



SCRIPT INSTRUCTIONS

NARRATION – Two choices from the Narration scripts or send us your own!

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AUDIOBOOK: - Two separate pieces/pages from the book excerpts or send us your own! **One page max** from any of the page excerpts. Try to keep your piece to approx 1 min. We do not need you to read title/author (only because it is not listed on some of these excerpts) We are giving you the full pages so you have more storyline, however please only read a portion of the copy if it's longer than 1 min.

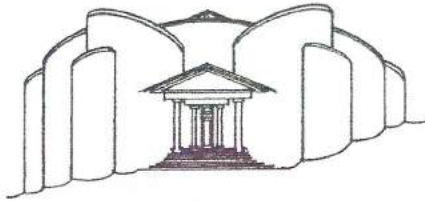
Everyone

Please send us your page or script number ASAP and any kind of title listed on the file as soon as you can. If you change your mind on your script it's important to let us know. We will want to follow along with you so that we can give proper storyline feedback. PRIOR TO THE SHOW would save us a ton of trouble, so try and stick with your choices. Please send us your script choices by Sunday evening so we can update the call sheet for the judges!

Your read should stay around 1 min – and we'd like you to choose a back up script as well from any of the scripts so that you are prepared for the 'Speed Round'

Your scripts will NOT be on the screen, so you need to have them printed out or on a separate device other than your recording device.

Thank you so much
All our best
The Get Mic'd Team



1st P-F

KENNY HAD SAID he was sorry about the apartment but, God, this *thing*, this awesome, unqualified, brave new love was so huge that he needed all his closet and floor space. How soon, in other words, could I move out?

I dug in, slept on the sofa, snapped his head off with every word of relocation counseling. He produced the lease to remind me that my name was nowhere on it.

I said, "You can't evict me. I work for eleven lawyers."

He said, "Please don't make me change the locks."

To save face, I set a date and collected cartons. I demanded

he reimburse me for everything we had purchased jointly, down to cleaning fluids, spices, potting soil, and bottles on which we'd paid deposits.

"What about going home?" Kenny tried. "That might give you some time and distance."

I said no. Not at my age; not to my parents, who'd take me in, all right, but in the spirit of weary pet owners collecting their repeat-offender dog from the pound.

"There's a trend," he said. "I wouldn't hesitate to live with my parents if circumstances dictated it."

"What about my work?"

"It's a job. You could get another one closer to them."

"I meant my writing. My new novel."

"Oh, that," he said.

I couldn't go home to my parents' house because I was secretly writing about them. After years of crafting stories about love between quiet people, the kind of love that small English movies celebrated, I had written a high-concept story about how my parents married each other twice. The night I read it, my classmates applauded. One person said, "Brava!" Someone else said she could see Eli Wallach playing the father.

"So what do we do with it?" asked our workshop leader.

"Send it out?" I asked.

"Eventually. Read me the last sentence again."

I did, fingering the beads around my neck the way I'd seen women authors at readings do: "Arthur set down the tray gently so the apple-scented tea wouldn't overwhelm its vessel, and, with ineffable sadness, departed Charlotte's lightless room."

N/F-F



Introduction

THE IRONY OF THIS BOOK'S TITLE, *DINNER CHEZ MOI*, IS THAT WHILE I WAS WRITING it I didn't have a *chez moi* to speak of, unless you counted my red suitcase on wheels. It was a turbulent couple of years, post-Paris, during which era I found myself moving several times, traveling incessantly, and ultimately staying at various friends' houses for long stretches, trying to figure out where I should end up.

Chez moi as a concept was therefore given a lot of thought. I did consider for a while changing the title (*Dinner Chez Everybody Except Moi?*), but in the end I kept it. I realized that feeding friends is about food that comes from the heart, not about what kitchen you happen to cook it in. In other words, *chez moi* is a place within that you give out to the world, and you can't help but take that with you wherever you go any more than a tortoise can his shell. At least that's how I've come to see it.

Another realization I had while writing this book is that in the run of an average day, dinner is often the likeliest candidate for being the highlight. That's an opportunity too good to pass up! It's all fine and dandy to rise to occasions in life, but we also have to take the initiative to create occasions to rise to when there don't seem to be any, which is most of the time. This is where dinner comes in with bells on: it's a chance every day to pull ourselves out of the mundane and give our lives a little polish and pizzazz.

None of this is to suggest that we have to get unreasonably fancy about the proceedings, a tendency from our more formal past that seems to have given the term "dinner party" a bad name. I'm aware of the stigma. For some people the very thought conjures up images of starched tablecloths and tomato aspics. In my world, "dinner party" simply means eating with others, so there's no reason not

to keep it down to earth if we want to. Even if it's as basic as an omelet or a baked potato, if it's dinnertime and I'm not stuck eating it by myself, that's party enough for me. The menu suggestions in this book are not quite so minimalist, admittedly, but you can always scale them back—or elaborate—to suit your mood and the moment. Besides, setting the tone is a matter not so much of what you serve, but of how you serve it.

I created these menus from recipes I enjoyed with different friends in different places, which is why the mix is eclectic. Initially, I tried to adhere to a strict menu formula, but I quickly realized that food shares something in common with people: it resists being pigeon-holed. Every time I'd add a recipe to a menu, it would make me think of another recipe, sometimes two or three, which of course I couldn't resist including whether they fit or not. So, what you get are menus with occasional intruders (titles set in italics), with which you can do what you like. I like to think the collection has ended up more true to life that way. What we cook is so much a reflection of where we are at any given time and of who we have around us.

You can simply follow the menus as they are or create your own by picking and choosing recipes from throughout the book. I swap them around myself all the time, including dragging in recipes from entirely different cookbooks to keep things personal and fresh. In any case, the menus take a bit of navigating, because with every recipe I wrote down came a torrent of thoughts and memories and I made no effort to dam the resulting flood. If you're trying to focus on chopping an onion and find that I suddenly veer off onto the subject of a long-ago holiday or the madness of men, now you know why. Perhaps you can think of my ramblings as the kind of chat we might have in the kitchen if we were cooking together, or as a conversation you might have over dinner with friends.

One last note: if you were looking for *napkin-folding tricks*, *theme-party ideas*, or *dining etiquette* and rules, I'm afraid you won't find them here. I did, once upon a time, consider discussing topics such as "how to draw up a guest list" and "how to set the table," but when I put pen to paper I found it all seemed silly and distracting. What's significant when it comes to feeding people is not whether we have impeccable fish-serving skills or the right number of matching silver dessert spoons, perfectly polished. What matters is gathering people we like around a metaphorical fire and sharing good food and a good time. That's the whole point of a dinner party. Seducing you into throwing them more often is the point of this book.

Happy hosting,

Laura



BUY

Rich Dad Poor Dad



NF - Male

Chapter One

2:11
LESSON 1: THE RICH DON'T WORK FOR MONEY

The poor and the middle class work for money. The rich have money work for them.

"Dad, can you tell me how to get rich?"

My dad put down the evening paper. "Why do you want to get rich, Son?"

"Because today Jimmy's mom drove up in their new Cadillac, and they were going to their beach house for the weekend. He took three of his friends, but Mike and I weren't invited. They told us we weren't invited because we were poor kids."

"They did?" my dad asked incredulously.

"Yeah, they did," I replied in a hurt tone.

My dad silently shook his head, pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose, and went back to reading the paper. I stood waiting for an answer.

The year was 1956. I was nine years old. By some twist of fate, I attended the same public school where the rich people sent their kids. We were primarily a sugar-plantation town. The managers of the plantation and the other affluent people, such as doctors, business owners, and bankers, sent their children to this elementary school. After grade six, their children were generally sent off to private schools. Because my family lived on one side of the street, I went to this school. Had I lived on the other side of the street, I would have gone to a different school with kids from families more like mine. After grade six, these kids and I would go on to the public intermediate and high school. There was no private school for them or for me.

My dad finally put down the paper. I could tell he was thinking.

"Well, Son...", he began slowly. "If you want to be rich, you have to learn to make money."

"How do I make money?" I asked.

"Well, use your head, Son," he said, smiling. Even then I knew that really meant, "That's all I'm going to tell you," or "I don't know the answer, so don't embarrass me."

A Partnership Is Formed

The next morning, I told my best friend, Mike, what my dad had said. As best as I could tell, Mike and I were the only poor kids in this school. Mike was also in this school by a twist of fate. Someone had



BUY

Rich Dad Poor Dad



drawn a jog in the line for the school district, and we wound up in school with the rich kids. We weren't really poor, but we felt as if we were because all the other boys had new baseball gloves, new bicycles, new everything.

Mom and Dad provided us with the basics, like food, shelter, and clothes. But that was about it. My dad used to say, "If you want something, work for it." We wanted things, but there was not much work available for nine-year-old boys.

"So what do we do to make money?" Mike asked.

"I don't know," I said. "But do you want to be my partner?"

He agreed, and so on that Saturday morning, Mike became my first business partner. We spent all morning coming up with ideas on how to make money. Occasionally we talked about all the "cool guys" at Jimmy's beach house having fun. It hurt a little, but that hurt was good, because it inspired us to keep thinking of a way to make money. Finally, that afternoon, a bolt of lightning struck. It was an idea Mike got from a science book he had read. Excitedly, we shook hands, and the partnership now had a business.

For the next several weeks, Mike and I ran around our neighborhood, knocking on doors and asking our neighbors if they would save their toothpaste tubes for us. With puzzled looks, most adults consented with a smile. Some asked us what we were doing, to which we replied, "We can't tell you. It's a business secret."

My mom grew distressed as the weeks wore on. We had selected a site next to her washing machine as the place we would stockpile our raw materials. In a brown cardboard box that at one time held cat-sup bottles, our little pile of used toothpaste tubes began to grow.

Finally my mom put her foot down. The sight of her neighbors' messy, crumpled, used toothpaste tubes had gotten to her. "What are you boys doing?" she asked. "And I don't want to hear again that it's a business secret. Do something with this mess, or I'm going to throw it out."

Mike and I pleaded and begged, explaining that we would soon have enough and then we would begin production. We informed her that we were waiting on a couple of neighbors to finish their toothpaste so we could have their tubes. Mom granted us a one-week extension.

The date to begin production was moved up, and the pressure was on. My first partnership was already being threatened with an eviction notice by my own mom! It became Mike's job to tell the neighbors to quickly use up their toothpaste, saying their dentist wanted them to brush more often anyway. I began to put together the production line.

One day my dad drove up with a friend to see two nine-year-old boys in the driveway with a production line operating at full speed. There was fine white powder everywhere. On a long table were small milk cartons from school, and our family's hibachi grill was glowing with red-hot coals at maximum heat.

Dad walked up cautiously, having to park the car at the base of the driveway since the production line blocked the carport. As he and his friend got closer, they saw a steel pot sitting on top of the coals in which the toothpaste tubes were being melted down. In those days, toothpaste did not come in plastic tubes. The tubes were made of lead. So once the paint was burned off, the tubes were dropped in the small steel pot. They melted until they became liquid, and with my mom's pot holders, we poured the lead through a small hole in the top of the milk cartons.

The milk cartons were filled with plaster of paris. White powder was everywhere. In my haste, I had knocked the bag over, and the entire area looked like it had been hit by a snowstorm. The milk cartons were the outer containers for plaster of paris molds.

My dad and his friend watched as we carefully poured the molten lead through a small hole in the

Time on the Water

*We sailed from the port of indecision
Young and wild with oh so much to learn
The days turned into years
As we tried to fool our fears
But to the port of indecision I returned*

—“UNDER THE LONE PALM”



I wasn't born in a trunk, I was born in a suitcase. But a trunk is where I've kept the scraps of my life for the past fifty years. My many attempts to begin a journal have all fizzled out after a few pages of notes. I have a considerable collection of notebooks, cocktail napkins, memo pads, legal tablets, sparsely filled binders, and mildew-spotted pages that sit in a cedar-lined steamer trunk in my basement on Long Island.

Almost five years ago, when I had the harebrained idea of doing a musical version of my friend Herman Wouk's *Don't Stop the Carnival*, Herman would send me pages of thoughts on the matter from his journal. He had kept a daily journal since 1946. To say the least, I was quite impressed. I envy those who have the discipline to keep a chronological record of events. I do not.

My plan has always been to keep adding to that mess in the trunk and, if I make it to my eighties and am still functioning in the brain-cell department, to retire to a tropical island, buy an old beach house, hire several lovely native girls as assistants, ship in a good supply of rum and red burgundy, and then spend my golden years making a complete picture out of the puzzle pieces in the old steamer trunk. That to me is the way any good romantic would look at his life: Live it first, then write it down before you go.

Any attempts at autobiography before the age of eighty seem pretty self-involved to me. There are a lot of smart middle-aged people but not many wise ones. That comes with "time on the water," as the fisherman says. So the following pages are another stab at completing a journal inspired by the trip that my wife planned for me to celebrate my fiftieth birthday, on December 25, 1996. I am glad to report that my first fifty years were, overall, a lot of goddamn fun. I just followed my instincts and kept my sense of humor. This journal narrates the trip itself as well as stories that the trip dredged up out of my past. I hope you enjoy the ride.

of the planets beyond Saturn, why not accept that ancient evidence for the existence of the Twelfth Planet?

As we ourselves venture into space, a fresh look and an acceptance of the ancient scriptures is more than timely. Now that astronauts have landed on the Moon, and un-manned spacecraft explore other planets, it is no longer impossible to believe that a civilization on another planet more advanced than ours was capable of landing its astronauts on the planet Earth some time in the past.

Indeed, a number of popular writers have speculated that ancient artifacts such as the pyramids and giant stone sculptures must have been fashioned by advanced visitors from another planet - for surely primitive man could not have possessed by himself the required technology? How was it, for another example, that the civilization of Sumer seemed to flower so suddenly nearly 6,000 years ago without a precursor? But since these writers usually fail to show when, how and, above all, from where such ancient astronauts did come - their intriguing questions remain unanswered speculations.

It has taken thirty years of research, of going back to the ancient sources, of accepting them literally, to re-create in my own mind a continuous and plausible scenario of pre-historic events. The Twelfth Planet, therefore, seeks to provide the reader with a narrative giving answers to the specific questions of When, How, Why and Wherefrom.

The evidence I adduce consists primarily of the ancient texts and pictures themselves.

In The Twelfth Planet I have sought to decipher a sophisticated cosmogony which explains, perhaps as well as modern scientific theories, how the solar system could have been formed, an invading planet caught into solar orbit, and Earth and other parts of the solar system brought into being.

The evidence I offer includes celestial maps dealing with space flight to Earth from that Planet, the Twelfth. Then, in sequence, follow the dramatic establishment of the first settlements on Earth by the Nefilim: their leaders were named; their relationships, loves, jealousies, achievements and struggles described; the nature of their "immortality" explained.

Above all, The Twelfth Planet aims to trace the momentous events that led to the creation of Man, and the advanced methods by which this was accomplished.

It then suggests the tangled relationship between Man and his lords, and throws fresh light on the meaning of the events in the Garden of Eden, of the Tower of Babel, of the great Flood. Finally, Man - endowed by his makers biologically and materially - ends up crowding his gods off the Earth.

This book suggests that we are not alone in our solar system. Yet it may enhance rather than diminish the faith in a universal Almighty. For, if the Nefilim created Man on Earth, they may have only been fulfilling a vaster Master Plan.

Z. SITCHIN New York, February 1977

THE ENDLESS BEGINNING

OF THE EVIDENCE that we have amassed to support our conclusions, exhibit number one is Man himself. In many ways, modern man - Homo sapiens - is a stranger to Earth.

Ever since Charles Darwin shocked the scholars and theologians of his time with the evidence of evolution, life on Earth has been traced through Man and the primates, mammals, and vertebrates, and backward through ever-lower life forms to the point, billions of years ago, at which life is presumed to have begun.

But having reached these beginnings and having begun to contemplate the probabilities of life elsewhere in our solar system and beyond, the scholars have become un-easy about life on Earth: Somehow, it does not belong here. If it began through a series of spontaneous chemical reactions, why does life on Earth

have but a single source, and not a multitude of chance sources? And why does all living matter on Earth contain too little of the chemical elements that abound on Earth, and too much of those that are rare on our planet?

Was life, then, imported to Earth from elsewhere?

Man's position in the evolutionary chain has compounded the puzzle. Finding a broken skull here, a jaw there, scholars at first believed that Man originated in Asia some 500,000 years ago. But as older fossils were found, it became evident that the mills of evolution grind much, much slower. Man's ancestor apes are now placed at a staggering 25,000,000 years ago. Discoveries in East Africa reveal a transition to manlike apes (hominids) some 14,000,000 years ago. It was about 11,000,000 years later that the first ape-man worthy of the classification Homo appeared there.

The first being considered to be truly manlike - "Advanced Australopithecus" - existed in the same parts of Africa some 2,000,000 years ago. It took yet another million years to produce Homo erectus. Finally, after another 900,000 years, the first primitive Man appeared; he is named Neanderthal after the site where his remains were first found.

In spite of the passage of more than 2,000,000 years between Advanced Australopithecus and Neanderthal, the tools of these two groups - sharp stones - were virtually alike; and the groups themselves (as they are believed to have looked) were hardly distinguishable.

Then, suddenly and inexplicably, some 35,000 years ago, a new race of Men - Homo sapiens ("thinking Man") - appeared as if from nowhere, and swept Neanderthal Man from the face of Earth. These modern Men - named Cro-Magnon - looked so much like us that, if dressed like us in modern clothes, they would be lost in the crowds of any European or American city. Because of the magnificent cave art which they created, they were at first called "cavemen." In fact, they roamed Earth freely, for they knew how to build shelters and homes of stones and animal skins wherever they went.

For millions of years, Man's tools had been simply stones of useful shapes. Cro-Magnon Man, however, made specialized tools and weapons of wood and bones. He was no longer a "naked ape," for he used skins for clothing. His society was organized; he lived in clans with a patriarchal hegemony. His cave drawings bespeak artistry and depth of feeling; his drawings and sculptures evidence some form of "religion," apparent is the worship of a Mother Goddess, who was sometimes depicted with the sign of the Moon's crescent. He buried his dead, and must therefore have had some philosophies regarding life, death, and perhaps even an afterlife.

As mysterious and unexplained as the appearance of Cro-Magnon Man has been, the puzzle is still more complicated. For, as other remains of modern Man were discovered (at sites including Swanscombe, Steinheim, and Montmaria), it became apparent that Cro-Magnon Man stemmed from an even earlier Homo sapiens who lived in western Asia and North Africa some 250,000 years before Cro-Magnon Man.

The appearance of modern Man a mere 700,000 years after Homo erectus and some 200,000 years before Neanderthal Man is absolutely implausible. It is also clear that Homo sapiens represents such an extreme departure from the slow evolutionary process that many of our features, such as the ability to speak, are totally un-related to the earlier primates.

An outstanding authority on the subject, Professor Theodosius Dobzhansky (Mankind Evolving), was especially puzzled by the fact that this development took place during a period when Earth was going

through an ice age, a most unpropitious time for evolutionary advance. Pointing out that Homo sapiens lacks completely some of the peculiarities of the previously known types, and has some that never appeared before, he concluded: "Modern man has many fossil collateral relatives but no progenitors; the derivation of Homo sapiens, then, becomes a puzzle."

How, then, did the ancestors of modern Man appear some 300,000 years ago - instead of 2,000,000 or 3,000,000 years in the future, following further evolutionary development? Were we imported to Earth from elsewhere, or were we, as the Old Testament and other ancient sources claim, created by the gods? We now know where civilization began and how it developed, once it began. The unanswered question is: Why - why did civilization come about at all? For, as most scholars now admit in frustration, by all data Man should still be without civilization. There is no obvious reason that we should be any more civilized than the primitive tribes of the Amazon jungles or the inaccessible parts of New Guinea, But, we are told, these tribesmen still live as if in the Stone Age because they have been isolated. But isolated from what? If they have been living on the same Earth as we, why have they not acquired the same knowledge of sciences and technologies on their own as we supposedly have?

The real puzzle, however, is not the backwardness of the Bushmen, but our advancement; for it is now recognized that in the normal course of evolution Man should still be typified by the Bushmen and not by us. It took Man some 2,000,000 years to advance in his "tool industries" from the use of stones as he found them to the realization that he could chip and shape stones to better suit his purposes. Why not another 2,000,000 years to learn the use of other materials, and another 10,000,000 years to master mathematics and engineering and astronomy? Yet here we are, less than 50,000 years from Neanderthal Man, landing astronauts on the Moon.

The obvious question, then, is this: Did we and our Mediterranean ancestors really acquire this advanced civilization on our own?

Though Cro-Magnon Man did not build skyscrapers nor use metals, there is no doubt that his was a sudden and revolutionary civilization. His mobility, ability to build shelters, his desire to clothe himself, his manufactured tools, his art - all were a sudden high civilization breaking an endless beginning of Man's culture that stretched over millions of years and advanced at a painfully slow pace.

Though our scholars cannot explain the appearance of Homo sapiens and the civilization of Cro-Magnon Man, there is by now no doubt regarding this civilization's place of origin: the Near East. The uplands and mountain ranges that extend in a semiarc from the Zagros Mountains in the east (where present-day Iran and Iraq border on each other), through the Ararat and Taurus ranges in the north, then down, westward and southward, to the hill lands of Syria, Lebanon, and Israel, are replete with caves where the evidence of prehistoric but modern Man has been preserved.

One of these caves, Shanidar, is located in the north-eastern part of the semiarc of civilization.

Nowadays, fierce Kurdish tribesmen seek shelter in the area's caves for themselves and their flocks during the cold winter months. So it was, one wintry night 44,000 years ago, when a family of seven (one of whom was a baby) sought shelter in the cave of Shanidar.

Their remains - they were evidently crushed to death by a rockfall - were discovered in 1957 by a startled Ralph Solecki, who went to the area in search of evidence of early Man (Professor Solecki has told nine skeletons were found, of which only four were crushed by rockfall.) What he found was more than

he expected. As layer upon layer of debris was removed, it became apparent that the cave preserved a clear record of Man's habitation in the area from about 100,000 to some 13,000 years ago.

What this record showed was as surprising as the find itself. Man's culture has shown not a progression but a regression. Starting from a certain standard, the following generations showed not more advanced but less advanced standards of civilized life. And from about 27,000 B.C. to 11,000 B.C., the regressing and dwindling population reached the point of an almost complete absence of habitation. For reasons that are assumed to have been climatic, Man was almost completely gone from the whole area for some 16,000 years.

And then, circa 11,000 B.C., "thinking Man" reappeared with new vigor and on an inexplicably higher cultural level.

It was as if an unseen coach, watching the faltering human game, dispatched to the field a fresh and better-trained team to take over from the exhausted one.

Throughout the many millions of years of his endless beginning, Man was nature's child; he subsisted by gathering the foods that grew wild, by hunting the wild animals, by catching wild birds and fishes. But just as Man's settlements were thinning out, just as he was abandoning his abodes, when his material and artistic achievements were disappearing - just then, suddenly, with no apparent reason and without any prior known period of gradual preparation - Man became a farmer.

Summarizing the work of many eminent authorities on the subject, R. J. Braidwood and B. Howe (Prehistoric Investigations in Iraqi Kurdistan) concluded that genetic studies confirm the archaeological finds and leave no doubt that agriculture began exactly where Thinking Man had emerged earlier with his first crude civilization: in the Near East. There is no doubt by now that agriculture spread all over the world from the Near Eastern arc of mountains and highlands.

Employing sophisticated methods of radiocarbon dating and plant genetics, many scholars from various fields of science concur in the conclusion that Man's first farming venture was the cultivation of wheat and barley, probably through the domestication of a wild variety of emmer. Assuming that, somehow, Man did undergo a gradual process of teaching himself how to domesticate, grow, and farm a wild plant, the scholars remain baffled by the profusion of other plants and cereals basic to human survival and advancement that kept coming out of the Near East. These included, in rapid succession, millet, rye, and spelt, among the edible cereals; flax, which provided fibers and edible oil; and a variety of fruit-bearing shrubs and trees. In every instance, the plant was undoubtedly domesticated in the Near East for millennia before it reached Europe. It was as though the Near East were some kind of genetic-botanical laboratory, guided by an unseen hand, producing every so often a newly domesticated plant.

The scholars who have studied the origins of the grape-vine have concluded that its cultivation began in the mountains around northern Mesopotamia and in Syria and Palestine. No wonder. The Old Testament tells us that Noah "planted a vineyard" (and even got drunk on its wine) after his ark rested on Mount Ararat as the waters of the Deluge receded. The Bible, like the scholars, thus places the start of vine cultivation in the mountains of northern Mesopotamia.

Apples, pears, olives, figs, almonds, pistachios, walnuts - all originated in the Near East and spread from there to Europe and other parts of the world. Indeed, we cannot help recalling that the Old Testament preceded our scholars by several millennia in identifying the very same area as the world's first orchard: "And the Lord God planted an orchard in Eden, in the east. . . . And the Lord God caused; to grow, out of the ground, every tree that is pleasant to behold and that is good for eating."

The general location of "Eden" was certainly known to the biblical generations. It was "in the east" - east

of the Land of Israel. It was in a land watered by four major rivers, two of which are the Tigris and the Euphrates.

There can be no doubt that the Book of Genesis located the first orchard in the highlands where these rivers originated, in northeastern Mesopotamia. Bible and science are in full agreement.

As a matter of fact, if we read the original Hebrew text of the Book of Genesis not as a theological but as a scientific text, we find that it also accurately describes the process of plant domestication. Science tells us that the process went from wild grasses to wild cereals to cultivated cereals, followed by fruit-bearing shrubs and trees. This is exactly the process detailed in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis.

And the Lord said:

"Let the Earth bring forth grasses;
cereals that by seeds produce seeds;
fruit trees that bear fruit by species,
which contain the seed within themselves."

And it was so:

The Earth brought forth grass;
cereals that by seed produce seed, by species;
and trees that bear fruit, which contain
the seed within themselves, by species.

The Book of Genesis goes on to tell us that Man, expelled from the orchard of Eden, had to toil hard to grow his food. "By the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread," the Lord said to Adam. It was after that that "Abel was a keeper of herds and Cain was a tiller of the soil." Man, the Bible tells us, became a shepherd soon after he became a farmer.

Scholars are in full agreement with this biblical sequence of events. Analyzing the various theories regarding animal domestication, F. E. Zeuner (Domestication of Animals) stresses that Man could not have "acquired the habit of keeping animals in captivity or domestication before he reached the stage of living in social units of some size." Such settled communities, a prerequisite for animal domestication, followed the changeover to agriculture.

The first animal to be domesticated was the dog, and not necessarily as Man's best friend but probably also for food. This, it is believed, took place circa 9500 B.C. The first skeletal remains of dogs have been found in Iran, Iraq, and Israel.

Sheep were domesticated at about the same time; the Shanidar cave contains remains of sheep from circa 9000 B.C., showing that a large part of each year's young were killed for food and skins. Goats, which also provided milk, soon followed; and pigs, horned cattle, and hornless cattle were next to be domesticated. In every instance, the domestication began in the Near East.

The abrupt change in the course of human events that occurred circa 11,000 B.C. in the Near East (and some 2,000 years later in Europe) has led scholars to describe that time as the clear end of the Old Stone Age (the Paleolithic) and the beginning of a new cultural era, the Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic).

The name is appropriate, only if one considers Man's principal raw material - which continued to be stone. His dwellings in the mountainous areas were still built of stone; his communities were protected by stone walls; his first agricultural implement - the sickle - was made of stone. He honored or protected his dead by covering and adorning their graves with stones; and he used stone to make images of the

Chapter One

THE POSITIVE APPROACH

If you are a teacher, have you been teaching long enough to remember when children sat in neat rows and obediently did what they were told? If you are a parent, do you remember when children wouldn't dare talk back to their parents? Maybe you don't, but perhaps your grandparents do.

Many parents and teachers today are feeling frustrated because children don't behave the way they used to in the good old days. What happened? Why don't today's children develop the same kinds of responsibility and motivation that seemed more prevalent in children many years ago?

There are many possible explanations, such as broken homes, too much television, video games, and working mothers. These factors are so common in our society today that the situation would seem rather hopeless if they really explained our current challenges with children. (And we all know of many single and working parents who are doing a great job raising their children because they use effective parenting skills.) Rudolf Dreikurs' had another theory.

There are many major changes that have taken place in society over the past few years that more directly explain the differences in children today. The outlook is very encouraging because, with

awareness and desire, we can compensate for these changes and in doing so can also eliminate some of the problems that many think are caused by broken homes, too much television, and working mothers.

The first major change is that adults no longer give children an example or model of submissiveness and obedience. Adults forget that they no longer act the way they used to in the good old days. Remember when Mom obediently did whatever Dad said, or at least gave the impression she did, because it was the culturally acceptable thing to do? In the good old days few people questioned the idea that Dad's decisions were final.

Because of the human rights movement, this is no longer true. Rudolf Dreikurs pointed out, "When Dad lost control of Mom, they both lost control of the children." All this means is that Mom quit giving the children a model of submissiveness. This is progress. Many things about the good old days were not so good.

In those days there were many models of submission. Dad obeyed the boss (who was not interested in his opinions) so he wouldn't lose his job. Minority groups accepted submissive roles at great loss to their personal dignity. Today all minority groups are actively claiming their rights to full equality and dignity. It is difficult to find anyone who is willing to accept an inferior, submissive role in life. Children are simply following the examples all around them. They also want to be treated with dignity and respect.

It is important to note that equality does not mean *the same*. Four quarters and a dollar bill are very different, but equal. Children obviously do not deserve all the rights that come with greater experience, skills, and maturity. Adult leadership and guidance are important. However, children deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. They also deserve the opportunity to develop the life skills they need in an atmosphere of kindness and firmness instead of an atmosphere of blame, shame, and pain.

Another major change is that in today's society children have

fewer opportunities to learn responsibility and motivation. We no longer *need* children as important contributors to economic survival. Instead children are given too much in the name of love without any effort or investment on their part and they develop an entitlement attitude. Too many mothers and fathers believe that good parents protect their children from all disappointment. They rescue or overprotect—thus robbing their children of the opportunity to develop a belief in their capability to handle the ups and downs of life. Skill training is often neglected because of busy life schedules or a lack of understanding of how important it is for children to contribute. We often rob children of opportunities to feel belonging and significance in meaningful ways through responsible contributions and then complain and criticize them for not developing responsibility.

Children do not develop responsibility when parents and teachers are too strict and controlling, nor do they develop responsibility when parents and teachers are permissive. Children learn responsibility when they have opportunities to learn valuable social and life skills for good character in an atmosphere of kindness, firmness, dignity, and respect.

It is important to emphasize that eliminating punishment does not mean that children should be allowed to do whatever they want. We need to provide opportunities for children to experience responsibility in direct relationship to the privileges they enjoy. Otherwise, they become dependent recipients who feel that the only way to achieve belonging and significance is by manipulating other people into their service. Some children develop the belief, "I'm not loved unless others take care of me." Others may develop the belief that they shouldn't try because they can't do very much that doesn't invite shame and pain. It is saddest when they develop the belief "I'm not good enough" because they don't have opportunities to practice proficiencies that would help them feel capable. These children spend a great deal of energy in rebellion or avoidance behaviors.

DOGS: THE ROYAL WRUFFIANS

When the Queen was seen wearing a sticking plaster on her hand late in 2006, there was, inevitably, speculation as to how she had injured herself, and concern for her health as she turned 80. But to seasoned royal watchers the answer should have been obvious—she had been hurt breaking up a fight among her beloved corgis!

It is often said that the Queen prefers the company of dogs and horses to people. This probably stems from her childhood when she and her younger sister Margaret led an isolated existence, and in the absence of many friends, they became much closer to their pets.

As far as the monarch is concerned her corgis can do no wrong. But that's not always how servants and visitors to royal palaces see it. Looking after as many as seven or eight corgis at a time is no easy task and for two footmen it is one of their most important duties.

At Buckingham Palace the dogs sleep in their own room, next to the Page's Pantry just outside the Queen's bedroom. They have wicker baskets, raised slightly off the ground to avoid draughts. Sometimes Her Majesty even allows some of them to sleep in her room.

Normally a footman takes them into the garden first thing in the morning to 'do their business'. But inevitably some will occasionally misbehave inside, and staff then have the unpleasant task of cleaning up the mess. Blotting paper and soda water are on hand to remove stains.

Soda-siphons have also been turned on the pooches themselves by frustrated footmen. 'When we got fed up with them snapping around our heels we would give them a good hosing down,' said one retired servant. 'The Queen did sometimes seem curious as to why the dogs were wet when it hadn't been raining but we never told her the truth—she would have gone mental.'

The Queen did 'go mental' in 1999 when one of her footmen got the corgis drunk on whisky and gin! Under the typically brilliant headline 'Flunky got the corgis drunk' *The Sun*, Britain's biggest-selling daily tabloid, told how the Queen's footman Matthew King was demoted after it was discovered he was spiking the dogs' food and water as a prank. Another servant said: 'He thought it was funny to see the dogs staggering about. He lost his position and was lucky not to get sacked. The Queen did not see the funny side to put it mildly.'

King, then 28, was downgraded to the rank of a normal footman and lost several privileges.

Suspicions were aroused two year earlier when one corgi—Phoenix—died during the Queen's summer break at Balmoral in Scotland. A routine post-mortem examination carried out by a vet on the 14-year-old revealed traces of alcohol in its blood. King's other duties included responsibility for Her Majesty's drinks trolley—groaning with whisky, gin and other spirits. A colleague claimed: 'Matthew made sure he only played the prank when the Queen was away. He thought it was all a bit of fun, which didn't do the dogs any harm. But he was well and truly in the doghouse when he was finally found out.'

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The Squirrel and the Chipmunk

The squirrel and the chipmunk had been dating for two weeks when they ran out of things to talk about. Acorns, parasites, the inevitable approach of autumn: these subjects had been covered within their first hour, and so breathlessly their faces had flushed. Twice they had held long conversations about dogs, each declaring an across-the-board hatred of them and speculating on what life might be like were someone to put a bowl of food in front of *them* two times a day. "They're spoiled rotten is what it comes down to," the chipmunk had said, and the squirrel had placed his paw over hers, saying, "That's it exactly. Finally, someone who really *gets* it."



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Friends had warned them that their romance could not possibly work out, and such moments convinced them that the skeptics were not just wrong but jealous. "They'll never have what we do," the squirrel would say, and then the two of them would sit quietly, hoping for a flash flood or a rifle report — something, anything, that might generate a conversation.

They were out one night at a little bar run by a couple of owls when, following a long silence, the squirrel slapped his palm against the tabletop. "You know what I like?" he said. "I like jazz."

"I didn't know that," the chipmunk said. "My goodness, jazz!" She had no idea what jazz was but worried that asking would make her sound stupid. "What kind, exactly?" she asked, hoping his answer might narrow things down a bit.

"Well, all kinds, really," he told her. "Especially the earlier stuff."

"Me too," she said, and when he asked her why, she told him that the later stuff was just too late for her tastes. "Almost like it was overripe or something. You know what I mean?"

Then, for the third time since she had known him, the squirrel reached across the table and took her paw.

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On returning home that evening, the chipmunk woke her older sister, with whom she shared a room. "Listen," she whispered, "I need you to explain something. What's jazz?"

"Why are you asking me?" the sister said.

"So you don't know either?" the chipmunk asked.

"I didn't say I didn't know," the sister said. "I asked you why you're asking. Does this have anything to do with that squirrel?"

"Maybe," the chipmunk said.

"Well, I'm telling," the sister announced. "First thing tomorrow morning, because this has gone on long enough." She punched at her pillow of moss, then repositioned it beneath her head. "I warned you weeks ago that this wouldn't work out, and now you've got the whole house in an uproar. Walking home in the middle of the night, waking me up with your dirty little secrets. Jazz indeed. Just you wait until Mother hears about this."

The chipmunk lay awake that night, imagining the unpleasantness that was bound to take place the following morning. What if jazz was squirrel slang

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for something terrible, like anal intercourse? "Oh, I like it too," she'd said — and so eagerly! Then again, it could just be mildly terrible, something along the lines of Communism or fortune-telling, subjects that were talked about but hardly ever practiced. Just as she thought she had calmed herself down, a new possibility would enter her mind, each one more horrible than the last. Jazz was the maggot-infested flesh of a dead body, the crust on an infected eye, another word for ritual suicide. And she had claimed to like it!

Years later, when she could put it all in perspective, she'd realize that she had never really trusted the squirrel — how else to explain all those terrible possibilities? Had he been another chipmunk, even a tough one, she'd have assumed that jazz was something familiar, a kind of root, say, or maybe a hairstyle. Of course, her sister hadn't helped any. None of her family had. "It's not that I have anything against squirrels per se," her mother had said. "It's just that this one, well, I don't like him." When pressed for details, she'd mentioned his fingernails, which were a little too

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long for her taste. "A sure sign of vanity," she warned. "And now there's this jazz business."

That was what did it. Following the sleepless night, the chipmunk's mother had forced her to break it off.

"Well," the squirrel had sighed, "I guess that's that."

"I guess it is," the chipmunk said.

He headed downriver a few days later, and she never saw him or heard from him again.

"It's not a great loss," her sister said. "No girl should be subjected to language like that, especially from the likes of him."

"Amen," her mother added.

Eventually the chipmunk met someone else, and after she had safely married, her mother speculated that perhaps jazz was a branch of medicine — something like chiropractic therapy — that wasn't quite legitimate. Her sister said no, it was more likely a jig, and then she pushed herself back from the table and kicked her chubby legs into the air. "Oh, you," her mother said, "that's a cancan," and then she joined in and gave a few kicks of her own.

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This struck in the chipmunk's mind, as she never knew her mother could identify a dance step or anything associated with fun. It was the way her own children would eventually think of her: dull, strict, chained to the past. She had boys, all of them healthy, and only one prone to trouble. He had a habit of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, but his heart was good, and the chipmunk knew he would eventually straighten himself out. Her husband thought so too, and died knowing that he had been correct.

A month or two after he'd passed on, she asked this son what jazz was, and when he told her it was a kind of music, she knew instinctively that he was telling the truth. "Is it bad music?" she asked.

"Well, if it's *played* badly," he said. "Otherwise it's really quite pleasant."

"Did squirrels invent it?"

"God, no," he said. "Whoever gave you that idea?"

The chipmunk stroked her brown-and-white muzzle. "Nobody," she said. "I was just guessing."

When her muzzle grew more white than brown, the chipmunk forgot that she and the squirrel had had

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nothing to talk about. She forgot the definition of "jazz" as well and came to think of it as every beautiful thing she had ever failed to appreciate: the taste of warm rain; the smell of a baby; the din of a swollen river, rushing past her tree and onward to infinity.

they'd collided with a rough air current or a ghost instead of a man. "The umbrella," Charlie said, looking for the evidence. Then he spotted it, almost down at the next corner, lying in the gutter, still glowing red, pulsating like failing neon. "There! See!" But people were gathered around the dead man in a wide semicircle, their hands to their mouths, and no one was paying any attention to the frightened thin man spouting nonsense behind them.

He threaded his way through the crowd toward the umbrella, determined now to confirm his conviction, too far in shock to be afraid. When he was only ten feet away from it he looked up the street to make sure another bus wasn't coming before he ventured off the curb. He looked back just as a delicate, tar-black hand snaked out of the storm drain and snatched the compact umbrella off the street.

Charlie backed away, looking around to see if anyone had seen what he had seen, but no one had. No one even made eye contact. A policeman trotted by and Charlie grabbed his sleeve as he passed, but when the cop spun around and his eyes went wide with confusion, then what appeared to be real terror, Charlie let him go. "Sorry," he said. "Sorry. I can see you've got work to do—sorry."

The cop shuddered and pushed through the crowd of onlookers toward the battered body of William Creek.

Charlie started running, across Columbus and up Vallejo, until his breath and heartbeat in his ears drowned all the sounds of the street. When he was a block away from his shop a great shadow moved over him, like a low-flying aircraft or a huge bird, and with it Charlie felt a chill vibrate up his back. He lowered his head, pumped his arms, and rounded the corner of Mason just as the cable car was passing, full of smiling tourists who looked right through him. He glanced up, just for a second, and he thought he saw something above, disappearing over the roof of the six-story Victorian across the street, then he bolted through the front door of his shop.

"Hey, boss," Lily said. She was sixteen, pale, and a little bottom heavy—her grown-woman form still in flux between baby fat and

baby bearing. Today her hair happened to be lavender: fifties-housewife helmet hair in Easter-basket cellophane pastel.

Charlie was bent over, leaning against a case full of curios by the door, sucking in deep raspy gulps of secondhand store mustiness. "I—think—I—just—killed—a—guy," he gasped.

"Excellent," Lily said, ignoring equally his message and his demeanor. "We're going to need change for the register."

"With a bus," Charlie said.

"Ray called in," she said. Ray Macy was Charlie's other employee, a thirty-nine-year-old bachelor with an unhealthy lack of boundaries between the Internet and reality. "He's flying to Manila to meet the love of his life. A Ms. *LoveYouLongTime*. Ray's convinced that they are soul mates."

"There was something in the sewer," Charlie said.

Lily examined a chip in her black nail polish. "So I cut school to cover. I've been doing that since you've been, uh, gone. I'm going to need a note."

Charlie stood up and made his way to the counter. "Lily, did you hear what I said?"

He grabbed her by the shoulders, but she spun out of his grasp. "Ouch! Fuck. Back off, Asher, you sado freak, that's a new tattoo." She punched him in the arm, hard, and backed away, rubbing her own shoulder. "I heard, you. Cease your trippin', *s'il vous plait*." Lately, since discovering Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* in a stack of used books in the back room, Lily had been peppering her speech with French phrases. "French better expresses the profound *nonness* of my existence," she had said.

Charlie put both hands on the counter to keep them from shaking, then spoke slowly and deliberately, like he was speaking to someone for whom English was a second language: "Lily, I'm having kind of a bad month, and I appreciate that you are throwing away your education so you can come here and alienate customers for me, but if you don't sit down and show me a little fucking human decency, then I'm going to have to let you go."

Lily sat down on the chrome-and-vinyl diner stool behind the register and pulled her long lavender bangs out of her eyes. "So you want me to pay close attention to your confession to murder? Take notes, maybe get an old cassette recorder off the shelf and get everything down on tape? You're saying that by trying to ignore your obvious distress, which I would have to later recall to the police, so I can be personally responsible for sending you to the gas chamber, that I'm being inconsiderate?"

Charlie shuddered. "Jeez, Lily." He was continually surprised at the speed and accuracy of her creepiness. She was like some creepy-ness child prodigy. But on the bright side, her extreme darkness made him realize that he probably wasn't going to go to the gas chamber.

"I wasn't that kind of killing. There was something following me, and—"

"Silence!" Lily put her hand up, "I'd rather not show my employee spirit by committing every detail of your heinous crime to my photographic memory to be recalled in court later. I'll just say that I saw you but you seemed normal for someone without a clue."

"You don't have a photographic memory?"

"I do, too, and it's a curse. I can never forget the futility of—"

"You forgot to take out the trash at least eight times last month."

"I didn't forget."

Charlie took a deep breath, the familiarity of arguing with Lily was actually calming him down. "Okay then, without looking, what color shirt are you wearing?" He raised an eyebrow like he had her there.

Lily smiled and for a second he could see that she was just a kid, kind of cute and goofy under the fierce makeup and attitude. "Black?"

"Lucky guess."

"You know I only own black." She grinned. "Glad you didn't ask hair color, I just changed this morning."

"That's not good for you, you know. That dye has toxins."

Lily lifted the lavender wig to reveal her close-cut maroon locks underneath, then dropped it again. "I'm all natural." She stood and patted the bar stool. "Sit, Asher. Confess. Bore me."

Lily leaned back against the counter, and tilted her head to look attentive, but with her dark eye makeup and lavender hair it came off more like a marionette with a broken string. Charlie came around the counter and sat on the stool. "I was just in line behind this William Creek guy, and I saw his umbrella glowing..."

And Charlie went through the whole story to her: the umbrella, the bus, the hand from the storm sewer, the bolt for home with the giant dark shadow above the rooftops, and when he was finished, Lily asked, "So how do you know his name?"

"Huh?" Charlie said. Of all of the horrible, fantastic things she might have asked about, why that?

"How do you know the guy's name?" Lily repeated. "You barely spoke to the guy before he bit it. You see it on his receipt or something?"

"No, I..." He didn't have any idea how he knew the man's name, but suddenly there was a picture in his head of it written out in big, block letters. He leapt off the stool. "I gotta go, Lily."

He ran through the door into the stockroom and up the steps.

"I still need a note for school," Lily shouted from below, but Charlie was dashing through the kitchen, past a large Russian woman who was bouncing his baby daughter in her arms, and into the bedroom, where he snatched up the notepad he kept on his nightstand by the phone.

There, in his own blocky handwriting, was written the name William Creek and, under it, the number 12. He sat down hard on the bed, holding the notepad like it was a vial of explosives.

Behind him came the heavy steps of Mrs. Korjev as she followed him into the bedroom. "Mr. Asher, what is wrong? You run by like burning bear?"

And Charlie, because he was a Beta Male, and there had evolved

over millions of years a standard Beta response to things inexplicable, said, "Someone is fucking with me."

Lily was touching up her nail polish with a black Magic Marker when Stephan, the mailman, came through the shop door.

"Sup, Darque?" Stephan said, sorting a stack of mail out of his bag. He was forty, short, muscular, and black. He wore wraparound sunglasses, which were almost always pushed back on his head over hair braided in tight corrrows. Lily had mixed feelings about him. She liked him because he called her Darque, short for Darquewillow. Elventing, the name under which she received mail at the shop, but because he was cheerful and seemed to like people, she deeply mistrusted him.

"Need you to sign," Stephan said, offering her an electronic pad, on which she scribbled *Charles Baudelaire* with great flourish and without even looking.

Stephan plopped the mail on the counter. "Working alone again?"

So where is everyone?"

"Ray's in the Philippines, Charlie's traumatized." She sighed.

"Weight of the world falls on me—"

"Poor Charlie," Stephan said. "They say that's the worst thing you can go through, losing a spouse."

"Yeah, there's that, too. Today he's traumatized because he saw a guy get hit by a bus up on Columbus."

"Heard about that. He gonna be okay?"

"Well, fuck no, Stephan, he got hit by a bus." Lily looked up from her nails for the first time.

"I meant Charlie." Stephan winked, despite her harsh tone.

"Oh, he's Charlie."

"How's the baby?"

"Evidently she leaks noxious substances." Lily waved the Magic Marker under her nose as if it might mask the smell of ripened baby.

"All good, then," Stephan smiled. "That's it for today. You got anything for me?"

"I took in some red vinyl platforms yesterday. Men's size ten."

Stephan collected vintage seventies pimp wear. Lily was to be on the lookout for anything that came through the shop.

"How tall?"

"Four inches."

"Low altitude," Stephan said, as if that explained everything.

"Take care, Darque."

Lily waved her Magic Marker at him as he left, and started sorting through the mail. There were mostly bills, a couple of flyers, but one thick black envelope that felt like a book or catalog. It was addressed to Charlie Asher "in care of" Asher's Secondhand and had a postmark from Nighi's Plutonian Shore, which evidently was in whatever state started with a U. (Lily found geography not only mind-numbingly boring, but also, in the age of the Internet, irrelevant.)

Was it not addressed to the care of Asher's Secondhand? Lily reasoned. And was she, Lily Darquewillow Elventing, not manning the counter, the sole employee—nay—the de facto manager, of said secondhand store? And wasn't it her right—nay—her responsibility to open this envelope and spare Charlie the irritation of the task? Onward, Elventing! Your destiny is set, and if it be not destiny, then surely there is plausible deniability, which in the parlance of politics is the same thing.

She drew a jewel-encrusted dagger from under the counter (the stones valued at over seventy-three cents) and slit the envelope, pulled out the book, and fell in love.

The cover was shiny, like a children's picture book, with a colorful illustration of a grinning skeleton with tiny people impaled on his fingertips, and all of them appeared to be having the time of their lives, as if they were enjoying a carnival ride that just happened to involve having a gaping hole being punched through the chest. It was festive—lots of flowers and candy in primary colors, done in the

tiful places there were in Scotland and beautiful scenery. Her son-in-law brought them every year to the lakes and they used to go fishing. Her son-in-law was a splendid fisher. One day he caught a fish, a beautiful big big fish; and the man in the hotel boiled it for their dinner.

Gabriel hardly heard what she said. Now that supper was coming near he began to think again about his speech and about the quotation. When he saw Freddy Malins coming across the room to visit his mother Gabriel left the chair free for him and retired into the embrasure of the window. The room had already cleared and from the back room came the clatter of plates and knives. Those who still remained in the drawing-room seemed tired of dancing and were conversing quietly in little groups. Gabriel's warm trembling fingers tapped the cold pane of the window. How cool it must be outside! How pleasant it would be to walk out alone, first along by the river and then through the park! The snow would be lying on the branches of the trees and forming a bright cap on the top of the Wellington monument. How much more pleasant it would be there than at the supper table!

He ran over the headings of his speech: Irish hospitality; sad memories, the Three Graces, Paris, the quotation from Browning. He repeated to himself a phrase he had written in his review: *One feels that one is listening to a disorganised music*. Miss Ivors had praised the review. Was she sincere? Had she really any life of her own behind all her pagandism? There had never been any ill feeling between them until that night. It unnerved him to think that she would be at the supper table, looking up at him while he spoke with her critical quizzing eyes. Perhaps she would not be sorry to see him fail in his speech. An idea came into his mind and gave him courage. He would say, alluding to aunt Kate and aunt Julia: *Ladies and gentlemen, the generation which is now on the wane among us may have had its faults but for my part I think it had certain qualities of hospitality, of humour, of humanity, which the new and very serious and hypereducated generation that is growing up around us seems to me to lack*. Very good: that was one for Miss Ivors. What did he care that his aunts were only two ignorant old women?

A murmur in the room attracted his attention. Mr Browne was advancing from the door, gallantly escorting aunt Julia who leaned

upon his arm, smiling and hanging her head. An irregular musketry of applause escorted her also as far as the piano and then, as Mary Jane seated herself on the stool and aunt Julia, no longer smiling, half turned so as to pitch her voice fairly into the room, gradually ceased. Gabriel recognised the prelude. It was that of an old song of aunt Julia's, *Arroyo for the Bridal*. Her voice strong and clear in tone attacked with great spirit the runs which embellish the air and, though she sang very rapidly, she did not miss even the smallest of the grace notes. To follow the voice, without looking at the singer's face, was to feel and share the excitement of swift and secure flight. Gabriel applauded loudly with all the others at the close of the song and loud applause was borne in from the invisible supper table. It sounded so genuine that a little colour struggled into aunt Julia's face as she bent to replace in the music stand the old leatherbound songbook that had her initials on the cover. Freddy Malins, who had listened with his head perched sideways to hear the better, was still applauding when everyone else had ceased and raising animatedly to his mother who nodded her head gravely and slowly in acquiescence. At last, when he could clap no more, he stood up suddenly and hurried across the room to aunt Julia, whose hand he seized and held in both his hands, shaking it when words failed him or the catch in his voice proved too much for him.

—I was just telling my mother, he said, I never heard you sing so well, never. No, I never heard your voice so good as it is tonight. Now? Would you believe that now? That's the truth. Upon my word and honour that's the truth. I never heard your voice sound so fresh and so . . . so clear and fresh, never.

Aunt Julia smiled broadly and murmured something about compliments as she released her hand from his grasp. Mr Browne extended his open hand towards her and said to those who were near him in the manner of a showman introducing a prodigy to an audience:

—Miss Julia Morlan, my latest discovery!

He was laughing very heartily at this himself when Freddy Malins turned to him and said:

—Well, Browne, if you're serious you might make a worse discov-

ery. All I can say is I never heard her sing half so well as long as I am coming here. And that's the honest truth.

—Neither did I, said Mr Browne. I think her voice has greatly improved.

Aunt Julia shrugged her shoulders and said with meek pride:

—Thirty years ago I hadn't a bad voice as voices go.

—I often told Julia, said aunt Kate emphatically, that she was simply thrown away in that choir. But she never would be said by me.

She turned as if to appeal to the good sense of the others against a refractory child while aunt Julia gazed in front of her, a vague smile of reminiscence playing on her face.

—No, continued aunt Kate, she wouldn't be said or led by anyone, slaving there in that choir night and day, night and day. Six o'clock on Christmas morning! And all for what?

—Well, isn't it for the honour of God, aunt Kate? asked Mary Jane twisting round on the piano stool and smiling.

Aunt Kate turned fiercely on her niece and said:

—I know all about the honour of God, Mary Jane, but I think it's not at all honourable for the pope to turn out the women out of the choirs that have slaved there all their lives and put little whippersnappers of boys over their heads. I suppose it is for the good of the church if the pope does it. But it's not just, Mary Jane, and it's not right.

She had worked herself into a passion and would have continued in defence of her sister for it was a sore subject with her but Mary Jane, seeing that all the dancers had come back, intervened pacifically:

—Now, aunt Kate, you're giving scandal to Mr Browne who is of the other persuasion.

Aunt Kate turned to Mr Browne, who was grinning at this allusion to his religion, and said hastily:

—O, I don't question the pope's being right. I'm only a stupid old woman and I wouldn't presume to do such a thing. But there's such a thing as common everyday politeness and gratitude. And if I were in Julia's place I'd tell that Father Healy straight up to his face. . . .

—And besides, aunt Kate, said Mary Jane, we really are all hungry and when we are hungry we are all very quarrelsome.

—And when we are thirsty we are also quarrelsome, added Mr Browne.

—So that we had better go to supper, said Mary Jane, and finish the discussion afterwards.

On the landing outside the drawingroom Gabriel found his wife and Mary Jane trying to persuade Miss Ivors to stay for supper. But Miss Ivors, who had put on her hat and was buttoning her cloak, would not stay. She did not feel in the least hungry and she had already overstayed her time.

—But only for ten minutes, Molly, said Mrs Conroy. That won't delay you.

—To take a pick itself, said Mary Jane, after all your dancing.

—I really couldn't, said Miss Ivors.

—I am afraid you didn't enjoy yourself at all, said Mary Jane hopelessly.

—Ever so much, I assure you, said Miss Ivors, but you really must let me run off now.

—But how can you get home? asked Mrs Conroy.

—O, it's only two steps up the quay.

Gabriel hesitated a moment and said:

—If you will allow me, Miss Ivors, I'll see you home if you really are obliged to go.

But Miss Ivors broke away from them.

—I won't hear of it, she cried. For goodness' sake go in to your supper and don't mind me. I'm quite well able to take care of myself.

—Well, you're the comical girl, Molly, said Mrs Conroy frankly.

—*Beannacht fíbh*, cried Miss Ivors with a laugh as she ran down the staircase.

Mary Jane gazed after her, a moody puzzled expression on her face, while Mrs Conroy leaned over the banisters to listen for the halldoor. Gabriel asked himself was he the cause of her abrupt departure. But she did not seem to be in ill humour: she had gone away laughing. He stared blankly down the staircase.

At that moment aunt Kate came toddling out of the supper room, almost wringing her hands in despair.

CHAPTER 4

3P - M/F

Screams tore through the air as panicked people fled in every direction. Mark bent down, grabbing Darnell by hooking his elbows under the boy's arms. The sound of flying darts cutting through the air to his left and right, finding targets, urged him to hurry, erasing any other thoughts from his mind.

Mark pulled on Darnell, dragging his body along the ground. Trina had fallen but Lana was there, helping her up. Both of them ran over to help, each grabbing one of Darnell's feet. With synchronized grunts they hefted him up and moved away from the Square, away from the open space. It was a miracle no one else in their little group had been struck by a dart.

Swish, swish, swish. Thunk, thunk, thunk. Screams and bodies falling.

The projectiles kept coming, landing all around them, and Mark and Trina and Lana shuffled as quickly as they could, awkwardly carrying Darnell between them. They passed behind a group of trees—Mark heard a few hard thunks as darts buried themselves in the branches and trunks—then they were in the open again. They hurried across a small clearing and into an alley between several haphazardly built log cabins. There were people everywhere, knocking frantically on doors, jumping through open windows.

Then Mark heard the roar of the thrusters and a warm wind blew across his face. The roar grew louder, the wind stronger. He looked up, following the noise, to see that the Berg had shifted position, pursuing the fleeing crowds. He saw the Toad and Misty. They were urging people to hurry, their shouts lost in the Berg's blast.

Mark didn't know what to do. Finding shelter was the best bet, but there were too many people trying to do the same thing and joining the chaos with Darnell in tow would only get them trampled. The Berg stopped again, and once more the strangers in their odd suits lifted their weapons and opened fire.

Swish, swish, swish. Thunk, thunk, thunk.

A dart grazed Mark's shirt and hit the ground; someone stepped on it, driving it deeper. Another dart hit home in the neck of a man just as he was running past—he screamed and dove forward as blood spurted from the wound. When he landed, he lay still and three people tripped over him. Mark only realized that he'd stopped, appalled by what was happening around him, when Lana yelled at him to keep moving.

The shooters above them had obviously improved their aim. The darts were hitting people left and right and the air was filled with screams of pain and terror. Mark felt utterly helpless—there was no way to shield himself from the barrage. All he could do was lamely try to outrun a flying machine, an impossible task.

Where was Alec? The tough guy with all the battle instincts? Where had he run off to?

Mark kept moving, yanking Darnell's body along, forcing Trina and Lana to match his speed. The Toad and Misty ran alongside them, trying to help without getting in the way. Darts continued to rain down from above, more screams, more falling bodies. Mark turned a corner and lurched down the alley that led back to the Shack, sticking

close to the building on his right for a partial shield. Not as many people had come this way, and there were fewer darts to dodge.

The little group hobbled as fast as they could with their unconscious friend. The structures were built practically on top of each other in this section of the settlement, and there was no room to cut through and escape into the surrounding woods of the mountains.

“We’re almost to the Shack!” Trina yelled. “Hurry, before the Berg is back on top of us!”

Mark twisted his body around so that he was facing front, gripping Darnell by his shirt behind him. Shuffling backward had strained his leg muscles to the max, and they burned with heat and were beginning to cramp. There was nothing in their way now to slow them down, so Mark sped up, Lana and Trina keeping pace, each holding one of Darnell’s legs. The Toad and Misty squeezed in and each grabbed an arm, taking some of the load. They slipped through the narrow paths and alleys, over jutting roots and hard-packed dirt, turning left and then right and then left again. The roar of the Berg was coming from their right, muted by the dwellings and rows of trees in between.

Mark finally turned a corner and saw the Shack across a small clearing. He moved to make a final sprint for it, just as a horde of fleeing residents swarmed in from the other side, frantic and wild, scattering in all directions, heading for every door in sight. He froze as the Berg rushed in overhead, closer to the ground than Mark had seen it before. There were only three people standing on the hatch door of the craft now, but they opened fire as soon as the Berg settled into a hovering position.

Little silver streaks shot through the air, rained down on the people surging into the clearing. Every projectile seemed to find its mark, slamming into the necks and arms of men and women and children. They screamed and crumpled to the ground almost instantly, others tripping over their bodies in the mad rush for cover.

Mark and his little group hugged the side of the closest building and laid Darnell on the ground. Pain and weariness slogged through Mark’s arms and legs, making him want to collapse beside their unconscious friend.

“We should’ve just left him back there,” Trina said, hands on knees, struggling to catch her breath. “He slowed us down, and he’s still right in the thick of things anyway.”

“Dead, for all we know,” the Toad’s voice croaked.

Mark looked sharply at him—but the man was probably right. They might’ve jeopardized their own lives to save someone who had no chance in the first place.

“What’s happening now?” Lana asked as she moved up to the corner of the building to look around at the clearing. She glanced back at them over her shoulder. “They’re just picking people off, left and right. Why are they using darts instead of bullets?”

“Makes no sense,” Mark replied.

“Can’t we *do* something?” Trina said, her body trembling with what looked like frustration more than fear. “Why are we letting these people do this?”

Mark stepped up to Lana and peeked out with her. Bodies littered the clearing now, impaled darts sticking up toward the sky like a miniature forest. Still the Berg hovered overhead, its thrusters raging with blue heat.

“Where are our security guys?” Mark whispered to no one in particular. “They take the day off or something?”

No one answered, but movement over at the door of the Shack caught Mark’s attention and he sighed in relief. It was Alec, waving frantically, urging them to join him. The man held what looked like two huge rifles with grappling hooks on the ends attached to big coils of rope.

Ever the soldier—even after all these years—the man had a plan, and he needed help. He was going to fight back against these monsters. And so was Mark.

Mark pulled back from the wall and looked around. He saw a piece of wood on the other side of the alley. Without telling the others what he was doing, he ran over to grab it, then sprinted out into the clearing, heading straight for the Shack and for Alec, using the wood as a shield.

Mark didn’t need to look up—he could hear the distinct swoosh of darts being shot at him. Heard the solid thunk of one of them hitting the wood. He ran on.

CHAPTER 5

Mark varied his steps, speeding up and slowing down, dodging to the left and right, making his way toward Alec. Darts thunked into the ground around his feet; a second one hit his makeshift shield. As he ran through the open space, Alec—still clutching those rifles—made a beeline for the middle of the clearing. The two of them almost crashed into each other directly under the Berg, and Mark immediately leaned in to try to protect both of them with his shield.

Alec's eyes burned with intensity and purpose. Gray hair or not, he suddenly looked twenty years younger.

"We've got to hurry!" he yelled. "Before that thing decides to take off!"

The thrusters burned overhead and the darts continued to slam into people all around them. The screams were awful.

"What do I do?" Mark shouted. The now familiar blend of adrenaline and terror surged through him as he awaited his friend's instructions.

"You cover me, with this."

Alec shifted his rifles under one arm and pulled a pistol—a dull black one that Mark had never seen before—out of the back of his pants. There was no time to hesitate. Mark took the gun with his free hand, and by the weight of the weapon he knew it was loaded. A dart slammed into the wood as he cocked the pistol. Then another one. The strangers on the Berg had taken notice of the two people scheming in the middle of the clearing. More darts thumped into the ground like a sudden hailstorm.

"Fire away, boy," Alec growled. "And aim well, 'cause you've only got twelve bullets. Don't miss. Now!"

With that, Alec spun and ran to a spot about ten feet away. Mark pointed the gun at the people on the hatch door of the Berg and fired off two quick shots, knowing he needed to get their attention immediately so they wouldn't notice Alec. The three green suits backed up and dropped to their knees, hunching down to get the metal ramp between them and the shooter. One of them turned and clambered to get back into the ship.

Mark tossed the wood shield to the side. He clutched the gun with both hands, steadied himself and concentrated. A head peeked over the edge of the hatch above and Mark quickly set it in his sights, fired a shot. His hands jumped with the recoil, but he saw the red mist, a spray of blood in the air; a body tumbled off the ramp and crashed into a group of three people below. Fresh waves of screams erupted from all directions as people saw what was happening.

An arm stretched around the Berg door above, holding the tube-weapon out to take random shots. Mark fired, heard a sharp ping as the bullet hit the metal contraption, then watched the weapon fall to the ground. A woman scooped it up and started examining it, trying to figure out how to use it to fight back. That could only help.

Mark risked a quick glance back at Alec. He was holding up the grappling-hook weapon as if he were a seaman about to harpoon a whale. A pop sounded and suddenly

PROLOGUE

I am the Shade.

Through the dolent city, I flee.

Through the eternal woe, I take flight.

Along the banks of the river Arno, I scramble, breathless ... turning left onto Via dei Castellani, making my way northward, huddling in the shadows of the Uffizi.

And still they pursue me.

Their footsteps grow louder now as they hunt with relentless determination.

For years they have pursued me. Their persistence has kept me underground ... forced me to live in purgatory ... laboring beneath the earth like a chthonic monster.

I am the Shade.

Here aboveground, I raise my eyes to the north, but I am unable to find a direct path to salvation ... for the Apennine Mountains are blotting out the first light of dawn.

I pass behind the palazzo with its crenellated tower and one-handed clock ... snaking through the early-morning vendors in Piazza di San Firenze with their hoarse voices smelling of *lampredotto* and roasted olives. Crossing before the Bargello, I cut west toward the spire of the Badia and come up hard against the iron gate at the base of the stairs.

Here all hesitation must be left behind.

I turn the handle and step into the passage from which I know there will be no return. I urge my leaden legs up the narrow staircase ... spiraling skyward on soft marble treads, pitted and worn.

The voices echo from below. Beseeching.

They are behind me, unyielding, closing in.

They do not understand what is coming ... nor what I have done for them!

Ungrateful land!



As I climb, the visions come hard ... the lustful bodies writhing in fiery rain, the gluttonous souls floating in excrement, the treacherous villains frozen in Satan's icy grasp.

I climb the final stairs and arrive at the top, staggering near dead into the damp morning air. I rush to the head-high wall, peering through the slits. Far below is the blessed city that I have made my sanctuary from those who exiled me.

The voices call out, arriving close behind me. "What you've done is madness!"

Madness breeds madness.

"For the love of God," they shout, "tell us where you've hidden it!"

For precisely the love of God, I will not.

I stand now, cornered, my back to the cold stone. They stare deep into my clear green eyes, and their expressions darken, no longer cajoling, but threatening. "You know we have our methods. We can force you to tell us where it is."

For that reason, I have climbed halfway to heaven.

Without warning, I turn and reach up, curling my fingers onto the high ledge, pulling myself up, scrambling onto my knees, then standing ... unsteady at the precipice. *Guide me, dear Virgil, across the void.*

They rush forward in disbelief, wanting to grab at my feet, but fearing they will upset my balance and knock me off. They beg now, in quiet desperation, but I have turned my back. *I know what I must do.*

Beneath me, dizzyingly far beneath me, the red tile roofs spread out like a sea of fire on the countryside, illuminating the fair land upon which giants once roamed ... Giotto, Donatello, Brunelleschi, Michelangelo, Botticelli.

I inch my toes to the edge.

"Come down!" they shout. "It's not too late!"

O, willful ignorants! Do you not see the future? Do you not grasp the splendor of my creation? The necessity?

I will gladly make this ultimate sacrifice ... and with it I will extinguish your final hope of finding what you seek.

You will never locate it in time.



Hundreds of feet below, the cobblestone piazza beckons like a tranquil oasis. How I long for more time ... but time is the one commodity even my vast fortunes cannot afford.

In these final seconds, I gaze down at the piazza, and I behold a sight that startles me.

I see your face.

You are gazing up at me from the shadows. Your eyes are mournful, and yet in them I sense a veneration for what I have accomplished. You understand I have no choice. For the love of Mankind, I must protect my masterpiece.

It grows even now ... waiting ... simmering beneath the bloodred waters of the lagoon that reflects no stars.

And so, I lift my eyes from yours and I contemplate the horizon. High above this burdened world, I make my final supplication.

Dearest God, I pray the world remembers my name not as a monstrous sinner, but as the glorious savior you know I truly am. I pray Mankind will understand the gift I leave behind.

My gift is the future.

My gift is salvation.

My gift is Inferno.

With that, I whisper my amen ... and take my final step, into the abyss.

3rd person fiction
M/F

who would quit when the going got tough. Maybe that's how girls were, he told himself. But he didn't believe it. He sensed there was something else, something she hadn't told him. Shrugging away the thoughts, he started down the cliff once more.

The downhill run was easier than uphill, but not by too much. The slippery, treacherous surface beneath his feet meant that he had to continually run faster and faster to maintain his balance, setting off miniature landslides as he went. Where the uphill course had burned his thigh muscles, now he felt it in his calves and ankles. He reached the bottom of the slope, breathing hard, and dropped to the shingle to do a series of rapid push-ups. His shoulders were burning after a few minutes but he kept at it, forcing himself past the point of pain, blinded by the perspiration that was running into his eyes until, eventually, he could continue no longer. Exhausted, he collapsed, his arms unable to bear his weight, and lay facedown on the shingle, panting for breath.

He hadn't heard Eyanlyn approaching as he was doing the push-ups. Now he was startled by the sound of her voice.

"Will, it's a waste of time."

Her voice didn't have the argumentative tone that had been so much in evidence in the last few days. She sounded almost conciliatory, he thought. With a slight groan of pain, he pushed himself up from the shingle, then rolled over and sat, dusting the wet sand from his hands.

He smiled at her and she smiled in return, then moved to sit beside him on the beach. "What's a waste of time?" he asked. She made a vague gesture that included the beach where he had just been doing push-ups and the cliff he had climbed and descended.

"All this running and exercising. And all this talk of escape."

He frowned slightly. He didn't want to start an argument with

her, so he was careful not to react too vehemently to her words. He tried to keep a reasonable, neutral tone.

"It's never a waste of time to stay in shape," he said.

She nodded, conceding that point. "Perhaps not. But escaping? From here? What chance would we have?"

He knew he would have to be careful now. If it seemed he was lecturing her, she might well retreat into her shell again. But he knew how important it was to keep hope alive in a situation like this and he wanted to impress that fact on her.

"I'll admit it doesn't look too promising," he said. "But you never know what tomorrow may bring. The important thing is to stay positive. We mustn't give up. Halt taught me that. Never give up because, if an opportunity arises, you have to be ready to take it. Don't give up, Evanlyn, please."

She was shaking her head again but not in argument.

"You're missing my point. I haven't given up. I'm just saying this is a waste of time because it's not necessary. We don't need to escape. There's another way out of this."

Will made a show of looking around, as if he might see this other way she was talking about.

"There is?" he said. "I don't see it, I'm afraid."

"We can be ransomed," she said, and he laughed out loud—not scornfully but in genuine amusement at her naïveté.

"I very much doubt it. Who's going to ransom an apprentice Ranger and a lady's maid? I mean, I know Halt would if he could, but he doesn't have the sort of money it would take. Who's going to pay out good money for us?"

She hesitated, then seemed to come to a decision.

"The King," she said simply, and Will looked at her as if she'd lost her senses. In fact, for a moment he wondered if she had. She certainly didn't seem to have too firm a grip on reality.

"The King?" he repeated. "Why would the King take the slightest interest in us?"

"Because I'm his daughter."

The smile faded from Will's face. He stared at her, not sure that he had heard her correctly. Then he recalled Gilan's words back in Celtica, when the young Ranger had warned him that there was something not quite right about Evanlyn.

"You're his—" he began, then stopped. It was too much to comprehend.

"His daughter. I'm so sorry, Will. I should have told you sooner. I was traveling incognito in Celtica when you found me," she explained. "It had become almost second nature not to tell people my real name. Then, after Gilan left us, I was going to tell you. But I realized if I did, you'd insist on getting me back to my father immediately."

Will shook his head, trying to catch up with what he was hearing. He glanced around the tiny, cliff-bound harbor.

"Would that have been so bad?" he asked her, with a touch of bitterness. She smiled sadly at him.

"Think, Will. If you'd known who I was, we never would have followed the Wargals. We never would have found the bridge."

"We never would have been captured," Will put in, but she shook her head once more.

"Morgarath would have won," she said simply.

He looked into her eyes then and realized she was right. There was a long moment of silence between them.

"So your name is . . ." He hesitated and she finished the sentence for him.

"Cassandra. Princess Cassandra." Then she added, with a rueful smile, "And I'm sorry if I've been behaving like a bit of a princess

Tail #1 Jerri meets Jesus

Jerri the Gerbil peered through the round doorway. It was dim and silent and the small, stone-walled room smelt musty from the scrolls that stood in the old, clay jars, but outside in the world, one could hear the distant sounds of the market. Roosters were announcing the day and many sandaled feet were scuffing and shuffling past carrying creaking, wicker baskets.

"Can I? Can I?"



His mother's twinkling, black eyes regarded her son thoughtfully.

"Is it today?" Jerri asked, repeating the question that had been his daily prayer for at least the past three weeks. Father Gerbil put down the stalk of wheat that he had been nibbling and came over. "Hmmm," he mused, measuring Jerri against the worn, black mark that had been drawn on the wall by the entrance to their hole. Jerri stretched himself on tiptoe as tall as he could, squeezing his eyes tightly closed and willing himself to reach the Mark. Father nodded slowly and winked. Jerri's eyes travelled to

his mother and he waited with bated breath.

"All right, Jeremiah." Her paw squeezed his shoulder. "But remember, never go anywhere that your whiskers don't fit and never, never, *never* eat anything that isn't leftovers."

"Of course," Jerri replied, hesitating. Now that the longed-for moment had come, he felt almost reticent, shy. He looked around at his brother but Billi was busy eating. There were two of them that year, but Jerri was the one with the adventurous spirit. Mother gave him a tiny push.

"Go on then," she said and added, "Be home for supper."

Jerri went.

The dusty floor was cool as he scurried across. At the door, he turned and glanced back. The hole was just visible, 'Behind the fourth pillar on the left, under the bottom stair.' It had been home to countless gerbil families ever since the synagogue had been built many years ago. Outside was the busy street.

The sunshine took him by surprise. It was market day. Every day was market day, it seemed. Everywhere movement and color, voices haggling, laughing, calling. Robes swishing. Tall, tall people busy with their daily lives. None of them noticing a young gerbil crouched against the wall. Voices.

"Hey, Joel!" hailed one of them. "That Baptiser's down by the river again. People are flocking to him. See how the market's emptying already. You coming?"

"Sure!" the speaker turned. "Joanna? You coming with us?" From above Jerri's head came the answer, evidently Joanna.

"Right. I'll bring lunch. We'll probably be gone all day." There was a muffled consultation and then a brown hand appeared and grasped the handle of a basket beside him. Quick as a wink, the little gerbil hopped in. He was looking for an adventure and here it was. What was a river, anyway, and who was the 'Baptiser?'

In a moment, the basket was in the air and swinging rhythmically down the street. Jerri tucked himself down among the folds of a snowy napkin, his whiskers twitching. There was a strong scent of freshly baked bread. It was irresistible – so he took a nibble. From the bread, he turned to a salty flavoured fish and even tried the green olives that lay scattered around it. This was better than just eating the scraps Father brought back from the market. Being well-brought up, he tidied up the crumbs and then snoozed, thinking that adventures weren't all that bad after all.

Suddenly, Jerri was jolted awake. The basket had been set down on a rock. There was the smell of water and the scent of myrtle blossom on the breeze. Birds were singing and there were many, many voices, some sobbing quietly, some laughing happily, some pleading for forgiveness. "Forgiveness? That's what you need when you have done something wrong," thought Jerri. He regarded the crusty, nibbled roll that lay in front of him. It definitely wasn't leftovers, nor was it *his* lunch. This was someone else's lunch and *he* had eaten it. His heart sank right down to the tip of his tail with guilt as he realised that he had already disobeyed his mother's words. Brown hands reached down to open the napkin.

"I'm really, really sorry!" Jerri squeaked as the napkin lifted, and he sprang out.

"Oh! A little gerbil! Poor thing, all caught up in my basket," cried Joanna.

"Poor little thing?" scoffed Joel rummaging among the folds. "Poor little thing indeed! The thief's eaten our lunch!"

Jerri heard and fled. Laughing hands chased after him, grasping, but he was too quick and leaped high in the air, twisting and turning. Down he fell, and landed in the water with a splash. Down, down through tangling, clutching weeds. He couldn't breathe. It was cold and very wet and frightening. Bouncing on the sandy bottom of the river, the frightened little gerbil shot back up to the surface, coughing and spluttering. If this was a river, he was not at all impressed. Poor Jerri! He wished he had never stolen the bread, he wished he had never left home, he wished he was back with his family but, most of all, he wished he had measured this river with his whiskers! Frantically scrabbling, he sank once more and, just as his lungs felt as if they were bursting and he was giving up hope of ever seeing the sun again, a strong hand scooped him up and brought him out into the sunlight gasping and wheezing.

Timeline

3RD P.

M or F

Michael Crichton

36:30:00

"Just take it easy, Chris," Marek said.

"Take it easy? Take it *easy*?" Chris was almost shouting. "Look at it, for Christ's sake, André—her marker's trashed. We have no marker. Which means we have no way to get home. Which means we are totally screwed, André. And you want me to *take it easy*?"

"That's right, Chris," Marek said, his voice very quiet, very steady. "That's what I want. I want you to take it easy, please. I want you to pull yourself together."

"Why the hell should I?" Chris said. "For what? Face the facts, André: we're all going to get killed here. You know that, don't you? We're going to get goddamn killed. And there is *no way out of here*."

"Yes, there is."

"I mean, we don't even have any *food*, we don't have goddamn anything, we're stuck in this—this *shithole*, without a goddamn paddle, and—" He stopped and turned toward Marek. "What did you say?"

"I said, there's a way out."

"How?"

"You're not thinking. The other machine has gone back. To New Mexico."

"So?"

"They'll see his condition—"

"Dead, André. They'll see he's *dead*."

"The point is, they'll know something is wrong. And they will come for us. They'll send another machine to get us," Marek said.

"How do you know?"

"Because they will." Marek turned and started down the hill.

"Where are you going?"

"To find Kate. We have to keep together."

"I'm going to stay right here."

"As you like. Just as long as you don't leave."

"Don't worry, I'll be right here."

Chris pointed to the ground in front of him. "This is exactly where the machine arrived before. And that's where I'm staying."

Marek trotted off, disappearing around the curve in the path. Chris was alone. Almost immediately, he wondered if he ought to run and catch up with Marek. Maybe it was better not to be alone. Stay together, as Marek had said.

He took a couple of steps down the path after Marek, then stopped. No, he thought. He'd said he would stay where he was. He stood in the path, trying to slow his breathing.

Looking down, he saw he was standing on Gomez's hand. He stepped quickly away. He walked a few yards back up the path, trying to find a spot where he could no longer see the body. His breathing slowed still more. He was able to think things over. Marek was right, he decided. They would send another machine, and probably very soon. Would it land right here? Was this a known spot for landings? Or would it be somewhere in the general area?

In either case, Chris felt certain he should stay exactly where he was.

He looked down the path, toward where Marek had gone. Where was Kate now? Probably some distance down the path. Couple of hundred yards, maybe more.

Jesus, he wanted to go home.

Then, in the woods to his right, he heard a crashing sound.

Someone was approaching.

He tensed, aware that he had no weapon. Then he remembered his pack, which was tied to his belt, beneath his clothes. He had that gas canister. It was better than nothing. He fumbled, lifting his overshirt, searching for the—

"Ssss."

He turned.

It was the teenage boy, coming out of the woods. His face was smooth and beardless; he couldn't be more than twelve, Chris realized. The boy whispered, "*Arkith. Thou. Earwashmann.*"

Chris frowned, not understanding, but an instant later he heard a tinny voice inside his ear: "Hey. You. Irishman." The earpiece was translating, he realized.

T I M E L I N E

"What?" he said.

"*Coumen hastealey.*" In his ear he heard, "Come quickly."

The boy was beckoning to him, tense, urgently.

"But . . ."

"Come. Sir Guy will soon realize he has lost the trail. Then he will return to find it again."

"But . . ."

"You cannot stay here. He will kill you. Come!"

"But . . ." Chris gestured helplessly toward the path where Marek had gone.

"Your manservant will find you. Come!"

Now he heard the distant rumble of horses' hooves, rapidly growing louder.

"Are you dumb?" the boy asked, staring at him. "Come!"

The rumble was closer.

Chris stood frozen in place, not certain what to do.

The boy lost patience. With a disgusted shake of his head, he turned and ran off through the forest. He immediately vanished in dense undergrowth.

Chris stood alone on the trail. He looked down the path. He didn't see Marek. He looked up the path, toward the sound of the approaching horses. His heart was pounding again.

He had to decide. Now.

"I'm coming!" he shouted to the boy.

Then he turned and ran into the woods.

:

Kate sat on a fallen tree, touching her head gingerly, her wig askew. There was blood on her fingertips.

"Are you hurt?" Marek said as he came up to her.

"I don't think so."

"Let me see."

Lifting the wig away, Marek saw matted blood and a three-inch gash across the scalp. The wound was no longer bleeding freely; the blood had begun to coagulate against the mesh of the wig. The injury deserved sutures, but she would be all right without them.

"You'll survive." He pushed the wig back down on her head.

She said, "What happened?"

"Those other two are dead. It's just us now. Chris is a little panicked."

"Chris is a little panicked." She nodded, as if she had expected it. "Then we better go get him."

They started up the path. As they walked, Kate said, "What about the markers?"

"The guy went back, and he took his. Gomez's body was trampled, her marker was destroyed."

"What about the other one?" Kate said.

"What other one?"

"She had a spare."

"How do you know?"

"She said so. Don't you remember? When she came back from that reconnaissance trip, or whatever it was, she said that everything was fine and that we should hurry up and get ready. And she said, 'I'm going to go burn the spare.' Or something like that."

Marek frowned.

"It makes sense there would be a spare," Kate said.

"Well, Chris will be glad to hear it," Marek said. They walked around the final curve. Then they stopped and stared.

Chris was gone.

:

Plunging through the undergrowth, ignoring the brambles that scratched his legs and plucked at his hose, Chris Hughes at last glimpsed the boy running, fifty yards ahead. But the boy did not heed him, did not stop, but continued to run forward. He was heading toward the village. Chris struggled to keep up. He kept running.

Behind on the trail, he heard the horses stamping and snorting, and the shouts of the men. He heard one cry, "In the wood!" and another answered with a curse. But off the trail, the ground was densely covered. Chris had to scramble over fallen trees, rotting trunks, snapped branches as thick as his thigh, dense patches of bramble. Was this ground too difficult for horses? Would they dismount? Would they give up? Or would they chase?

Hell, they would chase.

He kept running. He was in a boggy area now. He pushed through the waist-high plants with their skunklike smell, slipped in mud that grew deeper with each step. He heard the sound of his panting breath, and the suck and slap of his feet in the mud.

But he didn't hear anyone behind him.

Soon the footing was dry again, and he was able to run faster. Now the

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boy was only ten paces ahead of him, still going fast. Chris was panting, struggling to keep up, but he held his own.

He ran on. There was a crackling in his left ear. "Chris."

It was Marek.

"Chris, where are you?"

How did he answer? Was there a microphone? Then he remembered they'd said something about bone conduction. He said aloud, "I'm . . . I'm running. . . ."

"I hear that. Where are you running?"

"The boy . . . the village . . ."

"You're going to the village?"

"I don't know. I think so."

"You think so? Chris, where are you?"

And then, behind him, Chris heard a crashing, the shouts of men, and the whinny of horses.

The riders were coming after him. And he had left a trail of snapped branches and muddy footprints. It would be easy to follow.

Shit.

Chris ran harder, pushing himself to the limit. And suddenly he realized the young boy was no longer visible ahead.

He stopped, gasping for breath, and spun around in a circle. Looking—

Gone.

The boy had vanished.

Chris was alone in the forest.

And the riders were coming.

:

On the muddy path overlooking the monastery, Marek and Kate stood listening to their earpieces. There was silence now; Kate clapped her hand over her ear to hear better. "I don't get anything."

"He may be out of range," Marek said.

"Why is he going to the village? It sounds like he's following that boy," she said. "Why would he do that?"

Marek looked toward the monastery. It was no more than a ten-minute walk from where they were standing. "The Professor is probably down there right now. We could just go get him, and go home." He kicked a tree stump irritably. "It would have been so easy."

"Not anymore," Kate said.

The sharp crack of static in their earpieces made them wince. They heard Chris panting again.

Marek said, "Chris. Are you there?"

"I can't . . . can't talk now."

He was whispering. And he sounded scared.

:

"No, no, *no!*" the boy whispered, reaching down from the branches of a very large tree. He had whistled, finally taking pity on Chris as he spun in panicky circles on the ground below. And he had waved him to the tree.

Chris was now struggling to climb the tree, trying to pull himself up on the lowest branches, getting extra leverage by bracing his legs against the trunk. But the way he did it upset the boy.

"No, no! Hands! Use only the hands!" the boy whispered, exasperated. "You are dumb—look now the marks on the trunk, by your feet."

Hanging from a branch, Chris looked down. The boy was right. There were muddy streaks, very clear on the bark of the trunk.

"By the road, we are lost," the boy cried, swinging over Chris's head and dropping lightly to the ground.

"What are you doing?" Chris said.

But the boy was already running off, through the brambles, moving from tree to tree. Chris dropped back to the ground and followed.

The boy muttered irritably to himself as he inspected the branches of each tree. Apparently he wanted a very large tree with relatively low branches; none suited him. The sound of the riders was growing louder.

Soon they had traveled a hundred yards or more, into an area carpeted with gnarled, scrubby ground pines. It was more exposed and sunnier here because there were fewer trees to his right, and then Chris saw they were running near the edge of a cliff that overlooked the town and the river. The boy darted away from the sunlight, back into the darker forest. Almost at once, he found a tree he liked, and signaled Chris to come forward. "You go first. And no feet!"

The boy bent his knees, laced the fingers of his hands, and tensed his body, bracing himself. Chris felt the youth was too slender to take his weight, but the boy jerked his head impatiently. Chris put his foot in the boy's hands, and reaching upward, grasped the lowest branch. With the help of the boy, he pulled himself up, until with a final grunt he swung himself over so he lay on his stomach, bent double over the branch. He looked down at the boy, who hissed, "Move!" Chris struggled to his knees, then got to his feet on the branch. The next branch above was within easy reach, and he continued to climb.

Below, the boy leapt into the air, gripped the branch, and pulled quickly

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up. Although slim, he was surprisingly strong, and he moved from branch to branch surely. Chris was now about twenty feet above the ground. His arms burned, he was gasping as he went up, but he kept on going, branch to branch.

The boy gripped his calf, and he froze. Slowly, cautiously, he looked back over his shoulder, and saw the boy rigid on the branch beneath him. Then Chris heard the soft snort of a horse and realized the sound was close. Very close.

:

On the ground below, six riders moved slowly and silently forward. They were still some distance away, intermittently visible through gaps in the foliage. When a horse snorted, its rider leaned forward to pat its neck to quiet it.

The riders knew they were close to their prey. They leaned over in their saddles, scanning the ground, looking to one side and the other. Fortunately they were now among the scrubby low pines; no trail was visible.

Communicating by hand gestures, they moved apart, separating themselves as they came forward. Now they formed a rough line, passing beneath the tree on both sides. Chris held his breath. *If they looked up . . .*

But they didn't.

They moved onward, deeper into the forest, and finally one of them spoke aloud. It was the rider with the black plume on his helmet, the one who had cut off Gomez's head. His visor was up.

"Here is enough. They have slipped us."

"How? Over the cliff?"

The black knight shook his head. "The child is not so foolish." Chris saw his face was dark: dark complexion and dark eyes.

"Nor quite a child, my Lord."

"If he fell, it was by error. It could not be otherwise. But I think we have gone awry. Let us return as we came."

"My Lord."

The riders turned their mounts and started back. They passed beneath the tree again, and then rode off, still widely spaced, heading into sunlight.

"Perhaps in better light, we shall find their track."

Chris gave a long sigh of relief.

The boy below tapped him on the leg and nodded to him, as if to say, Good work. They waited until the riders were at least a hundred yards away, nearly out of sight. Then the boy slipped quietly down the tree, and Chris followed as best he could.

Once on the ground, Chris saw the riders moving off. They were coming to the tree with the muddy footprints. The black knight passed it, not noticing. Then the next—

The boy grabbed his arm, pulled him away, slipping off in the underbrush.

Then: "Sir Guy! Look you here! The tree! They are in the tree!"

One of the knights had noticed.

Shit.

The riders spun on their mounts, looking up at the tree. The black knight came back, skeptical. "Eh? Show me."

"I do not see them up there, my Lord."

The knights turned, looked back, looked in all directions, looked behind them. . . .

And they saw them.

"There!"

The riders charged.

The boy ran hard. "God's truth, we are lost now," he said, glancing over his shoulder as he raced forward. "Can you swim?"

"Swim?" Chris said.

Of course he could swim. But that was not what he was thinking about. Because right now they were running hard, flat out—toward the clearing, toward the break in the trees.

Toward the cliff.

The land sloped downward, gently at first, then more steeply. The ground cover became thinner, with exposed patches of yellow-white limestone. The sunlight was glaring.

The black knight bellowed something. Chris didn't understand it.

They came at last to the edge of the clearing. Without hesitation, the boy leapt into space.

Chris hesitated, not wanting to follow. Glancing back, he saw the knights charging him, their broadswords raised.

No choice.

Chris turned and ran forward toward the cliff edge.

⋮

Marek winced as he heard Chris's scream in his earpiece. The scream was loud at first, then abruptly ended with a grunt and a crashing sound.

An impact.

He stood with Kate by the trail, listening. Waiting.

They heard nothing more. Not even the crackle of static.

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Nothing at all.

"Is he dead?" Kate said.

Marek didn't answer her. He walked quickly to Gomez's body, crouched down, and started searching in the mud. "Come on," he said. "Help me find that spare marker."

•

They searched for the next few minutes, and then Marek grabbed Gomez's hand, already turning pale gray, the muscles stiffening. He lifted her arm, feeling the coldness of her skin, and turned her torso over. The body splashed back in the mud.

That was when he noticed that Gomez had a bracelet of braided twine on her wrist. Marek hadn't noticed it before; it seemed to be part of her period costume. Of course, it was completely wrong for the period. Even a modest peasant woman would wear a bracelet of metal, or carved stone or wood, if she wore anything at all. This was a hippie-dippy modern thing.

Marek touched it curiously, and he was surprised to find it was stiff, almost like cardboard. He turned it on her wrist, looking for the latch, and a sort of lid flicked open in the braided twine, and he realized that the bracelet covered a small electronic timer, like a wristwatch.

The timer read: 36:10:37.

And it was counting backward.

He knew at once what it was. It was an elapsed counter for the machine, showing how much time they had left. They had thirty-seven hours initially, and now they had lost about fifty minutes.

We should hold on to this, he thought. He untied the bracelet from her arm, then wrapped it around his own wrist. He flipped the little lid shut.

"We've got a timer," Kate said. "But no marker."

They searched for the next five minutes. And finally, reluctantly, Marek had to admit the hard truth.

There was no marker. And without a marker, the machines would not come back.

Chris was right: they were trapped there.

from below, but they seemed to emanate a subtle terror that reached out for me.

Well below the summit, the footing grew too uncertain for Donas. We dismounted and tethered him to a scrubby pine, continuing on foot.

I was panting and sweating by the time we reached the granite ledge; Jamie showed no signs of exertion, save a faint flush rising from the neck of his shirt. It was quiet here above the pines, but with a steady wind whining faintly in the crevices of the rock. Swallows shot past the ledge, rising abruptly on the air currents in pursuit of insects, dropping like dive bombers, slender wings outspread.

Jamie took my hand to pull me up the last step to the wide flat ledge at the base of the cleft rock. He didn't release it, but drew me close, looking carefully at me, as though memorizing my features. "Why—?" I began, gasping for breath.

"It's your place," he said roughly. "Isn't it?"

"Yes." I stared as though hypnotized at the stone circle. "It looks just the same."

Jamie followed me into the circle. Taking me by the arm, he marched firmly up to the split rock.

"Is it this one?" he demanded.

"Yes." I tried to pull away. "Careful! Don't go too near it!" He glanced from me to the rock, clearly skeptical. Perhaps he was right to be. I felt suddenly doubtful of the truth of my own story.

"I—I don't know anything about it. Perhaps the . . . whatever it is . . . closed behind me. Maybe it only works at certain times of the year. It was near Beltane when I came through last."

Jamie glanced over his shoulder at the sun, a flat disc hanging in mid-sky behind a thin screen of cloud.

"It's almost Samhain now," he said. "All Hallows' Eve. Seems suitable, no?" He shivered involuntarily, in spite of the joke. "When you . . . came through. What did ye do?"

I tried to remember. I felt ice-cold, and I folded my hands under my armpits.

"I walked round the circle, looking at things. Just ran-

domly, though; there was no pattern. And then I came near to the split rock, and I heard a buzzing, like bees—”

It was still like bees. I drew back as though it had been the rattle of a snake.

“It’s still here!” I reared in panic, throwing my arms around Jamie, but he set me firmly away from him, his face white, and turned me once again toward the stone.

“What then?” The keening wind was sharp in my ears, but his voice was sharper still.

“I put my hand on the rock.”

“Do it, then.” He pushed me closer, and when I did not respond, he grasped my wrist and planted my hand firmly against the brindled surface.

Chaos reached out and grabbed me.

The sun stopped whirling behind my eyes at last, and the shriek faded out of my ears. There was another persistent noise, Jamie calling my name.

I felt too sick to sit up or open my eyes, but I flapped my hand weakly, to let him know I was still alive.

“I’m all right,” I said.

“Are ye then? Oh, God, Claire!” He clasped me against his chest then, holding me tightly. “Jesus, Claire. I thought ye were dead, sure. You . . . you began to . . . go, somehow. You had the most awful look on your face, like ye were frightened to death. I—I pulled ye back from the stone. I stopped ye. I shouldna have done so—I’m sorry, lassie.”

My eyes were open enough now to see his face above me, shocked and frightened.

“It’s all right.” ~~It was still an effort to speak,~~ and I felt heavy and disoriented, but things were coming clearer. I tried to smile, but felt nothing more than a twitch.

“At least . . . we know . . . it still works.”

“Oh, God. Aye, it works.” He cast a glance of fearful loathing at the stone.

He left me long enough to wet a kerchief in a puddle of rainwater that stood in one of the stony depressions. He wet my face, still muttering reassurances and apologies. At last I felt well enough to sit up.

run down the hall to the door to the roof. It's not only unlocked but ajar. Perhaps someone forgot to close it, but it doesn't matter. The energy field enclosing the roof prevents any desperate form of escape. And I'm not looking to escape, only to fill my lungs with air. I want to see the sky and the moon on the last night that no one will be hunting me.

The roof is not lit at night, but as soon as my bare feet reach its tiled surface I see his silhouette, black against the lights that shine endlessly in the Capitol. There's quite a commotion going on down in the streets, music and singing and car horns, none of which I could hear through the thick glass window panels in my room. I could slip away now, without him noticing me; he wouldn't hear me over the din. But the night air's so sweet, I can't bear returning to that stuffy cage of a room. And what difference does it make? Whether we speak or not?

My feet move soundlessly across the tiles. I'm only a yard behind him when I say, "You should be getting some sleep."

He starts but doesn't turn. I can see him give his head a slight shake. "I didn't want to miss the party. It's for us, after all."

I come up beside him and lean over the edge of the rail. The wide streets are full of dancing people. I

squint to make out their tiny figures in more detail.

"Are they in costumes?"

"Who could tell?" Peeta answers. "With all the crazy clothes they wear here. Couldn't sleep, either?"

"Couldn't turn my mind off?" I say.

"Thinking about your family?" he asks.

"No," I admit a bit guiltily. "All I can do is wonder about tomorrow. Which is pointless, of course." In the light from below, I can see his face now, the awkward way he holds his bandaged hands. "I really am sorry about your hands."

"It doesn't matter, Katniss," he says. "I've never been a contender in these Games anyway."

"That's no way to be thinking," I say.

"Why not? It's true. My best hope is to not disgrace myself and . . ." He hesitates.

"And what?" I say.

"I don't know how to say it exactly. Only . . . I want to die as myself. Does that make any sense?" he asks. I shake my head. How could he die as anyone but himself? "I don't want them to change me in there. Turn me into some kind of monster that I'm not"

I bite my lip, feeling inferior. While I've been ruminating on the availability of trees, Peeta has been struggling with how to maintain his identity. His purity of self. "Do you mean you won't kill anyone?" I ask.

"No, when the time comes, I'm sure I'll kill just like everybody else. I can't go down without a fight. Only I keep wishing I could think of a way to . . . to show the Capitol they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their Games," says Peeta.

"But you're not," I say. "None of us are. That's how the Games work."

"Okay, but within that framework, there's still you, there's still me," he insists. "Don't you see?"

"A little. Only . . . no offense, but who cares, Peeta?" I say.

"I do. I mean, what else am I allowed to care about at this point?" he asks angrily. He's locked those blue eyes on mine now, demanding an answer.

I take a step back. "Care about what Haymitch said. About staying alive."

Peeta smiles at me, sad and mocking. "Okay. Thanks for the tip, sweetheart."

It's like a slap in the face. His use of Haymitch's patronizing endearment. "Look, if you want to spend the last hours of your life planning some noble death in the arena, that's your choice. I want to spend mine in District Twelve."

"Wouldn't surprise me if you do," says Peeta. "Give my mother my best when you make it back, will you?"

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"Count on it," I say. Then I turn and leave the roof. I spend the rest of the night slipping in and out of a doze, imagining the cutting remarks I will make to Peeta Mellark in the morning. Peeta Mellark. We will see how high and mighty he is when he's faced with life and death. He'll probably turn into one of those raging beast tributes, the kind who tries to eat someone's heart after they've killed them. There was a guy like that a few years ago from District 6 called Titus. He went completely savage and the Gamemakers had to have him stunned with electric guns to collect the bodies of the players he'd killed before he ate them. There are no rules in the arena, but cannibalism doesn't play well with the Capitol audience, so they tried to head it off. There was some speculation that the avalanche that finally took Titus out was specifically engineered to ensure the victor was not a lunatic.

I don't see Peeta in the morning. Cinna comes to me before dawn, gives me a simple shift to wear, and guides me to the roof. My final dressing and preparations will be done in the catacombs under the arena itself. A hovercraft appears out of thin air, just like the one did in the woods the day I saw the redheaded Avox girl captured, and a ladder drops down. I place my hands and feet on the lower rungs and instantly it's

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ISABEL'S BED

I didn't look up, but heard the purrs of approval from the backs of the other writers' throats.

"Can you see it?" our leader asked. "In italics? A prologue? And then we turn the page to chapter one"—he had mimed this with a graceful turn of his wrist—"and read about Charlotte's and Arthur's lives leading up to this moment. How about that?"

I heard more approving murmurs all around me. I couldn't imagine writing one page past these six about my parents; couldn't imagine why people liked them more than Cecily Biggins or Maisie Trumbull or ~~Emma Liversidge~~ of my shopkeeper trilogy. But what a night! I jotted their comments in my margins for later savoring: "Has your usual clarity and optimism." "Best thing you've done." "The dishwasher scene is great!"

And this, unless I was dreaming: "Shimmers with potential."

Kenny owned A Decent Bagel, Inc., and considered himself a writer since he had composed the slogan "Baking the best bagels in TriBeCa." He used to evaluate my stories late in the creative process after they had been rejected by several magazines. "It's not terrible," he'd say—he who made bagels, not out of love but out of market research.

I tried to show him how a person can be constructive and positive in his criticism at the same time he's finding fault.

"But what if it stinks?"

"Where does it stink?" I cried. "Show me the lines that stink."

"'Jelly-bean toes,'" Kenny read. "Wouldn't that make the baby deformed? And here—why is the mother scrambling