened teeth that would have caused the dentist to have a fit of apoplexy. ("Do NOT bite on those front teeth, Regina! And be careful of peach pits!!")

"Jonas, for God's sake what are you doing? Did you tell Gissalayne who you really are?" Regina glared angrily at him, her stomach churning wildly. What was causing this fatal attraction? *If only you would take me in your arms right now or just take me to bed...*

"Of course I told her, Regina. I am an architect. I'm building a monument to Fried Chicken. I didn't tell her it was going to be on Mars, but--"

Regina glared at him. "No, Jonas, I mean, the *real* mission. Where are we with all of this... ***Foreplay?***" Regina tried to conceal her sarcasm. For the first time in this lifetime, Regina felt like she was out of control and the attempt to deny it was making her double over with stomach cramps. If only it could

have been the raw oysters she'd had for lunch. They'd tasted a bit rancid... No... she loved raw oysters. They'd never affected her like this even when they *were* spoiled. Regina wiped the tears from her eyes and felt another attack of Jell-itch coming on.

"You signed a contract." Regina's voice gathered momentum. "**You are supposed to be impervious!**" she shrieked, bursting into tears.

"Regina, please... Don't you know already that the truth will set you free even though it can be very painful?" Regina was now itching all over and turning purple. Abruptly she opened the nearest door and slammed it behind her, leaving Jonas standing there wondering what to do next. Women were so complex when it came to sex.

Jonas was right, wailed Regina in her chambers, and so was the Oracle. Why had she been born a thoroughbred hybrid human? Was it not common knowledge that part of the mortal experience was pain, whether in the form of longing, gas, brassieres or high-heeled shoes? Was not Jell-Itch her Achilles heel, similar to that tragic flaw that had caused the death of Homer's great and unforgettable Greek hero?

Regina knew Jonas' case was similar. Although it didn't involve a dunking in the River Styx and one heel left dry, her recurring bouts of Jell-Itch had caused her to do some serious research on Jonas's past.

All was not as rosy as it seemed. When he was still a virtual ET in the eye-pod of the cosmic computer, a mysterious lover named Muse-Art had visited Babette Foreplay from The Unnamed Earth Planet of the Future. This was not an ordinary lover, for he was a musician. Everyone knows about the high energy of musicians and how off-the-wall they can be when it comes to sex... especially futuristic sex. Like most poets and artists, they are beings of a passion that knows no bounds.

In this instance, Muse-Art serenaded Babette with a six-pointed crystal star that he stroked with a plastic drinking straw that he'd collected from many not yet created Earth Plane fast food meals. The result was magical, causing every atom in Mama Foreplay's ET body to hum, and Baby Jonas' little body to hum as well. It was such a cozy *von tooti*, as they say in ET language, Mama Foreplay found herself dealing with serious labor pains that had led to the early hatching of little Jonas.

Punishment of future time intercourse was so serious, Mama Foreplay never dared confess to Papa Foreplay about her musical interlude.

Needless to say, little Jonas emerged as a *wunderkind* of trans-passion.

Trying to keep something from another ET, however, was about as easy as trying to keep a secret from the credit card bureau. Papa Foreplay eventually found out about his wife's little *tutti frutti* interlude, so as punishment, Baby Jonas, now a handsome 32-year-old dude, was terra-fied and sent back in time to seek his fortune on Planet Earth with Diebleed & Cuthrot.

Regina had not been forewarned about this Foreplay Prodigy of Passion. Also, she had no idea he would be so handsome and delectable. In fact, she had no idea, because before she met Jonas Foreplay, she had no desire to *have* such ideas. After all, was she not an important missionary with a position--and did she not take that position seriously? Screwing things up or down was no longer a viable option.

15

Calling Out the Guard

Gissalayne had no luck on EBay. No one seemed to be interested in buying Conscious Plans right now, especially since the country was now under martial law. Circle C had disappeared completely from the search engines. Apparently the Chinese militia had been swarming over the U.S. for some time, even in areas such as South Dakota and Wyoming. Added to this was the epidemic of illegal aliens that was multiplying faster than the military could keep up with them.

It wasn't difficult to get Jonas out of jail. Even though she hadn't played Monopoly in years, Gissalayne recalled the instructions about not passing Go and not collecting \$200. That was somewhat painful; she'd always enjoyed making a complete circle of all the properties without any short cuts.

"It's just a game, sweetheart," Jonas phoned her. "Don't take it seriously. Furthermore Broadway and Park Avenue and all

the Utilities are already taken over by the military. There are many more important things to focus on, such as where we're going to get married and the name of our first child."

Gissalayne almost dropped the phone. *Married? Child?* How did he know she'd just skipped a period?

"Where are you, Jonas?" she managed.

"In the next room, in the Wintergarden, of course. On the 13th floor. Just don't look outside. You'll think it's Nazi Germany."

"Jonas, how are we going to get out of here?" Jonas was standing in the doorway in his bathrobe, with a bouquet of red tulips.

"We can teleport, if you wish," Jonas nibbled passionately at her ear.

"How do you do that?"

"You've been doing it already, ever since you met me."

Jonas reached up toward the ceiling, pulled down a bright yellow jacket and handed it to her. "Are we ever going to have an exciting life together, Ms. Bumblebee!"

The war was heating up. US states bordering Mexico were holding barbecues and swim parties for the aliens—human

aliens—and roasting or drowning them alive. Holographic sewing machines stitched the sky with Disney characters and other favorite cartoons that were delightful to behold to all eyes looking up from city slums and fallow farmlands amidst the daily hosing of dioxin and other deadly chemicals.

Tsunami Events were also becoming popular, in less than a week wiping out entire city populations with mile-high waves that gobbled up and swallowed whole all traces of history, leaving nothing behind except seashells and occasional hair dryers, cigarette lighters, gumball machines... These humanly engineered disasters were among the Top Ten on the Hit List for population control. Stench from chemical detritus was the only challenge, and in tourist areas during saturation times, restaurants and resorts graciously provided guests with gas masks and headgear.

Volcanic eruptions added color to the mix. Painters, photographers and videographers with tripods easels and palettes planted themselves close to the site, leaving nothing to chance as they worked feverishly to capture every last ash from the showers of prismic panorama.

Crop circles were popping up everywhere, keeping decoders and web bloggers ultra-busy. Of particular note were the circles in genetically modified corn fields.

Subsidiary enterprises cashed in royally with everything from bumper stickers to board games. Many of the slogans were already worn out: "Support the Troops" and "Buckle Up" or "We Are All Honor Students of Every Elementary School on the Planet." Yet nostalgia refused to be defeated: anything with even the slightest fragrance of yesterday's body deodorant or bathroom spray still had buyers as the Circle C Cabal continued to market chaos. Even "Happiness is a warm puppy" returned to tee shirts and cross-stitch samplers.

D & C was faltering. By now, according to Regina's 'O' projections and spread sheets, the company should be employing several thousand turbo-charged ET studs to fight the demise of the planet by delivering their DNA to multiples of clueless females. Alas, the number dwindled weekly and resignations were a daily event.

Clearly, the D & C plan for infecting the planet with ET testosterone wasn't working; and no wonder. Jonas Foreplay's infatuation with Gissalayne Chondroitin was far from an isolated case. Instead of flitting from flower to flower, eligible ET studs

were getting hooked on the first nectar and checking out of D & C.

If it weren't already a well-worn aphorism, it became one now: if things aren't right at the top, the bottom will bottom out.

The former queen of benevolence and perfection had turned into a witch with incurable Jell-itch. Jonas and she had been made for each other, Regina fumed, and it was all her fault. She should have given him an 'O' test run first, before sending him off on that fateful SeaTac airport mission. Surely she was the fairest maiden in the land—so did that sound familiar to fairy tale fans? What *could* any vain Vashti become, except a determined witch hunter?

Gissalayne, who already had one cooking in the pot, was busily making preparations for the great day--before her front hump would be too noticeable--when the jubilant couple would be united forever as husband and wife.

"'O'... Ohhh... 'O' Oracle," wept Regina, despair and frustration rapidly deteriorating into anger and revenge, new emotions for the lovely queen who was alas, lovely no more. Her skin had become permanently pimped with Jell-itch blemishes, the corners of her mouth curved downward and her lovely hair was now straight, stringy and lusterless. She was even dealing

with cellulite on her upper arms and thighs, great cause for concern with sleeveless tops and miniskirts.

If *she* couldn't have Jonas, surely no other woman was entitled to have him either, raged Regina. Added to all this was today's announcement on her smart phone that Gissalayne Chondroitin was running for U.S. President.

"No woman except she, Regina Diebleed, will ever put her bathroom scales in the Oval Office," fumed Regina.

A wicked plan was brewing.

Meanwhile, Gissalayne was busier and happier than ever before. There was so much to do to prepare for the wedding, what kind of frosting for the cake, ethnic ratio of the bodyguards (number of blacks, whites, yellows and ETs) and whether the menu would be dairy or meat or meat or dairy. Also, if the wedding was to be interplanetary, what did ETs eat? Humans?

It as a busy schedule. In addition to launching her presidential campaign, there was always another ultra-sound or scan that had to be done. Having babies, especially with an ET father, wasn't as easy as it used to be. Jonas and Gissalayne scheduled clandestine meetings at five-star getaways to discuss their platform and play.

Predictably, Consciousness was the major issue on the Chondroitin ticket. "Chondroitin for Consciousness" was one of the campaign slogans, and "Put Consciousness Back into the White House" and "We Have Been Unconscious for Too Long!" were popular billboards that started popping up on lawns and expressways.

"Love" was the other buzz word. As washed-out overused and abused as this four-letter word already was, Gissalayne and Jonas knew it still had value among people who linked it with favorite colognes and soaps from yesteryear along with other romantica like horehound drops and gingham pinafores.

Even though in this war-torn grief-filled bombed-out uranium-depleted world nostalgia wasn't what it used to be, love was still the front porch swing and Grandma's sugar cookies. Spaceships hovered over each metropolis pouring love energies into every alley and performing their magic. Hoodlums, drug dealers, rapists, pedophiles, politicians locked arm-in-arm in daisy chains of mutual admiration, dancing and singing, protesting against street gangs, drugs, crime, violence and hypocrisy. In the Nation's Capitol, the President was ready to call out the troops until he realized all of them had been deployed

overseas. For the first time since the *coup* that had placed him in office, his writers were speechless.

Essential oils such as rose, musk, geranium, gargantuan, frankincense and myrrh were particularly effective. The whole country smelled like a whorehouse.

It didn't take long for Gissalayne to become President for a day on a TV reality show. She was also beginning to show.

"Imagine a baby in the White House!" the public crowed.

Maggie was ecstatic. "I don't know how you managed to do it, Gissalayne!" she called her best friend who was in the middle of a caucus on importing orange juice from Israel.

"With Foreplay anything is possible," Gissalayne said out loud at the head of the conference table. Several rabbis from Israel cocked their eyebrows and cocks and adjusted their *tsitsis*--fringed prayer shawls--and checked to make sure their zippers were fastened.

"A woman in the White House? Impossible."

"Why?"

"Because women are impossible."

"A white woman in the white house? Yes, maybe, but more likely a black woman, but not in the White House. First the White House would have to be painted Black."

Things were getting out of hand. Regina removed her hand from her panties and dialed the president of one of the major banks.

"I need to make a deposit, Gerald."

Gerald Foreclosure twirled the olive in his martini before popping it in his mouth. "You mean like a deposit deposit, Regina?" What a pleasant surprise. Surely she must have an agenda.

"Gissalayne Chondroitin and her Conscious Love Play are getting too much press," Regina snapped. "She actually may have a chance of winning the presidential election."

Six major banks, representatives from the Vatican, the State of Israel, five of the most prestigious secret societies and Regina Diebleed met on an island off the Pacific. The caviar, lobster and truffles were exquisite and nothing was left to chance; even the uncorked wine was tested.

"D & C has gold," Regina began her speech, taking a sip of champagne. "Gold you can bite into. It is time to open our coffers and share this wealth with the leaders of the world. Betterment of our lives has been a major concern of D & C from its very inception."

"Terrorism is rampant," she continued after a round of applause. "We must join together in an effort to combat this dangerous group of love extremists that is determined to destroy the planet." Another round of applause.

"We must keep people unconscious!" she concluded to a standing ovation with "Bravo! Bring it on! Show us the money!"

In less than six weeks, the planet's epidemic of red alerts produced new levels of fear that harvested unprecedented demands for guns, knives, tents, duct tape, candles and KY Jelly. The war-and-survival economy and baby-making were booming and for the first time in a decade unemployment numbers were down.

Predictably, Gissalayne lost the presidential election.

16

Turr'ism

The day after Gissalayne's presidential defeat, she opened the door to her office at Hook, Line & Sinkers, LLC, stepped inside and looked around. It was empty. All furniture, files drawers, drapes, even her photos, books, dildos, magazines, computer, were gone and the air conditioning had been turned off. No one else was in the suite except Susan, the new receptionist.

"Susan, what happened to my office?"

Susan popped a peppermint in her mouth and eyed Gissalayne darkly. "I'm not sure," she sputtered, sucking hard. "I've only been here for a week."

"Susan, I am HL & S's most successful hooker, I mean, Sinkers, I mean—where's the rest of the staff?" Gissalayne shouted.

"Gone," said Susan vacantly. "I'm packing up too. Even though I'm not the brightest light, even I can see the handwriting on the wall. You have to have something to hook and sink in order to stay in business...right?"

Gissalayne sighed heavily and gazed out the window at the street below, crowded with protestors, pimps and parades. She had to admit the city had never seemed more colorful, active or democratic than now. Central areas that were usually desolate were swarming with people of all races, backgrounds and financial circumstances. Most people had abandoned inner city driving; their vehicles could too easily be ruined or stolen and their passengers murdered.

"All is not lost," Gissalayne turned away from the window, smiling weakly at a Susan who had already vanished.

In the ensuing months, Gissalayne pursued her consciousness mission with Jonas at her side or underneath, sometimes on top, to support her. Small segments of the population that were either retired or unattached to the outcome of this or any other war started to donate their time and energy, even candy bars and toys, to the cause. Preoccupied with the search for buried consciousness, everywhere large holes appeared; mounds of dirt popped up in some of the most remote places. In many cities, to everyone's surprise, diggers were even uncovering underground gulags or concentration camps, and UFO research centers.

Maggie called to complain to Gissalayne that this was the fourth time this month that the schools were closed because of a bomb threat. The kids were getting on her nerves.

"If they're on your nerves, maybe you can teach them how to lighten up by bouncing," suggested Gissalayne from her new trampoline. "Bouncing is good for the lymph system and you know how you wanted to add more exercise to your life, Maggie." It was true; Maggie was spreading and she didn't feel good about it.

"I do want my high school cheerleading figure back again, Gissalayne," she admitted, hauling all the kids to a sporting goods store to purchase a bouncer on sale.

Even if the people seemed lost, that didn't mean they really were, or that everything else was. In fact, daily life was beginning to resemble a treasure hunt or scrap bag of findings. Appreciation sprang up everywhere, as a free gift for what could no longer be bought: falafel, a pair of genuine sheepskin slippers, a Japanese kite. Parents started to read storybooks to their children because after awhile even suicide bomb reports and city burnings on TV started to lose their edge. How much time can one really devote to watching other people's destruction? Even earthquakes and tsunamis had become trite

and boring; proving that anything overdone toughens us up for the next round of trauma.

“We need a good dictator,” cried the robbed and injured and hungry and imprisoned.

“Amazing, just amazing,” Jonas thought, pulling up in a stretch limo in front of the Foreplay California estate. “Just desserts, all right!” He’d brought back a few desserts himself, gifts from Paris, since Gissalayne was in her ninth month of pregnancy and had been unable to fly with him: a new battery-run butterfly game, a remote headset for multi-dimensional mood music, and a box of marzipan balls. Gissalayne adored coconut.

Although Regina had successfully squelched Gissalayne’s presidential campaign, Gissalayne herself was far from squelched. “Who are this bitch’s enemies?” she fumed, contacting Intelligence.

Harold Boxhart surfaced easily on the sugarcone.com search engine as Gissalayne’s last reject. Regina typed in Harold’s identity code: *drApes4U* and started typing furiously:

Hi Harold, I read your profile and I think we have a lot in common. I make smoothies for breakfast every morning

too... and yes, the bananas have to be ripe. Very ripe... and *large*.

Harold bit the bait, especially photos of Regina standing next to her private plane. In the second email Regina discussed her firewalking experiences. "Not only my feet were bare," she wrote, signing with several smiley faces.

A few days later it was time to drop the bomb. "Do you ever do professional work?" she wrote on a blog bordered with belts, whips and boots. "If so, I have a high paying job for you. You probably know our country has become infested with turr'ists."

"Huh?" Harold wrote back. He wasn't up on the latest presidential pronunciations.

"Have you ever worked for an Agency before?" Regina asked.

"I pride myself on being independent," Harold wrote back, referring Regina to the Ripley Firehorse website and seminar information on Self Empowerment. "I am a positive DO-ER," he finished in red.

"Shit," muttered Regina. The following Monday at 9:31 AM, shortly after Harold took off for work, the D & C Slops (short for

Sleuth Ops) helicopter landed at the Issaquah heliport in pouring rain. Four Slops piled into a waiting black limousine and headed for the Sunny Shades apartment complex. Decked out in shiny red raincoats, bulletproof vests, elbow-length gloves and gas masks, they banged open the front door.

It took only one look around Harold's apartment for the D & C Slops to make their decision. Still wearing their gloves and gas masks, at 9:31:10 AM they slammed the front door behind them, piled into the limousine and headed back to the heliport. Once aboard their craft, they contacted Regina.

"Mission Impossible," was the message on Regina's cell phone. The sleuth team handed in their resignation papers.

"Harold, why don't we meet in Fiji," suggested Regina in an email with a pink background and border chain of pink hearts. "I own a resort there. Bring your camera equipment!"

Harold felt a rare humming in his left ear and his right foot started doing a nervous non-stop tap dance. The new sugarcone.com profile was hot bait all right. His rod was stiff and bending. This fish better not be a bedroom slipper or someone's old shoe. Like most people, Harold did pride himself on being non-materialistic, to a certain extent. He was into saving the planet, whales, trees and people whenever possible.

This was a good day. Toilet paper was on sale and he'd found a bunch of bananas at the Exact Ripe stage. He would be meeting Regina seven days from now. One banana for each morning smoothie and none left over to rot. What was Regina's last name? Regina Die... "Your ticket is on its way," she wrote. "First class. Don't forget to specify American Menu. I wouldn't want you to get stuck eating Ethnic."

Hands on hips, Harold surveyed the living room. Not much space for sitting. The sofa and chairs piled with newspapers, porn mags, trash bags on their way out to the dumpster... dead spiders dangling from the dining room chandelier... yep. It was a good thing this babe had suggested Fiji and not Issaquah.

"Right off there's some things you need to know about me," Harold informed Regina as soon as they checked in to the Wigi-Fiji Resort and Spa. "I do not like to lie in the sun, I don't play cards and I hate snorkeling."

"Why that's wonderful, Harold," Regina smiled enthusiastically, linking her arm in his as they headed for the coffee shop. "I hope you hate turr'ists, too."

"Yes, ma'am, tourists are a nuisance."

"No no, not *tourists*, turr'ists!" repeated Regina.

"Ahhh... *terrorists*, you mean!" Harold finally caught on, grinning broadly. "You mean like the illegal aliens and the folks that don't pay income tax and hate Americans."

"Did you ever hear of a man named Jonas Foreplay?" Regina leaned forward, gazing into Harold's dishwater brown eyes.

"No, what does he do, run a pleasure emporium? Ha ha!" Harold laughed at the cleverness of his own joke.

"He is an ET," Regina whispered loudly. "A real one. And a turr'ist!"

"A Turr'ist?" Harold leaned forward also, tipping over his water glass.

"Yes, a Turr'st," repeated Regina before the waiter appeared to mop up Harold and the table.

It was easy to put together a plan as soon as Harold realized there was money in it. "I need a new pickup truck, Regina," he beamed, "and now I can get a better camera!"

"Yes, a pickup truck, for many pickups," Regina waxed enthusiastic. By this time she was an expert at faking orgasms, so while Harold was doing his leg sling thing, she used the time to map out a strategy.

"Imagine the nerve of an ET trying to ruin our government," fumed Harold.

Gissalayne was just about to start nursing little Zerox when Harold's face appeared in the sitting room window. "AIIIEEEE!" she screamed. Banquo's ghost! Was this a vision from an ugly dry cleaning past that had not yet been deleted by her backward space bar?

Harold was just as shocked as Gissalayne. He'd never been to California before, and the last he'd heard from Gissalayne was when she'd walked away from him at the SeaTac airport on her way back to Rochester, New York at the outset of what had turned out to be a five-star blizzard.

Zerox, who was teething, bit down hard on Gissalayne's nipple. She let out another scream, but Harold had already disappeared. He was racing down the street in his rented Mercedes. All the fucking NASA from that unpleasant Y2K4 New Year's Eve with Gissalayne swelled up in his throat, making him want to puke.

She didn't even like his pancakes! What was she doing in Jonas Foreplay's California estate, nursing a little ET? Something was surely extraterrestrial here.

He phoned Regina. "WHERE did you go? To his home?"

Regina tried to hold back her anger.

It was a dream, Gissalayne convinced herself, as little Zerox kept pooping in fresh diapers every time she changed them.

"Ahh, so you're the dry cleaning man," Jonas extended a hand to Harold, to Harold's amazement, slicing right through his own as if were just a mirror image. "Are you supposed to take me out? Is that your assignment? Handcuff me, if you wish, and lead me away. But first tell me what the charges are."

A strange peppermint scented breeze swept over Harold; suddenly he felt dizzy and he couldn't stand up straight. The taste in his throat was.... Agghhh.

Jonas telepathed Regina. "One of your henchmen is there, my dear. I think there's a lesson to be learned here. You can NEVER fool Mother Nature."

Regina was too angry to respond, but she didn't have to. The troops had already arrived. In went the syringe and as Jonas' head fell forward, they picked him up and shoveled him into the waiting van where he was driven to a nearby gulag.

"You did a perfectly magnificent job, Harold," Regina praised him.

"But I really didn't do anything," Harold protested.

"You can go home now." Regina patted his arm.

"B-b-but what about us?" Harold stammered. "I mean, don't you think we have a future? Didn't you like the way I fucked you? I don't have to dry clean, Regina. I don't have to do anything... We could play all day!"

"Yes, you're right," Regina purred. "You really don't have to do anything to be a perfect nothing. You're easy." With a snap of her fingers, Harold was whisked off by the limousine chauffer and placed on a private jet back to Seattle.

Consider all of this a dream, you asshole, Regina blessed him. Amazing what money could buy and shouldn't.

The military couldn't be as cruel as reported by all the Human Rights activist groups, Jonas concluded. Cruelty required intelligence as in brain power, and these men were either too drunk or drugged most of the time to know what they were doing. Maybe that was it, he decided. Drunk and drugged. He'd never killed a person. What did it take inside to kill someone you

didn't even know but were told was your enemy? Besides adrenalin and propaganda, what did it take to kill innocent women and children, innocent men? A monthly salary, the possibility of being cited as a hero... Yes, there were plenty of reasons for barbaric behavior. For humans it was as natural as sweating, shitting and spawning eggs that hatched into their own likenesses. It was life in the raw.

The teeter totter goes down, and comes up. Pleasure emporiums sprang up everywhere, featuring new electronic arousal gadgets and other toys that supported the greatest pleasure on earth... and it was free for all. People started to learn how to cooperatively steal and share food, clothing and rice. Without money for prescriptions, the sick and dying starting using their ingenuity such as their minds, to find solutions for getting well. Cooperative block parties shared break-in responsibilities and collected weapons. It was soon mutually understood that everyone got a fair share of the loot.

Another positive outcome was the burgeoning of a large number of study groups. With so many people out of work and sick of watching the same old-same old canned versions with new titles: Shock and Wonder, Surprise and Plunder, Revelation

and Dismay, etc., etc., many people started to gather together to read Plato, Aristotle, Sophocles, Descartes, Henry Miller... anything that took their minds off their loss of consciousness. "What is good?" was one of the more popular study groups. Another popular topic, as one would imagine, was "What is real?"

Churches, synagogues, mosques and casinos were crowded with the bored and desperate. Even more golf courses sprang up, using plastic grass that didn't have to be watered; and to save on fuel and lose weight, golf carts were pulled by a team of four men, similar to the Chinese jinrikisha.

Little details in life started to take on greater importance: It became an art to clean the refrigerator or bathtub, and people pleased themselves by vacuuming underneath the bed or making new Christmas tree ornaments from broken ones.

17

All Over the Place

One of the major problems was knowing the difference between real and virtual. A man who looked just like Jonas--he could have been his twin, Jonas thought--was apprehended at the San Francisco international airport for smuggling drugs into the US from the Netherlands. But then, if Jonas was a clone, why couldn't this man also be one? A third man who resembled Jonas was handcuffed at one of the many Bushmen rallies and charged for being a terrorist. Jonases seemed to be everywhere. Gissalayne even saw several trimming hedges, ringing Salvation Army bells, driving garbage trucks, seated behind bars at the bank...

"Jonas, sweetheart, are you aware you're all over the place?"

"Of course. I have to be," he grinned, holding her close. "The only challenge is for you is to know you're always with the right one."

Life might have sucked for most, but for this happy couple, the sucking continued to be delicious. Little Zerox was a joy and Hippolyte was already cooking in the fourth month. "Jonas, why can't Love be a Life Purpose?" Gissalayne stroked his thigh.

"I suppose it can be," answered Jonas thoughtfully as he fondled her breasts.

"So you think we can end this quest right here? I mean do you think we've solved the riddle of the Sphinx by saying it all starts and ends with Love?"

"Well actually, it started with discontent, if you recall," Jonas reminded her. "First you have to know what it isn't in order to discover what it is."

Outside the bedroom window the Great One wiped her beard on a thick layer of clouds and let out a low barely audible whistle of relief.

About the Author

Carol Adler, MFA is an entrepreneur, professional writer, editor and teacher of English and creative writing. She is President of Dandelion Books, LLC, www.dandelion-books.com of Tempe, Arizona; a full service publishing company that markets its “uncensored nonfiction, conscious solutions and unfettered fiction” using the latest production and delivery technologies, including on-demand dot.com networking. She is also President and CEO of Dandelion Enterprises, Inc., www.write-to-publish-for-profit.com and President of the International Arts & Media Foundation, a non-profit subsidiary of Dandelion Enterprises, Inc.

Adler’s business experience also includes co-ownership of a Palm Beach, FL public relations company and executive management positions in two U.S. rejuvenation and mind/body wellness corporations for which she founded publishing divisions.

Her publications include 3 books of published poetry (3 more soon to be published), well over two hundred poems in poetry journals, and several fiction and non-fiction works. She has published two of her novels under the pseudonym, Sarah Daniels (*The Woman with Qualities*, and *Come As You Are*). This is her third novel.

As a ghost writer, Adler has developed and written manuscripts for a number of professionals in the health care and human potential industries. These include: a holistic medical book, *Why Am I Still Addicted? A Holistic Approach to Recovery* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991), for Richard Plagenhoef, M.D., *The Six Steps to the Fountain of Youth: How to Slay the Dragons of Aging Without Drawing the Sword* (Belleair Bluffs, FL: TriNeuroGenics, Inc., 1997) for 59-year-old world karate champion, Dennis Kelly; *The Human Body Owner’s Manual for Optimal Performance*, for Guy Delulliis, vice president of Optimal Human Performance, Inc., and *Answers to the Top 10 Health Challenges*, for Sheryl Simpson, ND, MH, LMT (TriNeuroGenics, Inc., 1998).

Adler has served as editor of several poetry and literary magazines, and her career includes extensive teaching of college English poetry, fiction, non-fiction and business writing, and conducting of writing workshops in Florida and New York State prisons, libraries, elementary, junior and high schools, and senior citizen centers. She has a B. A. in philosophy and English from the U. of Michigan, and a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Vermont College.

About the Cover Photograph

Courtesy of NASA's Spitzer and Hubble space telescopes teamed up to expose the chaos that baby stars are creating 1,500 light years away in a cosmic cloud called the Orion Nebula. This striking composite indicates that four monstrously massive stars, collectively called "trapezium," at the center of the cloud may be the main culprits in the Orion constellation, a familiar sight in the fall and winter night sky in the northern hemisphere.