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Odd, Strange and Curious

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Odd, Strange, and Curious

Kerry Burns
and Lindsey Appell

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Where Were You Last Night?

A flash fiction

By Lindsey Appell

I tossed and thrashed and got up four times to check outside. I lay awake and wondered what he loved so much about the night. I supposed there was something very primal about it—half-seen creatures sneaking and scurrying about, breaking the waiting silence. I worried and slept and got up for some water.

At 5:08 AM I heard the telltale rustling and anxiously scrambled to the door. “Where were you last night?” I said.

Aloysius cocked his head, briefly licked at a bleeding abscess, and trotted into the kitchen where he demanded food.

“Who did you piss off? This is why I don’t let you out after dinner, you great orange fiend. What if an owl or coyote got you? Hmm?” I emptied half a cup of dry food into Al’s dish and went searching for hydrogen peroxide. “Now I’m going to have a vet bill on top of everything else.”

I turned from the medicine cabinet to find Al standing in the bathroom, his eyes floating above the laundry hamper, staring at me.

“God, you’re a creepy cat.” He purred as if in agreement with my assessment. “You won’t be so happy when I’m cleaning out your scrapes, buddy. Hold on, this will sting,” I said, lifting him into my arms.

Al squirmed and let out several quick, pitiful meows. I touched the disinfectant the scratch behind his ear. He dug his claws into my forearms and shot over the sink and into my dirty linen.

“Damn you!” I shouted against my better judgment. My raised voice sent Al’s ears straight back as he leaped from the hamper and bolted toward the cat door. Throwing my coat on, I

went out after him, cooing “Kitty, kitty, kitty. Where’s my baby Wysius? It’s okay, sweetie, I just need to clean you up, you big dumb oaf.”

Aloysius heard my voice and darted from his hiding spot under the garnet dogwood bush. Pausing in mid-sprint, he looked back at me, wide-eyed.

“It’s okay honey, come here. Come on Al, come on my Wysius.” His hackles lowered, his ears perked, and he continued on down the lane, this time with his tail high and twitching. “Where are you going? Get back here!”

He continued moving forward, occasionally speeding up to a full run when I began to gain on him. I trudged along behind, my scratched arms beginning to itch. Not fifty yards down the driveway, Al stepped into the grass and sat down. He stared at me.

“What? What is your deal, weirdo?”

Brrrrr? He asked, wiggling his left paw. Something glittered in the grass beneath it. I crouched down. Al rubbed himself against my hips affectionately at I dug into the soft earth. I held up a small but ornate gold bracelet and brushed off the caked dirt. I wondered briefly how much I could pawn it for before I saw the engraving on the inside.

Ever Encircling, Never Apart. Rowen Stewart and

I gaped. *Rowan Stewart*; my name. I rubbed furiously at the inner ring of the bangle. The missing name did not, as I hoped it would, magically appear. Al bit my hand.

“What?” I pivoted around on my heels. Al put his paws on my shoulders and licked my cheek. “You think that makes up for this? You have a lot of explaining to do.”

Am I Crazy

By Kerry Burns

Eric seemed to be an ordinary man with an ordinary life. He went to college and got a degree in business and electrical engineering. He married Sonja that spring right after graduation, and they moved to Grand Island, Nebraska where they both found good jobs. Three years later, twin girls arrived, and Sonja quit her job to be a mother.

Eric later opened a business that focused on electronic equipment which used high intensity magnetic fields. He had a couple of government contracts and spent sixty hours a week at the business. The inevitable happened. Sonja grew resentful at being home alone with the little girls, and Eric worked shoulder to shoulder with a woman who was one of his electronics engineers, Sheela Gigh. She was not particularly attractive, in fact she was quite homely and had few social skills, but she was very needy for male companionship. She and Eric found things to do other than electronics in the lunch room.

The next inevitability was that Sonja and the girls stopped by the business one evening to bring Eric a freshly cooked supper. They found Eric and Sheela on the couch having sex. Eric got the freshly cooked supper, pot and all. The little girls were screaming and crying asking what daddy was doing. Sonja told Eric not to come home anymore in terms that left no question about her rage.

Eric lost the house, the girls, and part of the business in the divorce. He moved to North Platte with what remained of his business. Most of his staff moved with him including Sheela and several other engineers. He was able to make a down payment on a large older house on the edge of the city which he

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planned to use for his business as well as his residence. Sheela rented an apartment closer to downtown.

Well, I was never home before so maybe this will work better. It won't be much of a home, but at least everything is in one place.

He installed his magnetic field generator in the basement and turned the main floor into labs and unit assembly rooms. He had an office, bedroom and kitchen upstairs. As was his lifelong habit of routine, he quickly slipped into schedule of work, shopping, visiting Sheela, and doing research in the evenings. Life went along quietly through the winter and into the spring. Eric resigned himself to seeing his daughters only once a year which was all the decree permitted.

One sunny Wednesday morning while buying groceries, he said to the store owner, "I see you painted your storefront red. That's a lot more interesting; perked it up a lot."

"Thanks, the winter was kind of hard on the paint job, and I thought a brighter color would get some customer attention."

"It certainly does that," Eric said.

A few days later he was driving over to Sheela's when he caught sight of the store out of the corner of his eye.

It's the same old blue gray that it has been. That's odd.

He continued on to Sheela's who met him at the door with nothing on but a smile.

"Hi, Sweetie, I'm always afraid that you might not show up, but you always do. I get worked up thinking that you are coming over," she said kissing him seriously.

"I can barely hold out until our Saturday date; it relieves a lot of the stress from work. I guess neither of us has any friends in town outside of the shop," Eric said.

As he was leaving several hours later she asked, "Do you like the way I had my hair cut and styled?" He had barely noticed, but agreed that it looked nice.

When she came into work on Monday her hair looked the same as it had before Saturday night, as far as he could tell. *Maybe she fixed it differently.*

On Wednesday he went for groceries. The bright red storefront grabbed his attention.

Oh, I had forgotten it looked gray the other night. I guess it was the light.

He dismissed the thought from his mind, turning his attention to a research problem at the lab. When he arrived home, he noted that the grass was getting tall and needed mowed.

I mowed this lawn two evenings ago. It really grows fast. I guess I had better hit it again before it gets out of hand.

Eric got the mower out of the garage and quickly mowed the lawn. He went in the house and returned to his research with his magnetic field generator.

Saturday night, time to go see Sheela. She is so good to me and is really pretty good company if a couple of electrical engineers can be good company.

He got ready and drove to her apartment noticing that the grocery store was red. He hurried to her door and rang the bell.

“Oh, it’s you. I didn’t know if you would be here or not?” she greeted him fully dressed and not smiling.

“What’s wrong? Why wouldn’t I be here? We have a standing Saturday night date. I certainly wouldn’t miss it. This is the highlight of my week.”

“You stood me up last week and never said a word about it at work all week. Not even an, “I’m sorry.”

“I was here, don’t you remember. You met me at the door without any clothes on, we had a nice roast for dinner, and you talked about your new hair do.”

“I cooked a roast, but you didn’t eat any of it, and my hair is the same as it has been for the past three years. Do you see any

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difference? I don't know what woman's house you went to, but it wasn't mine?"

"No I don't see any difference in your hair. I don't understand this at all. I remember it all so clearly. I don't know any other woman in this town, and I certainly don't know anyone else who looks like you."

"And what's that supposed to mean? Am I so strange looking that no one even resembles me?"

"Look Sheela, I'm sorry, that's not what I mean at all. Can I come in, and we can sit down and talk?"

"Ok, but if you have a girl friend, tell me. I know that our relationship is convenience mostly on both our parts, but I do really like you."

They sat down on the couch to talk things over, and Eric put his arm around her shoulders. "I don't know what is going on. I am absolutely sure that I was here last Saturday, but you say you haven't seen me for two weeks."

"That's right. I paced and cried and kept looking out the window for you. I thought maybe you had been hurt or got totally involved in your research. I finally went to bed at ten, but then I left the door unlocked for you."

"You had a scratched off pimple between your breasts last week. Is it still there?"

"Yes, but it is about healed up now. How could you know that?"

"Because you met me at the door without any clothes on, silly."

"Then I must be the one going crazy. I am absolutely sure that you weren't here."

"Let's not worry about it for now, Hon. Show me your nearly healed pimple." She unbuttoned her blouse to show him the pimple and the discussion of who was crazy was forgotten in favor of sexual passion.

Other than noticing that the grass was growing faster than he thought it should, and the mower tank was almost empty when he thought he had filled it, the week went along quietly.

On his way to Sheela's on Saturday night, he noticed that the store was a blue gray.

I wonder what that means, or is it the angle of the light.

Sheela met him at the door with a frown. "Well, you're a week late, but it's good to see you. What happened last Saturday?"

"What, is this a joke?"

"No it's not a joke, I told you I worry about you not coming, but you always have before. Why didn't you call or say something at work? You acted like nothing had happened."

"As I recall we had this discussion last week about the week before, and after some intense questions, we decided to make out for awhile."

"The last time you came over, I met you at the door without any clothes. I was hoping to convince you to come around more often, but I guess it didn't work."

"And did you have a pimple on your chest?"

"Yes, did that put you off?"

"No, it didn't, but it confuses the hell out of me. Do you want to go for a ride for a few minutes?"

"Ok, but make it quick; I'm pretty hard up. You owe me for last week too." Eric drove to the grocery store and stopped in the parking lot.

"What color is the store front?"

"Kind of a blue gray. Does it look like that to you?" Sheela asked.

"Have you ever seen it any other color?"

"No it's been that color since we moved here?" She said.

"Ok, do you need anything from the store before we go home?"

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“Not really, what’s this all about. Are you trying to distract me from explaining about last week?”

“No, but I am really confused. I feel like I’m losing track of time or something,” he said.

“I’ve heard of people like that. They think they did something different the day before, or they don’t even know how it got to be Tuesday when yesterday was Friday.”

“The question is whether it’s me or you. Do I have an imagined memory of last Saturday night or do you?”

“Well, it’s not me,” Sheela snapped.” I know what I remember. Either you have another girl friend that you’re lying about, or you have a severe mental problem. If that’s the case, maybe I shouldn’t see you anymore until you get this straightened out.”

“Ouch, please don’t do that. I need help, not rejection. I don’t have anyone else to turn to. Can’t we work together on this?”

“I’m not sure I want to. I’m kind of afraid, and besides, I like you too much to have this craziness go on. I know we have an agreement to give each other pleasure and not get romantically entangled. I don’t know if I want to continue that. When I think you may have a girl friend, it upsets me.” Eric parked the car in front of Sheela’s apartment, and they both got out and went in.

After an extended period of pleasure giving, Sheela said “This has been very nice, and I really don’t want to lose you, but let’s not see each for a few weeks. I’m too confused.”

“Ok, but will you do one thing for me? Wear a blue ribbon in your hair every day at work without fail.”

“I don’t like blue very much. I would rather have a different color. Why do you want me to do this?”

“I want to be sure it’s you and not some figment of my imagination. Wear something that you wouldn’t wear normally every day. Tell me now what it will be. I’m testing myself.”

“Ok, I’ll wear the blue ribbon all week if you will promise not to come over next Saturday.”

“It’s a deal, but I will miss you?” Eric went home after that to try figure out what was happening to him.

Somehow I think the new hairdo Sheela goes with the blue grey store, but that remains to be seen. In the meantime, I need to get my business under control. The staff seems to not know what they are doing half the time. First they give me a report, and then they give me a different one on the same experiment.

He spent Sunday doing his own research and trying to drive out the conflicting memories.

Monday, Sheela showed up at work with a blue ribbon in her hair. He smiled and waved to her. They had agreed to be nothing but business-like at work after the disaster in the lunch room when Sonja came in, so they rarely talked except about her projects.

After work, Eric broke his habit and went to the grocery store. It was painted red. He said to the grocery store manager, “I see you painted your storefront red. That’s an interesting change; perked it up a lot.”

“Thanks, the winter was kind of hard on the paint job, and I thought a brighter color would get some customer attention.”

Eric bought a six pack of beer and walked thoughtfully out of the store.

That’s the same conversation I had with him two weeks ago, but he didn’t seem to even notice.

He went back to his lab and dived into the research.

When Sheela came in the next morning, there was no ribbon in her hair and no smile. She went to her work without a word. Eric drove to the grocery store and found that it was red, and he

returned to work. Later in the day, Sheela asked to talk to him. "I'm giving you my two weeks notice. I can't stand your lying, and the tension I feel when I'm around you."

"But Sheela, you're a good engineer, and I really need you on this project. What can I do to keep you? All I asked was that you wear the ribbon."

"You didn't ask me to wear any damned ribbon. I gave you yesterday to apologize, and you never said a word."

"What did I do to make you so angry?"

"As if you didn't know; you stood me up for a second time on Saturday, or did you forget again that you didn't show up?"

Eric stared at her in confusion "I, I don't know what to say that you would believe."

"I know I'm pretty homely, but if you don't want me anymore, please don't humiliate me. Tell me you don't want to continue instead of telling me all of this weird crap." She turned and walked back to her work. Eric drank a six pack for supper.

"Hi, Honey, do you like my ribbon" Sheela said to Eric as she walked into work the next morning.

Before he could really regain emotional control, one of his engineers came up to him, "Excuse me sir, I have this report with my name on it, but I am sure that I didn't write it although I agree with what it says. Did someone else prepare this?"

"I don't know. I don't think I've seen it, but if you think it's correct, sign off on it." Eric sat down shaking his head.

What the hell is going on? I don't think I can take this much longer.

Since it was Wednesday, he went to buy groceries. The store was red. He bought what he needed including more beer, and returned home. Instead of doing research, he drank the beer and went to sleep.

The next two days were blue ribbon days. On Friday night, Sheela stopped on her way out. "Would you come over tonight?"

I wore my ribbon all week, and I think I want a reward. I'm over my little fit."

He didn't want to ask her about Tuesday. "Ok, but you're not getting out of my sight. If you want, I'll take you to dinner, and then we can go to your house."

"Sounds good to me, but let's do take out."

He returned home late with no Saturday night date scheduled. He spent Saturday in the lab. He felt a little calmer after three days of consistency with Sheela and a patched up relationship.

I wonder if she is still leaving next week. She never said a thing about it. I'm beginning to think that she is more than a little whacked. I'm almost afraid to ask her.

Early in the afternoon, Eric decided to call Sheela to see if the Saturday night date was still on. "Hi Sheela, I thought I could come over tonight if you're not busy, and we could talk over some things."

"I guess you can if you don't think I'm too ugly to be around. Is your other girl friend out of town?"

"Damn it Sheela, I don't have any other girl friend. In fact, I don't think I have any girl friend at all." Eric drove over to Sheela's. She met him at the door.

"If this is about getting me to stay on at work, you can turn around and go home now."

"I don't want you to quit, but that's not what this is about." She let him in and they sat down on the couch. "I want you to tell me what our relationship has been for the last week in detail, and I'll listen."

"Ok, starting last Saturday night, you didn't show up. I waited up for you, but I finally decided that you were doing your thing again whatever it is. I didn't hear from you Sunday, and you didn't answer your phone. Monday, you were at work, but you didn't say a thing to me. You seemed kind of spacey

and not there. On Tuesday you seemed more yourself so I tried to talk to you, but you said something about a having asked me to wear a ribbon. That was the last straw, and I quit. The rest of the week you were back in space mode, and hardly said two words to me. Then today you called me and wanted to have our Saturday date. If I weren't so damned lonely, I would have told you to stick it. Would you like to explain your behavior to me?"

"I would like to, but I can't. I don't remember things that way at all other than the part when you said you were quitting. I wonder if I was in some kind of fantasy world most of the week and didn't even know it."

"I want you to go now. I know if you stay much longer my resolve will weaken, but you need to get some mental health help. If you get your head straightened out, I want you back. No other guy has ever paid any attention to me."

"Well, alright, I'll go, but how about a goodbye kiss."

"Oh no, you don't get one. You pulled that on me last time, and you didn't leave until after midnight." Eric knew that if he pushed a little, he could seduce her, but decided to accept things and leave. When he got in the car to go home, he noticed that it was almost out of gas.

What the hell, I got gas two days ago, and I haven't even been out of town. Either there's a leak or someone siphoned my tank.

He stopped for gas and went on home.

The mail was on the table including a number of bills. *I've got the time; I guess I had better pay these bills.* He sorted out the bills and opened them. *What's going on! I paid all of these Tuesday night.* He grabbed his check book to compare the numbers, but no checks had been written for May for those bills. *I give up. I can't deal with this. How can I possibly do any useful research if my memory is this faulty? I can't even keep track of my personal life.*

He wrote the checks and put them in envelopes and had them ready to mail. He carefully put the checkbook back in his desk. He then went in the kitchen and got quietly drunk.

Sunday morning, he got up and decided that he would pay close attention to everything and take good dated notes.

Maybe all of this comes from inattention. With my mind on the research, I don't pay enough attention to what's going on around me. Apparently, I've treated Sheela pretty shabbily without even realizing it.

After breakfast, he went downstairs and threw himself into his research in order to finish what he had started earlier in the week. However, he couldn't find his notes from Friday. *What did I do with them? I thought I laid them on the lab table. More inattention I guess.*

About an hour later he spotted them on the shelf above the table in plain sight. *Dumb shit, pay attention to what you are doing.*

He continued with his work and by afternoon had finished the experiment and went back upstairs. He noted that the envelopes for the bills were not where he left them. His little note card that he used to keep track of things said he had paid them that morning. After a few minutes of panic he remembered to look at his check book. The checks he had written were dated for Tuesday. He sat numbly for awhile and then drank all of his beer.

He called Sheela, a little later "Hi, Hon. Was I at your house Saturday for awhile?"

"No, you were here Friday night, and we had a good time. I was kind of hoping that you would come over again. Did you think the Saturday dates were off?"

"I don't know what I think, but I will come over if right away is ok." Although he was pretty loaded, he drove there safely.

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“Sheela met him at the door. After one kiss she said, “You’re drunk. What’s going on? You know I don’t like alcohol, and you never drink around me.”

Eric decided to not mention that he had seen her the previous day, and see what she did.

“I drank some beer at home. These strange things keep happening that I can’t account for. I don’t think I can take it much longer. Can you tell me in detail what our relationship has been for the last week?”

“I can do that. I’ve thought a lot about it. Saturday you were over and asked me to wear the blue ribbon every day, which I did. Monday I got a big smile and a wave when I came in. The next day you didn’t speak to me and didn’t seem to notice that I was even there. I might add that the staff really doesn’t like it when you act like that. The next three days were great, and you were your old self. Then we left after work Friday night, got takeout and came here. Do you see the Styrofoam containers in the waste basket? Then you called me about a half hour ago and said you wanted to come over. What do you remember?”

“Most of that but some other stuff too. Tuesday you were really unfriendly and at quitting time you came in and said you were giving your two weeks notice and denied anything about the blue hair ribbon. The rest of the week you were your old sweet self, and we were here Friday night. I had such a good time I decided to call and see if Saturday night was ok. You said yes, but you were really angry about the way I treated you all week. You said I ignored you most of the week, and asked me to leave after about a half hour. After I got home, I paid some bills, but then I couldn’t find them today to mail them, and my check book said I paid them on Tuesday. I had even written a note to myself saying I had paid the bills on Saturday.” Eric began to sob.

"I don't know what to tell you. I thought about quitting to get away from this situation, but I didn't say anything. I was kind of irritated about the hair ribbon, but since you had been so nice to me, I decided to wear it especially for you."

"Are there two of you? Are you some kind of a goddess who can be in two different places at the same time, or maybe you have a twin sister? But then there was the pimple."

"I don't think that I'm a goddess. I'm a homely woman who has finally found a lover, and I don't want to give him up unless he turns out to be totally mad. I don't know much about men, and this whole business scares me a lot. Is this what guys are like?"

"I don't think so. I've never been this way before, but I can't speak for all guys. Tell me more about the staff and not liking my behavior. You said I was kind of spaced out."

"I didn't say that, I said that you ignored me and everyone else. Spaced out might be a good term. Are you doing drugs or smoking pot or something like that?"

"No I'm not. I've never used that stuff. I drank some beer to relax my mind. This whole business is tearing me up."

"Well you go around in a daze sometimes. You don't talk to anyone and your instructions don't always make much sense. A lot of times they are a repeat of what you said before, or you like skip ahead, and we don't know what you're talking about, and then suddenly, you are your old self again. This all started about a month ago."

"This isn't at all what I know. I work hard every day and stay on task. I engage with everyone. I have had some problems with staff asking dumb questions or having reports they claim they haven't written. I feel like things have been getting a little disorganized. I do research every evening except when I'm over here. You know I like a systematic life."

“Promise me that you’ll make an appointment with a mental health specialist. Maybe you’re working too hard, or maybe you’re getting some damage from the magnetic fields. You get more exposure than anyone else.”

“I’ll do that, but will you come with me so they can hear your side of things. I’ll call in the morning and get an appointment.”

“Ok, I’ll go with you when it’s time, but I’m feeling a little lonely now, and I would like you to get on task, but please don’t come over drunk anymore.” When Eric got home it was too late to do any research; he went to bed.

Monday morning he called a local psychiatrist. “I need an appointment soon. I feel like I am losing it, and I totally don’t understand what’s going on.”

“I can get you in on Wednesday morning at nine. We have a cancellation then. Will that work for you?” the secretary asked.

“Yes, that is good, and would you email me an appointment slip so I don’t lose track of the appointment.”

“I will, you should get it in a few minutes,” she answered and hung up.

He saw that it was a blue ribbon hair day when he went to Sheela to tell her about the appointment. “You seem to be in a really good mood today. We go in Wednesday morning at nine.”

She flashed him a warm smile. “Think how good a mood I’d be in if you were with me every night. Anyway, I’ll be ready on Wednesday.”

That taken care of, Eric went back to his regular routine of work and research. Wednesday morning he was ready to go and went to Sheela at her work station.

“Are you ready to go? We’re supposed to be there at nine.”

“Aah, Where?”

“To the psychiatrist, you said you would go with me.”

He never said a word to me about that.

“Oh, ok I’ll go. Let me shut this stuff off first.” Eric noted that she wasn’t wearing her blue hair ribbon. They got in the car and drove across town to the doctor’s office.

“We’re here for my appointment, Eric Bader,” he announced to the secretary.

“I’m sorry, sir, you’re not scheduled for an appointment now, although Dr. Redden is available at this time.”

“You emailed me this appointment slip on Monday,” he said handing her the slip.

“I don’t know how you got this but you’re not in my computer. I’ll ask him if he can see you this hour.” She went in the Dr.’s office and consulted with him.

“He will see you now Mr. Bader,” she told him when she returned. She led Eric and Sheela into the Dr.’s office. The interview lasted an hour during which both Eric and Sheela related the events of the past month.

“Well, Mr. Bader, you seem to have many symptoms of dissociative disorder. Would you be willing to enter the hospital for a more extensive evaluation? It doesn’t sound like you are really safe living alone in your present condition.”

“I’ll go, but I don’t think I have a dissociative disorder. My mind is clear even if I’m confused, and things are not consistent. I really want to know what is wrong with me, if indeed it is me.”

“I’ll come and visit you every day if I can, and we’ll keep the business going and get the contract fulfilled. Please, get well.” Sheela said.

The doctor made the calls and in a short while the ambulance came and took Eric to the hospital.

Sheela returned to work to explain things to the staff. “The doctor put Eric in the hospital for observation. I think he will be

there for awhile so we all have to pull together to keep things going. We're close to making big money."

Even though he was in the locked ward to keep him from wandering off, Sheela and members of the staff came to visit him almost every day. He was able to continue directing his business from the hospital. One of his engineers, Pete Franden offered to pick up his research.

"I'll think about that Pete, but I finally finished a phase, and it will take a lot of briefing to get you ready for the next part. I really don't like to talk about it outside of the shop. This could be a real breakthrough on light and gravity behavior."

He had been in the hospital a little over two weeks when Sheela came to visit him after work. "It has been really lonely at work. You have really spoiled me because I used to be lonely all of the time. It's really private in here do you think maybe we could..." she smiled and gestured toward the bed.

"No. I would like to but these people seem to be puritanical, and things wouldn't work out well. For all I know, they watch me even when there are visitors here; not that I'm paranoid or anything. I really think they will release me in the next few days since my insurance is about to run out. I don't think they've found anything, and my life seems to be really consistent. You haven't changed at all."

At his consultation two days later Dr. Redden said, "Well Eric, we can't find anything wrong with you, and your behavior and memory are very consistent with a man of your age. I am going to discharge you, but I would like to see you a couple of times a month. Your first interview troubled me some. I would suspect drug use, but we did a twenty-two channel blood screen when you came in and found nothing. Give Sheela a call and have her pick you up sometime after two this afternoon."

"I hope you're right Doc. What I went through scared the hell out of me. I still don't know what to think. Was it really me, or was it something else. I don't understand."

"We'll work on this. I'll set up an appointment before you leave. I have some concerns about your condition myself, but I can't really find anything yet."

"Give me a slip so I don't lose track of when I should see you."

Sheela picked him up and drove directly to her apartment. He stayed the night with her, and went home the next morning which was Saturday.

Eric bought some groceries and checked various parts of the business to see what had been done in his absence. Everything seemed to be normal and well managed. About four that afternoon, the phone rang.

"Hi, are you coming over for our Saturday date? I can make you a nice supper if you want, and I have a surprise for you."

"Ok, when do you want me to come over?"

"Sixish would be good and don't drink anything. It doesn't help you know."

Eric did a quick cleaning of his personal rooms upstairs and went to Sheela's expecting the surprise to be a naked Sheela.

"Hi, sweetie, thanks for coming over. Do you notice anything different?" asked a fully dressed Sheela.

Eric looked at her and the apartment hoping to detect the surprise. "You did something with your hair?"

"Yes, I got it cut and styled. After you said something about me having my hair cut last month, I thought maybe it was a hint that I should do something with it. Do you like it?"

"Yeah, it gives you a softer kind of flirtatious look."

Oh Lord, it looks like it did last month. Is it all starting again?

“Well come on in. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes, but let me warn you, I’m not wearing any stupid blue ribbon.” Eric sat down on the couch with a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach.

“Do you want to sit next to me or across from me?” Sheela asked as she began to set the table.

“Next to you, I think. It’s cozier that way.” *And I don’t have to look at your hair.*

“Why don’t you stay with me, sweetie? We could be cozy all of the time, and I could kind of watch over you in case you start to lose it or something.”

“That’s really kind of you to offer, but I wouldn’t get much research done. I know too well what happens when we are together. Besides, I still have a lot of pain from losing Sonja and the girls, and I’m not ready for anything serious.”

“Well, it was worth a try.”

As he was eating his steak he thought, *there are two of them. There has to be. I don’t know how that can be, but I’m sure. You can’t cut the same hair off twice.* Later that evening when they were playing in the bedroom, he found a clothing marker.

“Turn over Hon, I want to draw something on your back.” Sheela giggled and turned over. Eric wrote $E=mc^2$ between her shoulder blades and drew a number of lines including one that came up to the hair on her neck. “Now don’t scrub this off. We can use it to remember our good time tonight.”

It was very late when Eric got back to his house. He spent Sunday going over research notes, checking the condition of all of the equipment, and getting focused on the projects.

It must be the same with the grocery store. First there was a grey one and a red one. Then he painted the second one, and when they were both red, I couldn’t tell the difference. Eric drove to the grocery store and surreptitiously scratched $E=mc^2$

on the window trim. He returned home feeling at least partially satisfied.

The next morning everyone was glad to see him back at work. He talked to Pete, and they decided to work as a team on the research in case Eric ended up back in the hospital. Sheela came in and gave him a warm smile. “Hi Hon, do you want to see the art work on my back?”

“Not right now. It might distract me from my first day at work.” It took him most of the day to get catch up with everything. After dinner he went down stairs and turned on all of the equipment and started the next phase of his research.

If this works like I think it will, there will be big money to be made.

He carefully made notes of his work and put them in his pocket. The next morning he was ready for a big day at work. As his staff filed in they were all surprised to see him and had endless questions to ask about where he had been.

“I’ve been in the mental hospital. You all knew that. Sheela kept you up to date on things didn’t she? After all I was here yesterday.”

“If you were, no one saw you; you definitely weren’t around here. No one has seen you for almost three weeks,” Pete answered.

“Ok, everybody go to work. I’ve got to figure this out. Would you stay Sheela? I need to ask you some things.”

“Sure, I’ll stay. I would like some explanations myself.”

“Tell me what happened after I asked you to go with me to the psychiatrist. “

“I agreed to go with you on Wednesday morning when your appointment was scheduled. You never said a word about it on Wednesday. In fact, you hardly spoke to anyone for the rest of the week. I figured that you had changed your mind. On Monday you hardly came out of your room. I went up a couple

of times to check, but you were lying on your bed not saying anything. The staff decided that if you weren't better by Wednesday we would call an ambulance. I went up to your room that morning, but you were gone. There was no trace of you. We called the police, but they really didn't do anything. We called the psychiatrist's office, but you had never appeared for your appointment, and they didn't know anything. Then this morning you were here like everything was normal. Eric, I'm really afraid there is something seriously wrong with you."

"There is something seriously wrong ok, but I'm not sure that it's me. That's absolutely not what I remember. I spent over three weeks in a psych hospital and everything was fine. I got out on Friday and spent most of the weekend with you. Would you stand up and turn around for a second."

"Ok, what's up? What are you going to do?"

"I want to check something on the back of your neck. As I suspected; Saturday night I put a drawing on your bare back that went up to the hair on your neck, but it's not here. Would you ride down to the store with me?" She agreed and they went to the store.

"Come with me Hon," he said taking her hand. "I want to check something on the paint of the window frame."

"You know, Eric, this is too weird. What are we supposed to do here?"

"I scratched $E=mc^2$ on the frame right here on Saturday night. It's not here now, and there's no sign of repainting."

"Let's go back to work. I don't like this stuff. This isn't science. You can't put a formula on it or measure it. This is only believing in something."

"Ok, I wanted to check this to make sure. I didn't think it would be there. If a researcher observes an event and writes it down, does that mean the event occurred?"

“Well, yes usually, but if no one else observes the event then we don’t know if it occurred or not. No one saw you write on the window sill, and no one observed any drawing on my back, so did they occur?”

“I don’t know, and that what’s driving me nuts. There is one more thing I can check. I have an appointment slip in my pocket for next Wednesday at the psychiatrist’s. Let’s go see if that’s the case.”

When they arrived at the clinic, Eric said, “I have an appointment with Dr. Redden for next Wednesday, and I would like to confirm it. I’m Eric Bader.”

“Well, Mr. Bader, you missed your appointment last month and I don’t have you down for next week,” the secretary replied.

“How do you explain this,” Eric replied and handed her his appointment slip.

“Well, this is Dr. Redden’s signature. I guess he forgot to tell me about you. It appears that there is an open spot at that hour, so I’ll put you down for it. Please try to keep this appointment or have someone call to cancel.”

“Thank you, I’ll do my best to be here,” Eric said as they walked out.

“I was sure that the appointment wouldn’t be there, but at least I had some proof that it had been made. It’s not only me.”

“Well, it’s not me, and it’s not your staff. There are five people who have observed things differently from what you report. How do you explain that?” Sheela said.

“I think that there are two of everyone that I have been in contact with for the last two months, but there is only one of me. When I’m with the other set, I’m kind of a ghost here.”

“You’re talking about ghosts and double beings, and you call it science. I really can’t buy this. Don’t tell me anything more about this business. If you’re gone for a while, next time

make up a big lie. Try to be normal around me. I have enough problems.”

“What problems do you have? Do you want to tell me about them?” Eric asked as they pulled up in front of the lab.

“I guess this is as good a time as any. I haven’t had a period in over two months.”

“I thought you were on the pill, and you said you were so messed up inside that you couldn’t get pregnant.”

“I don’t know for sure that I am, and I have been afraid to check since you have been so erratic, besides I have always been irregular.”

“Well, you better get a test or see a doctor. That complicates things a little more.” *Over two months. That’s about when this business started. That could mean that the other Sheela is in the same condition, whatever it is.*

They walked into the lab with an unspoken agreement to get to work and get through the day. That evening Eric sat alone in his house trying to puzzle out his situation.

It only happens when I’m alone, and after I go to meet Sheela or to the store or something, and they are different. Things change a little, like the missing checks or the store paint. I frequently run the field generator when I’m alone because that’s when I do my research. I wonder if that is somehow the cause of these changes. I can do a test on that idea.

After relaxing for a while, Eric drove to Sheela’s house. “Oh sweetie, I’m so glad you came over. I have been so lonely for almost a month, but don’t try to tell me where you were all that time.”

“Ok, no explanations. Come here and let me hold you.” There was no drawing on Sheela’s bare back and not trace that it had been scrubbed off. It was very late when he returned home. Even though he was tired, he went down to the basement and turned on the magnetic field generator. He spent two hours

on his latest experiment drawing on the research notes he had in his pocket. He went to bed to await the outcome when people came to work.

“Good morning Eric, are you feeling better today? You certainly look better,” Pete greeted him.

“Yeah, I feel great, but I’m a little tired. I stayed up late doing research. Here are the notes I made last night.”

“Hi, sweetie, do you want to see my art work today. It’s starting to fade a little,” Sheela said as she walked by.

“Not right now, but maybe after work if you have the time.”

“I can always make time for that. I have nothing planned.”

“Ok, take out or restaurant after work.”

Well, it looks like it’s the field generator, but I’ll check a little further.

It was take out, and they hurried over to Sheela’s place. Later in the evening they lay comfortably together.

“Are there any secrets you need to tell me?” Eric asked as he gently rubbed her bare abdomen.

“You may be a little crazy but you seem to have some kind of magical insight. Yes, the rabbit died yesterday. How could you have possibly suspected?”

“Only a hunch, I have many powers, my dear.” They discussed the situation until Sheela fell asleep.

I think this is a new and different way to have twins. I wonder what my other twin girls are doing these days.

Eric slipped out quietly and stopped at the grocery store. His scratching was still intact on the window frame. Satisfied, he went home. At this point he was very tired, but he turned on the field generator, did a couple of tests and went to bed.

He woke up the next morning to the sound of people talking downstairs. *It’s after ten. They must be wondering about me.*

Before he could get out of bed, Sheela came in. “Are you ok today? You were your weird self yesterday. Please say you’re ok.”

“I’m ok, I worked late last night in the lab, and I was really tired. Is everything ok downstairs?”

“Yes, Pete has kind of stepped forward to keep things going when you’re not up to it or gone. I think he has some research ideas too. I’ve done the paperwork and paid the bills and payroll. The government likes our work.”

I wonder what they would think if they knew what I know. “Tell the guys that I slept in, and I’ll be down in a few minutes.” Sheela nodded looking a little disappointed and went down stairs. Her collarless blouse showed there was no black mark on her neck.

I was pretty sure I knew where I was, and that clinches it. It’s the magnetic field generator. It somehow moves me back and forth. I wonder if it would do that to anyone who works where I do. Eric spent the day getting the research and the production back on track. He started Pete on the research project he had been pursuing. Now both Petes had the same assignment.

After supper, Eric lay on his couch thinking about his problem. Sheela had invited him to come over for the evening, but he declined.

I think the field generator has to go. It’s too damned dangerous. I don’t know how or why it does what it does. I don’t think I can cope with two sets of everything, and who knows, it could turn into four or five or more sets of everything. What if Pete gets moved to the other place and meets his other self?

It was late in the night when Eric got up and went down to the basement. He turned the generator on medium power and loosened a couple of water pipe fittings on the generator cooling

system. He then drove to Grand Island in hope of seeing his daughters. Sonja was more than a little hostile, but agreed he could talk to them for an hour if she was in the room. The visit wasn't very satisfying because Eric continued to worry which girls they were, and if the others were different. It was late Saturday afternoon when he returned to North Platte. Although he was exhausted, he went to Sheela's rather than home.

"Oh, come in. I'm glad you could make it. Are you ok? You look really bad."

"I'm ok, but really beat. I decided to visit my girls today, and I didn't get much sleep last night. I thought being with you would help me relax."

"I wouldn't want you to relax too much. Come in and I'll fix you something to eat, and you can rest awhile and get some energy back." After dinner Eric fell asleep and slept until the next morning to Sheela's dismay that Eric wasn't interested in sex. He did spend most of Sunday with her, and when he went home he found a severe mess in the basement. The generator shorted out, and caused a minor explosion which broke several water pipes.

Well that seems to have done the job. I had better shut off the water, and see if I can get this basement pumped out, and call my insurance agent.

Monday morning the staff came in and helped with the clean up.

"What happened, Eric? Did a pipe burst or what?" Pete asked.

"I don't really know. Everything seemed fine when I left for Grand Island on Friday night. I must admit, I didn't check the basement before I left. I didn't get home until Sunday afternoon. I could hear the water hissing, and I went downstairs and found an awful mess. I haven't had time to really look at things. I suspect that the generator is totally ruined."

“Does that mean we’re out of business when we were about to make a major breakthrough?”

“We’re hurt bad, but there is insurance on the generator. We have our production contract with the government, and we can limp along.” Everything went along quietly until Thursday when he got up and started breakfast.

Where’s that melon I bought yesterday? I put it right here on the middle shelf. The milk is open, and I know I didn’t open it yet. Oh damn!

Eric ran down to the basement. There sat the generator in perfect shape, no broken pipes, no mildew. *Well, so much for theory number one.* He went back up and had breakfast and waited for the staff to come to work.

“Hi sweetie, you look like you’re ok today. You’ve been in your space mode for almost a week. Do you want to see my art work? One more shower and it will be gone.” Sheela asked as she started to unbutton.

“No, no, not here. Turn around and I’ll check. Yeah, I can see that it’s there.” Later that day, Pete and the other staff came to his office to talk.

“Eric, we’re worried about you and the company. As you know, we had you taken to the hospital yesterday afternoon, but I guess they released you. We would like to buy the company from you. We are on the edge of a big breakthrough, and you’re not with it,” Pete told him.

“What are you offering? I’ve sacrificed a lot to get this operation and research going, but things have really been weird for me. Maybe it’s time for me to step back.” *Especially if they are shipping me to the hospital.*

“Would you take \$200k and retain twenty-five percent share in the company? Then if you get to be more stable, we will be glad to have you do research.”

“That’s fine with me, but you need to know that Sonja has twenty-five percent interest in the company so you will have to work with her. Bring me the cash in the next few days, and we will sign the papers. Please don’t turn me in to the psych people unless I get violent or something.”

“You really want cash?” Pete asked.

“Yeah, otherwise, Sonja will try to get a hold of a bunch of it.” Two days later, the deal was done. Eric requested to live upstairs until he could find another place even though Sheela begged him to move in with her.

The only thing that shifts is me and what I have on me. Theory number two, I think it must be the house. I’ve got to get these hundred dollar bills attached to me or I’ll end up leaving them here. Is that whacked enough, sewing all of your money into your clothes? I know if this business keeps up these people will have me in a mental ward. Too many people know about my weird behavior.

Friday morning Eric woke up and knew he had shifted. One look around the room confirmed it. He was wearing his cash pajamas, so he still had his money. He left the house immediately and went to Sheela’s. She was getting ready for work.

“Hi Hon, can I come in?”

“Oh please do. Are you alright now? You’ve been in space mode for over a week, and some of the guys think you sabotaged the generator. Sonja heard about it, and she is ready to sue and try to institutionalize you too.”

“Damn, will you protect me Sheela? Can I stay here and hide. Tell them I will sell out for a hundred thousand, but don’t let them know where I am.”

“I’ll hide you Eric, and I’ll protect you, but you have to stay here with me. Maybe we could move someplace where no one knows us.”

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Eric got his money, and he and Sheela moved to Arizona. Still, from time to time, Eric would unaccountably shift away to the other Sheela for a few days. Both women were endlessly demanding as was the stream of babies and their diapers. There was nowhere to go in either environment that would not land him in a mental institution. He became a sex slave in two worlds.

The End

Born on the Moon

By Kerry Burns

It is the duty of parents to teach their children the many things they must know to live well and safely, and many of these things are not taught in school. Family history and family secrets have to be passed on at some point.

Some years ago when she came home from school, my six year old daughter Mara asked, "Dad, where were you born?"

For many people that would be a simple direct answer. However, I had a choice to make, I could tell a simple truth, or I could tell her a big fat lie.

"On the Moon," I said. "My mother was a Moon maid and my father was from earth."

"Oh, Dad, be serious; you weren't born on the Moon, That's stupid."

"Not so. Sit down on the couch; I think it is time you learn something about your heritage. Moon culture and people have a long and interesting history. They visited the earth long before Earth people learned how to go to the Moon. In fact, it may be that their scientists gave earth scientists some hints on how to do space travel."

"Grandma is not from the Moon. She said she was born in Missouri."

"That's true she was, but you see the grandparents you know adopted me. They aren't my real birth parents. I've had a very difficult and complicated life. There's no use me going into the whole story if you don't believe what your father tells you. What I want you to understand is that we are very special people. We have better eyes to see light and dark, and we think differently than ordinary earth people. Someday you may meet your real Moon grandmother."

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“Well, ok. I guess if you really are from the Moon, then I will believe it, but it seems pretty weird. Am I the only Moon girl at school?”

“Probably you are. There aren’t many Moon people here, and they hide themselves carefully. You need to be pretty sure of them before you ask. There would be a lot of prejudice if the whole population knew about us. You should be very careful about telling people that you are a Moon person.”

The next day when she came home from school, my daughter asked, “tell me about life on the Moon. Did you go to school there? What was it like? Is there a Moon language?”

“Yes, Yes, Yes,” I answered. “First thing is that on the Moon, we live underground in tunnels and caves because it is so cold on the surface, and there is no air. Everything is in tunnels and caves, and it’s mostly dark. That’s why Moon people can see in the dark better than earth people. I’m sure you noticed that about yourself.”

“Oh, I wondered why I could see so much better at night than Peggy.”

“I went to school on the Moon, or maybe I should say in the Moon. We had classes like you have, and kids started learning to read Moonish. We recited poems and had recess. I didn’t have many friends. Everybody knew I was a half-Moon, and they didn’t like me, or they were afraid of me. You really had to be a full-Moon to be completely accepted. I never knew if my Dad came to the Moon on his own, or if he had been captured on earth and taken there. He had a job, and we had a pretty good place to live.”

“What was your mother’s name?”

“‘Moonahontus,’ which means ‘flower of the people’. She was a very good mom, and she helped me to understand a lot of things about Moon people.”

“Is your Moon mom still alive?”

"I think so. Moon people live a very long time. She was still young and healthy when I left, but I don't want to get ahead of my story. I went to school for all eight years. Moon kids are smarter, so it only takes eight years to finish school. We didn't have Moon band. Moon people don't care much for music, and the thin air makes the notes sound funny. Moon basketball was out of the question. Did you ever try to play basketball in a low gravity tunnel? The ball bounces all over and things really get out of control."

"That would be dumb. Did you study then?"

"Mostly we studied, but we did play chase the girls and kiss them, like they do here. As we got older, the girls didn't run as fast, but it got easier to bump our heads on the top of the tunnel."

"Yuck, why do boys always want to do that? But if I threaten to kiss them, they run. Boys are so stupid."

"Anyway, when I graduated, I couldn't get a job because I was a half-Moon, so I signed up for an earth expedition. My father had taught me English, and they thought I might be useful."

"Oops, five-o'clock, that's as far as we go tonight. I'll fix supper while you change your school clothes. Peggy will probably be over after supper to play, but not a word to her about this. I wouldn't want you to lose your friend."

"Wait, one more question. You didn't tell me about Moonish. Can you say something?" she pleaded. "Maybe you could teach me Moonish."

"Well, I have forgotten most of my Moonish. 'Grulg' means 'Hi' and 'Lago' means 'goodbye', and 'Bogga lugga manoe juge' means go change your school clothes now'."

"Ok, lago," she replied.

She probably didn't realize that all present tense Moonish words have a g in them.

The next day was more of the same. “Dad, how did you get to earth?” Mara asked.

“Well, that is kind of complicated. Like I told you, after I graduated, I signed up for an Earth expedition. First, we went to this big hanger where we spent a whole Earth cycle learning about Earth culture and studying Spanish. My English was pretty good, but I didn’t know anything at all about Spanish. ‘Que pasa mia cara?’ Why do I need to learn that? Well, I found out. On the second week of orientation, they told us about the travel. It’s kind of weird. Moon travel doesn’t go through regular space, but kind of an alternate space, and we always land somewhere in the Southern Hemisphere. I guess they had a bunch of disasters until they learned to arrive only on land.

The other thing is that we don’t travel in a space ship. It’s more like a three-room camping trailer. The trip only takes a few minutes, and we have a place to live when we get there. The trouble is the navigation is not very good. They don’t land in the water anymore, but that is the best they can do. If we landed in Australia or Africa, we speak English. If we land in South America, we speak Spanish.”

“Dad, you are telling me more than I want to know about this stuff. Where did you land, and what did you do when you got here? Get to the story and quit playing professor.”

“Ok, ok, we landed in central Argentina fairly near the mountains. I have to tell you, being out in the open sky was really scary, but not as bad as all of those cows that were milling around our house-ship. I had never seen cows before; they were a lot bigger than the pictures showed. Did you ever step out of the shower and see a big old cow staring at you through the window? We don’t eat much meat on the Moon, mostly a kind of mushroom that grows in the caves, so we didn’t know anything about cows.

The Moon scientists figured out a way to hide our house-ship, so humans couldn't notice it, but for some strange reason the cows could see it.

Anyway, we put on our disguises and stole a number of horses from the local ranchero. Now disguises for Moon people aren't much. We look almost like earth people. There are some differences in the parts that are always covered and the earlobes are always attached. The main disguise was to color our skin a little brown since living in caves left us pasty white.

I don't want you to think it was easy riding a horse bareback out across the pampas. The local ranchero didn't provide saddles when we stole the horses. Being used to one-sixth gravity, I can tell you that bouncing on that bony back at full gravity for almost a hundred miles was not any fun, but it was more fun than walking around after we got off of the horses. We traded them in for a car at the first medium sized town we came to.

Our mission was to study the oil industry in Texas, and we were working our way north. I thought that flying to Houston would be more efficient, but, no, the full moons wanted to drive through the jungle and mountains to Caracas. I was the junior member of the expedition, so I didn't have any say. Sometimes those Full-Moons are too strange. Maybe they slept outside in the earth shine and got a little Earthy.

It's starting to get dark, so that's it for today. Go change your school clothes; Hasta la vista mia Nina."

"Sure, lagoon, Dad."

She was into this now. Friday, she came home right after school.

"Grul, Dad, will we learn about the jungle today? Were there elephants and lions there?"

"No, no, there aren't any lions and elephants in South America. They're all in Africa and some in Asia.

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The road north was not very good, but we got to Ecuador. Get out the map of South America and you can follow along. Ecuador is a country, and it is located right on the ecuador, I mean equator.”

“What’s an equator?” she asked.

“It’s an imaginary line all the way around the world half way between the North Pole and the South Pole. This line runs right through Ecuador, so they named the country after it. Most of our driving had been in the Andes, which are high mountains. Soon after we left Quito, the Capital, we headed for Venezuela. We started down hill toward the jungle, and the road was terrible. Remember, this was back in the olden days, and they barely had cars in South America.

A little while after we crossed the border into Venezuela, we came across a big tree on the road. I thought that was a good reason to go back to Quito, but who is going to listen to a sixteen-year old kid? Anyway, while we were arguing, a bunch of banditos came out of the jungle and pointed guns at us and told us to get out of the car. Two of them jumped in the car and drove away toward Quito. The rest of them forced us down a jungle trail. We walked until it was dark, and we were deep in the jungle where there was no sign of a road.”

“Were you really scared?”

“Oh, yes! We were all tired from the new gravity and were trudging in the darkness to their camp. ‘EEEEyaow,’ screamed a jaguar. The banditos ran and we followed them into the camp. The scream scared all of the birds and animals in the trees, and they set up a big ruckus. Then the dogs in the camp started barking and howling. Finally, things settled down. The banditos fed us supper and told us that we had been muy stupido e loco for driving without an escort on a road that leads nowhere.”

“What does that mean, Dad?”

“Oh, yeah, Spanish; It means very stupid and crazy. I think they were right. We were in big trouble.

Anyway, the camp was made up of eight jungle houses around a central camp fire. The houses were about ten feet each way with a little door. They were made out of sticks tied together. Then overlapping big leaves, kind of like banana leaves, were tied to the sticks, to keep out the rain, but they wouldn't keep out a jaguar. They wouldn't work very well here in Northern Wisconsin either.

There was no way we were going to try to escape into that jungle. That's enough for today. Now it is time for you to escape upstairs while I fix supper.”

She stayed with her mother over the weekend, and I had no story telling duty for a couple of days. Monday after school, things returned to the story telling routine.

“Dad, Mom said that you are not from the Moon, and that you should stop telling me all of this nonsense.”

“I never told your mom about my Moon life. I didn't think she would understand. She doesn't like strange things. People react funny to those who are different. That's why I told you not to tell anyone that you are a quarter Moon. Your mom thinks I am an ordinary guy from Montana. It would really upset her if she thought she had children who were part Moon.”

“Ok, Grulg, Dad. Is that better? Let's get on with the story. How did you escape from the jungle and the banditos?”

“Well, actually, I didn't. But that will take quite a bit of telling for you to understand. We stayed at the camp several days. The banditos took everything but the clothes we were wearing. They didn't know that they were Moon clothes. There were six of us who made the trip from the Moon. One of our party was earth named Roger. His Spanish was worse than mine, and he didn't understand what was going on. A little while after we left the camp and started down the trail, he

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decided to make a try for the road before we went deeper into the jungle. About five minutes after he ran, the jaguar screamed 'EEEyeow'. The banditos shook their heads. 'Loco!' We continued down the trail to the north deeper into the jungle. I have always wondered if the jaguar was one of their guards.

We marched on through the jungle on this rough narrow trail for a couple of days. Finally we came to a small farm. I think the farmer grew cocaine. He took the two Moon men in our crew for farm laborers. I think that meant they would be slaves. After a few more days, we came to another farm. It was deep in the jungle by a big river. That farmer bought the other two, but he didn't want me because I was too small. They were both Moon women. I think maybe he was lonely.

The banditos were mad because they still had me along, and the farmers didn't want me. That night we camped by the river. The mosquitoes were terrible. I thought they were going to suck all of my blood. They didn't tie my hands anymore, so I spent my time slapping mosquitoes. The banditos sat by the fire laughing and talking. Suddenly they all burst out laughing and looking over at me and laughing some more. I had a feeling that I was in deep trouble.

The next morning we got in a big dugout canoe and started down the river."

"What's a dugout canoe, Dad?"

"That's a little boat made out of a single tree. They take about a twenty-foot piece of tree trunk and dig out wood on one side for places to sit and paddle. When that side is hollowed out, they tie some sticks on crosswise, so the log won't roll over and dump us in the river. That is very important because the piranhas in those rivers can eat the meat off your bones before you can sink to the bottom of the river."

"What are piranhas, Dad?"

“They are meat eating fish that are about a foot long with sharp teeth, and they are very hungry all of the time. There are millions of them in the river. A jaguar wouldn’t stand a chance against them.

Anyway, we found out about piranhas a few days later. We had started up a small tributary that had floating logs and branches in the way. One of the banditos was pushing them aside with a stick when he slipped and fell in. The water boiled with all of the piranhas going for him. He let out a short scream, but that was the end. The banditos were angry at me like it was my fault. They said something like ‘if it wasn’t for me, they wouldn’t be going up this rio malo.’ I was afraid they were going to throw me in.”

“What’s ‘rio malo’?”

“Oh, that means ‘bad river or evil river’. Something like that. Anyway, by evening of that day we came to a little hut near the rio malo. We all got out and went to the hut. We were met by an old, ugly woman with long grey hair and almost no teeth. She said her name was Marie La Vaux. She gave the banditos some money and some meat.”

They said, “You belong to her now,” and they ran back to the dugout, jumped in and paddled away as fast as they could.

“Ok,” I said. “Go get ready for supper. This is much too scary to hear on an empty stomach.”

After we had eaten supper, Mara was ready to continue.

“What did this ugly woman do?”

“This was the scariest place I had ever been in, being an innocent boy from the Moon. It was wet and jungle. In the mornings it was misty, and I couldn’t even see the river. There were rotting parts of dead animals lying around the hut. She warned me not to go past the ring of trees around the hut, maybe fifty feet each way, or very bad things would happen to

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me. I could hear moaning and growling, and all kinds of weird sounds out there.

Sometimes in the mornings there would be a dead animal by the door of the hut; sometimes there would be leafy green plants or fruits.

Marie, she made me call her Marie, would cook this stuff up in a pot in the hut, and we would eat it. I didn't think of it then, but the pot cooked without any fire. It sat there, and pretty soon the food was done."

Marie told me after the meal, "Take one of those animal carcasses out to the edge of the ring and throw it out to the 'things.' But be very careful not to step over the edge even a centimeter."

I always chose the stinkiest ones, but it didn't improve the smell of the camp. She had me do other jobs as the months passed. She let me go down to the river for water. Sometimes I could see the piranhas swimming by as I scooped up the bucket of water.

She always wanted me to comb her tangled, long, grey hair. Her hair smelled as bad as the dead animals. Her body smelled worse, and her breath was so bad I could hardly breathe."

She used to say, 'Don't be afraid, I won't hurt you if you are a good boy,' sometimes in Spanish and sometimes in English.

I had to sleep in the little hut, because it was too dangerous outside when the 'things' brought us food. I was absolutely not permitted to see the 'things'.

I never did sleep very soundly in that hut, and one night, I heard some noises. I didn't move, but I opened one eye. Marie had a fire going outside. There was a 'thing' which looked like a man with her. It was totally ash white, and it was holding down some kind of medium sized animal that was kicking and struggling. The man thing was making a strange moaning

sound. I think his tongue had been cut out, and Marie was singing some kind of a weird song. I caught some of the words, and I knew from my training that it was a voodoo song. If that was so, then the man thing was a zombie.

Ok, I have to stop here for tonight. The rest of this story has to be told in the daylight or we will both be in danger. Now go to bed.”

“Ok, Dad, buenos noches and lago.”

I hope she slept well. Anyway she came home from school the next afternoon ready to hear more of my story.

“Ok, now where were we?” I said.

“You discovered that there was a zombie with Marie.” Mara answered.

“Right, I lay there paralyzed with fear. No wonder she smells so bad I thought. She’s probably been kissing that zombie. Then Marie cut the heart out of the live animal, It was so horrible that I made a whimpering sound. They both heard me. The zombie came and picked me up and lay me down by the fire next to the animal. I thought they were going to cut my heart out too.”

As I lay there, Marie began to talk to me. “It is too bad that you saw this. You should have stayed asleep. We could have become very good friends, and you could have helped me in many ways, but now you must become a zombie. No one is allowed to see this ritual who has not been initiated.”

“She raised the knife above my chest, and I passed out. I have no idea how long I was out. It could have been years or a few hours. I came to consciousness one evening while I was eating a piece of rotten meat. There were other ‘things’ around. Some had been humans, and some had been animals. My tongue had been cut out, so I could never tell about the ritual.”

“But you have a tongue now, Dad. Did it grow back? And what is consciousness?”

“Consciousness is when a person knows who they are, and what is going on around them. It’s like being awake rather than asleep. The tongue problem is a complicated story. As you can see, I am not a zombie now. “

We things had to forage in the forest for food for ourselves and for Marie. Sometimes the ‘man things’ were sent to catch animals for the rituals, but they never sent me. Marie never talked to me again, but sometimes she would glare hatefully at me. I think she was angry that I had to become a zombie.

Marie never stepped outside of the ring of trees, and I never stepped inside again until one day. It was one of those misty days when you couldn’t see the river. About noon, a small boat stopped at the river landing, and a group of men came to Marie’s hut. Their black faces looked out from the hooded robes. The men produced some drums and whistles and began to play and sing. All of us ‘things’ were drawn into the circle by the hut. All of the ‘things’ but me began to moan and whine and roll on the ground. I stood there looking at them. That may have been the only smart thing I had done while I had been on earth.”

Marie looked at me. “It is as I suspected. You are not a true zombie. You would have made a better husband for me, but it is too late for that now. I am sending you with these men. If you understand me nod, your head.”

I nodded. The men who were playing stopped and began to shout and point at me. I didn’t understand what they were saying. I think now maybe it was Portuguese.

“What’s Portuguese, Dad?”

“It’s a language a lot like Spanish. They speak it in Brazil which is a very large country down river from Venezuela where they have a lot more voodoo.”

Marie said, “Good bye, my little helper.” The men quickly tied my hands and led me down the path to the boat. I didn’t look back, but I could hear the moaning and gurgling sounds. I

guess I wasn't as undead as I was supposed to be. They put me in the boat, and we rowed away down the river.

"This is the end of today's story. I need to fix our supper, and you need to pick up a few things in your room and change your school clothes. Thursday there was no story. There was a school activity. She was ready for the next installment.

"Where did they take you, Dad? Let's get on with this story. It is taking so long. How did you escape and get over being a zombie?"

"I told you it was a very long and complicated story. We traveled down river for a long time. Every day the river got a little bigger. They fed me the same food that they ate which was a great improvement, but they never tried to talk to me because I couldn't talk. Sometimes they gave me orders. Try going around for a whole day without being able to talk. It gets really lonely. I was still mostly zombie, so that stuff didn't bother me much then. I felt like I was kind of in a trance. What I didn't know then was that being half-Moon saved me. I guess the voodoo ritual only partially worked on me.

One day after about a month, we left the boat and started walking through the hills and mountains. I was still numb and went along. They untied my hands, but they kept me in the middle of the group. Finally, we came to the top of a high ridge. There was jungle around us as far as I could see in any direction, but from then on, we were walking down hill.

That night we came to a voodoo camp which was almost like the one I had been in before. They tied me to a tree out with the 'things.' Outside the hut they did the drumming and singing. The woman who lived in the hut was young and beautiful and had almost no clothes on. She danced around the hut singing and screaming, and waving her arms. Finally, she fell down and lay on the ground. Then they killed a couple of animals and smeared blood all over her and themselves. They brought me in

and smeared blood on me and did a bunch more dancing and singing.”

“Oh, yuk, that’s so gross. Did the ‘things’ attack you?”

“No, I think they knew I was zombie. At least they could smell me. Some of the skin on my arms was starting to rot. The next morning, a different group of men loaded me in a small boat, and we started down a fast running stream. It only took a few days to get to a larger slow river, and then I could smell the salt water. The only thing I knew for sure was that when the water was salty, there wouldn’t be any piranhas. Every day my head got a little clearer, but I was definitely still zombie.

Ok. That’s it. We have house cleaning tomorrow. We will take up the story on Monday after school.”

“Ok, Dad, ligo”

“Buenos noches mia, Nina.”

She came in the door at 3:40 and sat down on the couch. “Ok, I’m ready for the next part. This is way more interesting than school. What happened when you got to the ocean? That’s what salt water means, isn’t it?”

“Yes, that’s what salt water means. We came to a small city on the edge of the ocean that evening. As it was getting dark, we tied up at a very small dock with one other rickety little boat. We got out and walked up a muddy path to a group of huts. I think we were across the river from the main part of town. It was raining as usual. The jungle always smells worse when it is wet. Rot and mold and dead animals and plants were everywhere. You have to understand that people in these places don’t have toilets, and they go wherever. Sometimes you have to watch where you are stepping, especially when you don’t have shoes.”

“Dad! That’s terrible. I don’t even want to think about it.”

“Never mind. They took me to a little hut and tied me to the center post. They went to some of the other huts and forgot to

bring me any supper or anything to drink. The next day it was still raining and dark and misty. A woman who looked a little like Marie brought me some food and something to drink. She was very dark and spoke some language that I didn't understand at all. I think it may have been some Bantu language from Africa. Remember, that voodoo came from Africa. She began to sing and chant. I didn't understand a word of what she said, but the zombie part began to come out in me again. It was hard for me to think or have any feelings. Finally, she spit at me and left in disgust. After that, my skin quit rotting and my body felt a lot stronger.

One night a few days later, they came to me while I was sleeping and rubbed blood all over me, and the next morning I had to eat the heart of some animal. I didn't have any power to resist, and I really couldn't taste anything. Later I saw the body of a dead gorilla that had come from Africa lying by one of the huts. I think they were trying to make me into a really strong zombie, and that part worked. I could feel my muscles growing and my body coming back to life more or less. A few days later, some people came and looked at me. They gave the woman some money and took me away. They spoke Spanish, and I understood that I was a slave. We crossed the river and got on a big ocean boat. It was some kind of a freighter."

"What's a 'freighter', Dad?"

"A freighter is a ship that hauls cargo like bananas or oil. Sometimes they haul cattle, but that's really messy. Or maybe they haul coffee beans, but there are no people on board other than the crew. This freighter was old and dirty, but it took us to Nicaragua, which is a country in Central America. I was put in a big hut with a bunch of other slaves. They could all talk but me. They seemed to be in a kind of trance but they were definitely not the undead."

"What are 'the undead'? You said that a couple of times."

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The undead are the ‘things.’ They are not really dead because they move around, and they eat and sleep and take orders. They can work, but they can’t think, and they don’t seem to know who they are. Some people believe that their souls have been taken from them.”

“How could it be true that they have no souls?” she asked.

“I don’t know. They weren’t able to make me one of the undead, and I really don’t know what it was like. Anyway, this group of us had to work every day loading the freighters with bananas. I did that every day for almost five years. A stem of bananas weighs about eighty pounds. Each of us would pick up one and carry it up the gangway on to the ship and then down the ladder into the hold and carefully place the bunch in the stack. Then, turn around and go up a different ladder and off the ship for another bunch. You may have noticed that I don’t care much for bananas. They did feed us pretty good, because we had to work hard every day.

Every couple of months, it was hard to keep track of time, the skin on my arms would start to rot and stink. A voodoo lady would come at night when I began to rot and take me away to some dark place. Then she would do a ritual that had a lot of singing and moaning and rubbing blood on me. I usually missed the next day’s work, but my arms would quit stinking and heal up.

What no one knew was that something was growing inside me very slowly. It was some kind of a Moon thing, kind of like a cancer, but not quite.

But you will have to wait until tomorrow to find out what it was. Now go get ready for supper while I set the table. We are having roast and fried bananas tonight.”

“Yeah right, Dad. More like fried potatoes and green salad. That’s what you always cook, lago.”

Another day, another story. Winter was coming to Northern Wisconsin. When she got home from school, I had a fire going in the Franklin stove.

“Brrrr, it’s cold today. The wind off the lake is really bad. I need a good story to warm me up.”

“Ok, as you remember from last night. I was a zombie working on a banana boat in Nicaragua. I am guessing that it was some time in the 1930's. What is time to a zombie? I could tell you many things about life as a zombie and things that happened to me and my fellow workers in the last few years that I was there. But if I did, we would be all winter getting through the story.

One day while we were loading bananas, a voice came into my head. It spoke in Moonish “It’s time to leave here. Hide on the boat, and maybe we can escape.”

As I was carrying my last bunch of bananas onto the loaded boat, the slave behind me stumbled and fell off the gang plank into the water. That happened once in a while. We got very tired by the time the boat was loaded. I went down into the hold, and placed my stem of bananas on the stack. No one else was coming for a while, so I pushed some big stems of bananas aside and wormed my way down underneath and lay very still. A little while later, a few more stems of bananas were placed on top of me, and then everything was quiet.

After a long time, I felt the boat start up, and I could feel it bouncing around when the tug pulled us away. I had seen so many banana boats pull away from the dock, I was sure I knew what was happening. In a little while we were out in the open sea. Did you know that bananas cure sea sickness?”

“Oh, Dad, I don’t think so. You’re making that up.”

“Come on, would I make up things when I am trying to educate my dear little daughter?”

“Yes, you do it all of the time.”

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“In any case, I ate a lot of bananas, and I wasn’t sea sick. After a number of days, who can tell how many when you are lying in the dark under a big pile of bananas, we came to some kind of a port. I knew I had to get off the ship before they found me, so I had to be ready. The hatches were all locked so I couldn’t sneak off, and it was so dark that even my Moon vision didn’t help.

Finally, they opened the big hatch door, and they started unloading. I thought they probably had a bunch of zombies who would carry the bananas off the same way we put them on. But, no, a big machine drove in and lifted up whole piles at once and drove them off the ship. My turn came. The machine picked up the pile I was in and drove off the ship and set me and the bananas down in a railroad box car. I didn’t know what that was at the time. I had a few minutes to look out, but all I could see was some big buildings and a sign that said “Welcome to the Port of Houston.”

“Well,” I thought, “I guess I am the only one on our mission to make it to Houston. I sure wish we had flown. All too soon, they slammed the box car door shut, and I was in the dark again. After a few days of thumping and bumping we stopped again. I didn’t know where we were, but I thought it was time to say goodbye to the bananas. I got ready and was crouched by the door. When it opened, I leaped out knocking down a couple of guys. I still had my gorilla strength, and I was able to push my way through a bunch of men, and I started running up the railroad tracks.”

I heard someone yelling “Hey, you bum, come back here.”

“I didn’t know what a bum was for sure, and I wasn’t going to stop and ask. I caught up to a slow moving freight train, and some men, bums I guess, shouted at me to jump onto a box car. They reached down and gave me a hand to pull me up. Unfortunately, the skin on my hand and arm pulled off in the

guy's hand as he pulled me aboard. Of course, the smell was terrible. I tried to tell them not to be afraid, but all I could do was make these really weird grunting sounds. They all jumped out of the car and left me alone. I had no food, no water and it was cold. I saw a sign that said 'Denver siding'. I guess that is where I was."

"Where is Denver, Dad?"

"It is in Colorado, very near the mountains. I think it is about eight hundred miles northwest of Houston. From what I have figured out, it was about the first of March. What I didn't know then was that the train was headed north into Wyoming and even colder weather. I was a poor starving zombie from the tropics with practically no clothes. I hadn't had shoes on for over ten years. There were a couple of piles of hay at one end of the car and a water bottle that one of the bums had left. I crawled under the hay and hoped for the best. After three more days, we stopped in some city. I didn't know then, but it was Billings, Montana, and it was winter. I jumped out of the car and staggered toward a fire that some bums had going."

"You keep talking about bums. What are they?" she asked. "And Billings is where Cousin Keith lives isn't it?"

"Yes, Keith lives in Billings. Bums are poor men who have no jobs and ride around the country on freight trains when they can sneak on like I was doing. A lot of them were looking for jobs in different cities, and some of them liked riding around the country. They called me over to the fire where they had some food. As soon as they could smell me, and I think the skin was starting to come off my face, they started shouting for me to stay back and began throwing sticks and rocks at me. I tried to signal them with my arms and tell them as best I could that I wouldn't hurt them. Then, they all jumped up and ran away. They left their food, so I ate it, and got warm by their fire. I found a jacket one of them had left, and I put it on. It was then

that I noticed that my stomach had swollen up so much that I couldn't get the jacket buttoned.

I was kind of worried about that, but then zombies aren't able to worry much. Then, the bums were coming back with a bunch of other men. I ran for it. There was a train leaving with a bunch of empty cars that had no tops or side doors. I didn't know it then, but they were coal cars which are loaded from the top. I was able to grab the ladder on the very last car. I climbed the ladder to the top. The sides of the car were made of smooth steel which angled down to the bottom which was open. I could see the railroad ties going past."

"What are railroad ties, Dad?"

"They are heavy square pieces of wood that hold the rails in place. If you ever noticed a railroad track, they are those black things that are about two feet apart under the rails. The rails are nailed to them with big spikes."

There was no way that I could get down into the car without falling out and being run over by the train. I decided to hang over the edge into the car so no one would see me at least until we got out of the city yards. In a little while, the train stopped. I could hear the bottom doors being closed on the cars ahead. Finally, they got to mine. I couldn't have held on much longer since the skin on my hands had rotted off and the muscles had turned to mush. I was losing my gorilla strength. As soon as the train started, I let go and slid to the bottom. I was resting on the bottom dump door. I couldn't think of anyway to get back up the sides. I really didn't know how much danger I was in. I know now that they load these cars by dumping tons of coal or grain at a time in from the top.

The steel was freezing cold, and it was really hard to keep my bare and now skinless feet off the steel car sides. I figured this was pretty much the end, and I would die before the day was over. After about a two hour ride, it was dark and the train

stopped. Everything was quiet. A great full moon rose and shined down in the car. Home! It gave me some hope and a little strength. I hadn't noticed it before, but there was an emergency rope hanging down in one corner. It took all the strength I had left to climb up the side with my bare feet braced against the icy steel side. The ladder was right there, and I climbed down. I could see the tipple ahead, and they were getting ready to fill the first car."

"What's 'a tipple', Dad?"

"It's a big kind of a building. The coal is raised up high and then they can drop it in the railroad cars or trucks without having to shovel or move it by hand."

I breathed a sigh of relief and sneaked away. My feet hurt; my hands hurt; my stomach hurt, and there was an icy wind blowing filled with sleet and rain. I had to find shelter, but where?"

The moon showed me the way. A voice in my head, in Moonish, said, "Keep going, we're not safe yet."

I saw a gulch off to the right across the tracks and up the hill a little. I headed for that, maybe I could get out of the wind up there. There was a little road up the bottom that was covered with coal slack.

"What's 'coal slack', Dad?"

"Oh, that's real fine coal almost a powder. It is very soft and smooth and easy on the feet, but it doesn't burn very well, so they can't sell it. At least they couldn't in the olden days."

"There were several small buildings, but they were all locked. The Moon showed me the mine mouth; a black place on the hillside. I went in. Immediately, I was out of the wind, and it was warm and dry. I went in a little ways, but it was absolutely dark. The black coal ate every bit of light. I came to a wide place, and I got against the side of the tunnel and lay down."

The voice in my head said, "This will have to do."

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“I died right there, and my body began to rot away.”

“Dad! You didn’t die. People don’t die and come back to life. That’s just in stories. I know that much!”

“Hang on, and let me finish. What had been growing inside me was Baby Dad. That way the Moon part of me was able to preserve me, and was able to move my life and memories into a baby. The voodoo stuff kept the baby from growing for all of those years. This part of the story I don’t remember, but my adopted dad told me about it. He came to work the next day. This was his coal mine, the Burns Mine. He found a baby lying in the mine on an old jacket with a bunch of slime around it. He took the baby home immediately and gave it to my mother, and they raised me. My Moon memories came back slowly after I got to high school. And that is why you are a Moon Maid.”

“Dad, I don’t believe that ending at all. You made this stuff all up. Zombies don’t turn into babies.”

Well, if you can’t believe your father, who can you believe? Don’t you want to be a Moon Maid?”

The End

Kerry and Lindsey write about hoarders, travelers, straying cats, migrating Irish, arranged marriages, transported college students, parallel worlds, struggling against all odds, and being born on the moon. Characters in these stories make decisions, often small or incidental, that change their lives in ways they could never have imagined. Sometimes others make decisions that cause change. If we are not in charge. Who is?

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