Of Night and Light

Stories

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iDead

Sometimes when you innovate, you make mistakes.
—Steve Jobs

A Pentagon black ops unit had worked on infrasound technology for years but never fully succeeded in demonstrating its efficacy as a weapon. When funding was withdrawn due to deep budget cuts stemming from a teetering economy, nominal monies were found at Hawley-AIlsworth Institute of Technology (HAIT) to continue development of a sonic and ultrasonic enemy deterrent.

For two years, graduate student Jesse Kline had worked as an assistant in HAIT's Infrasonic Emitter Laboratory (IEL). During this time he researched and wrote his dissertation on Otoacoustic Emissions, which he was slated to defend in ten days. It was his fervent hope that after his successful completion of his doctorate he would be hired fulltime by the Institute. He had worked hard to prove his worth to the project, and he had received glowing evaluations by its director, Dr. Phillip Leman.

No other student spent as much time at IEL as he had. In fact, it had become his second home. After working on complex tasks from Dr. Leman, he would often crash on a small cot in a storage room next to the lab. His dedication was both admired and mocked by his peers, who viewed him as a loner lacking in
Late April Tree Frogs

Finally he paid the debt of nature.
—Robert Fabian

Along the Calcasieu River north of Lake Charles, Louisiana, on high ground adjacent to a vast marsh, stood the 150 year-old former plantation that had housed the Arceneaux family for three generations. The ancestral moniker’s reign would end with Claude Arceneaux, who had contracted a rare infection that left him infertile while serving with the army in the Philippines. He and his wife, Ruby, had broached the subject of adoption, but ultimately Ruby decided that if she couldn’t bear her own child, she didn’t want to raise somebody else’s.

“Blood is what it’s all about,” she’d protest, as Claude tried to keep the subject alive.

“You’ll be thinking otherwise when you’re old and need someone to care for you,” he would invariably reply.

“Hell, I’ll hire someone to meet my needs with all the money you’ll be leaving me. So hurry up and go,” joked Ruby, and they would both chuckle, although feeling a tinge of emotional pain each time.

* * *

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Strategy

I am horrified of real thinkers.

When I come upon one,

my existence is voided.

Thus I travel with the inferior.

It is among them I thrive.
The Smell of Summer Asphalt

As rivers flow into the ocean but cannot make the vast ocean overflow,
so flow the streams of the sense-world into the sea of peace that is the sage.

—Bhagavad Gita 2:70

Rimyi Mehra could barely contain his excitement as the road repair truck approached his small village of Baritun. He loved the scent of fresh asphalt and the sight of the shimmering steam rising from it as it poured from the truck. But most of all, he loved to chew and blow bubbles with it before it hardened or was defiled by the wheels of ox carts, human feet, or the occasional automobile. No boy or girl in the village could create tar bubbles as large as Rimyi, whose favorite pastime was to launch his sticky black orbs onto the Yamuna River. He would follow them as far as he could and watch them bob and weave in the churning water.

The narrow main street of his village in the Haryana Region of India was repaved every year, due to the ever-crumbling ground beneath it. It was said that Baritun would soon slide from its mountainside perch into the Ganga tributary. But this had been predicted for so long that few people paid much attention. However, Rimyi was among those who did. With mounting fascination he measured the descent of the narrow strip of yard behind the two-
Little Conversations

The time has come...
to talk of many things
Of why the sea is boiling hot,
and whether pigs have wings.

—Lewis Carroll

It all began when Leonard Myers asked his wife if he was the greatest love of her life. As was the case when he had previously asked the same question, she was reluctant to respond. So he rephrased it.

“Am I the person you care for more than anybody in the world?”

“Please don’t go there again, Lenny. You know that’s an unfair question,” pleaded Elizabeth.

“Why? Either I am or I’m not. It’s pretty simple.”

“No it’s not. You’re asking me to quantify my feelings, and that’s something I can’t do. I love many people... our daughter, my parents. I love you all very much,” replied Elizabeth with mounting irritation.

“That’s a cop-out. We all love somebody best, and I would think you would love your life partner above all others.”

“And you love me better than anyone?” challenged Elizabeth.

“Of course I do,” responded Leonard... though only after a slight hesitation.
People of Color

We hunt them for the beauty of their skins.
—Lord Tennyson

"I hate this look!" bemoaned Lionel Chesley, staring at his image in his car’s rearview mirror on his way to work. Purple just doesn’t suit me, he thought, although it had seemed fine when he chose it. Now he couldn’t wait to transit to another shade.

The Purples were not his kind of people, although they did try to befriend him. They were just too snooty for his tastes. Live and learn, mumbled Lionel, thinking how he had screwed up before. Two years ago, his sisters convinced him to get in touch with his female side, so he went pink. What a disaster. The constant ribbing from his buddies nearly put him over the edge. Since the 2030s, dermal manipulation had gone from being a novel way to stand out from the crowd at parties and special events (like Halloween and Valentine’s Day) to a means of declaring one’s social predilections and even political affinities—blue for liberals, red for conservatives, and so on. The late Reverend Jesse Jackson believed skin colorization fulfilled the dream of his Rainbow Coalition movement.

“No longer is the world just black and white,” he proclaimed on Meet the Press. “It’s chartreuse, magenta, teal, ochre, and an endless array of other
Incredible

The woman struck by the speeding car

stared back at her severed legs

as if looking into an aquarium

filled with iridescent jellyfish.