

## #17 Encore

Back in Seattle Ray opened up the home where he and Helen had spent so many happy years, and moved back in. In retrospect all those years now seemed to have been happy. Everything there reminded him of her, so that now there was only a very quiet and sad desperation remaining. The serenity had been replaced by loneliness. He noticed that the dust that had had to be taken care of regularly had not accumulated much while he was gone, just a mustiness. He had always been skeptical about dust being human skin cells, but he guessed that must indeed be the case. All those layers of Helen's and his skin floating around and clinging to everything. As his own body continued its inevitable layer by layer decline, he guessed the dust would once again begin to build up between dustings.

Allie had picked him up at the airport and gone grocery shopping with him on the way back to get all the essentials he would need to start out. Then she did the walk through with him, clearly wondering how he would take the sights again without Helen.

Helen was everywhere, of course, but he found that he could handle it now. Allie had removed Helen's clothes and many of the daily aspects of Helen's computer-related life. They had become part of Allie's life now.

Ray knew he would have to start managing what Allie had been doing for him by himself now though. The months he had been away had helped. Allie left him more or less on his own then, calling him frequently, but not being there for everything anymore.

As soon as Allie drove away Ray was on the phone to Lesa. Her classes were just out too and she had graded and returned the finals. She was rather glad to have some time. They both spoke of having time, but neither spoke of the possibilities of their going one direction or the other to be with each other to spend that time, to have those days and days and days to work out who they were and how they had gotten there.

Ray told Lesa that he had been reminded of those old Bob Dylan lines, "You can't let other people get the kicks for you. It's all over now, Baby Blue." He knew that what Helen, and thereafter Allie, had done for him had not been "kicks" by any stretching of the imagination, but at the same time, it had been *life*, and he had missed out on a whole bunch of it.

The conversation came around finally, as it did too often, to Lesa being his agent who had to tell him that the Mariners were still trying to make a date for him to appear at the plate to pick up his second World Series ring.

"You know I still haven't seen the previous ring, Ray. I saw the baseballs and trophies when I was there and I loved holding them and thinking about each one while Helen would be sleeping, but the ring wasn't out. I should have asked Helen. You don't wear it, do you?"

"No, of course, I don't wear it. You know me better than that."

"I know, Ray. Rings probably don't mean as much to a 'guy'."

Ray didn't know whether this discussion of rings was some kind of ploy or just a bunch of facts. Asperger's syndrome again he suspected.

But he was really getting tired of the Mariners insisting that he suit up every whipstitch. He was an old man. At some point they would have to honor his just saying he was tired and retired. His last at bat had been rather ridiculous didn't she agree?

Lesla didn't agree, seeming to think that in some sense it had been his best 'performance'.

She suggested finally that maybe she should explain this sense of his weariness and desire to retire to them. Should she tell them that he would appear in one more game as a retirement gimmick. Then he'd be done with it.

Yes, okay. Good idea. One more time. He could maybe handle that.

So Lesla worked a lucrative deal like all his others where he would appear in one final game before the home fans and that would be his swan song. Mariners management bought into it and Ray was on the roster

again, scheduled to play when the Yankees were in town next, a day game on a Saturday with a retirement celebration afterwards. It sounded fine, so she sent him the forms and it was scheduled.

Ray redoubled his exercises for the final weeks before his Major League career would go kaput. It worried him because he knew he had lost a considerable amount of conditioning during Helen's illness and thereafter. He could not now, nor probably ever again, regain it. He was too damned old.

The game would be hyped to the hilt with National TV coverage. Joe Brett and Tim no doubt. The family was abuzz for some pizzazz. But nobody mentioned Lesa, least of all Ray. He couldn't. Lesa had been ritualistically barred from the games in Seattle, more or less as penance for his family having been barred from Yankee Stadium. Lesa made no mention of the actual game to Ray other than contractual aspects required in the agent-client relationship.

It seemed to be a part of the two-universe system, Bonns here, Lesa there, Ray the telecommuter. Anyway, any invitation would seem to require acknowledgement of too much that no one really wanted acknowledged. This final game Ray saw as a sweeping away of that whole artifact rather than trying to clean it up for perpetuity.

The format of his participation would be the same as in the World Series games in which he had played. He'd sit there until Mac Heller decided to use him. He'd go out there, a *Casey at Bat*, and swing the bat one, two, or three times and that would be that, the major league career of Ray Bonn in the books.

Between innings they chose to present each of his achievements on the big screen from his cringing on the Larry King Live show in anticipation, the first tentative home run, on to the convincing ones, the World Series Victories, and him accepting MVP awards not very graciously, etc. Ray sat and watched, mortified and elated in turns as they toasted him.

There were actually a couple of video clips he had not seen. He enjoyed watching himself scramble between first and second base like a wounded crab. So did the fans. He had wondered what that had looked like. It was a great memory seeing Hiro speed past home plate before Ray could be tagged out. Ray wondered whether there might be some shenanigan like that he could pull off today. It would avoid having to demonstrate whether he had the strength to put one over a fence. But he doubted whether he had the dexterity to accomplish such a feat today.

Because Lesa Sorensen was Ray Bonn's agent, a Nobel Laureate of some distinction, and a beautiful woman with a personality that could charm snakes and snake oil salesmen, her desires for Ray's final Hurrah were not without influence. She really didn't want Ray to be apprehensive, or to make this day awkward for him in any way. Her touches would have to be subtle. She knew that Ray would not be sent up to bat before the eighth or ninth inning. So she booked herself to appear with Joe and Tim on Hot Box Sports with the agreement that her appearance would not be announced (and she would be seen nowhere) until she appeared on their show. She wanted her being there to be a surprise. They announced early on that there would be a special guest coming up in the eighth inning, leaving the audience to surmise who that might be.

There would be other touches too in the final presentation of Ray's awards, including the retirement of his most appropriate of numbers, 50 that would then hang in SAFECO field along with that of Hank Aaron, Edgar Martinez and other Mariner greats. He had worn it at 48, 49, and 50. Now he was 51.

So when the bottom of the eighth came around Lesa Sorensen appeared in the booth with Joe and Tim. Joe was exuberant. Lesa was absolutely gorgeous, they both agreed. She delightfully demurred. It had been too long since Lesa had appeared on Joe Brett's Sports presentation. It had seemed to both him and Tim as though she belonged on every show when Ray Bonn stepped to the plate. In Major League Baseball the names of Ray Bonn and Doctor Lesa Landau/Sorensen would always belong together.

"Oh, please, could we just drop that former name altogether." She had heard Ray Bonn say one time that the greatest thing he had ever done was to help her sort out her past. "That is the kind of a guy Ray Bonn is," she said. "Let's just leave it sorted out, shall we." She smiled but she was serious. "Lesla Sorensen."

Ray's wife had died the previous winter, how had he taken that?

"Ray and Helen had shared their whole lives. Their parents had been close friends; they had been born at the same hospital less than 24 hours apart. Their lives together had demonstrated a love that is the rarest achievement of the human heart," Lesa sentimentalized with honesty. She had not meant to be quite so melodramatic but had gotten herself almost in tears recounting having watched that last World Series game with Helen on speaker phone.

Ray had been devastated by his loss and only recently had begun a life after Helen. "Teaching courses at Stanford University seems to have been very helpful to Ray in finding a little happiness as a physicist again."

She too had been teaching. It was at Harvard, was it not?

"Yes, I've taught at Harvard since the first of the year." She and Ray actually taught similar courses covering Ray's work in relativity and their shared work on irreversibility and entropy in thermodynamics for which the Nobel Committee had honored them both.

Between catching up on the intellectual lives of Ray and Lesa, three Mariners went out. Thus, after the Yankees were blanked in the top of the ninth it was once again looking dire.

Ray was, of course, the proverbial ninth inning clutch hitter, and heading into the bottom of the ninth down by three, either the Mariners got some runners on base or Ray's at bat wasn't going to mean much. Gala post-game festivities might not seem very festive in that case, but they would get him out there anyway on this day wouldn't they – as a last out if nothing else. "Oh, I would think so" Lesa said. If Mac Heller didn't put him up to bat, it wouldn't sit well with the fans. Mac had seemed on occasions past to excel in managing when Ray was sitting there on the top shelf waiting to be taken down and dusted off. One would have to think that they had compatible personalities, Lesa suggested.

With two out and only one man on, Mac paced in front of his players and seemed to be thinking about the possibility of using Ray just to give the retirement party something to celebrate. However, he seemed to have decided that Ray Bonn wouldn't even function well without the chance of a win being on the line. She saw him as under pressure withstanding the uproar of the crowd, "Ray Bonn, Ray Bonn, Ray Bonn."

Up to this point the game had been boring to say the least, and as color commentator she felt some pressure to provide some bit of color so she began commenting about what must be going on in the dugout. "You know, Ray told me once that he and Helen had this division of labor at their house in which Helen took care of all the finances, the running of their home and family, and in short, all the practical matters and decisions about the house. I think maybe he exaggerated a little though, don't you, Joe? Tim? That couldn't really happen in America, could it?"

Pleased with watching them look at each other and squirm guiltily, she added, "He did make his money, after all, well, the money he made before selling books and swinging a bat, as an engineer." After a pause she said, "And then as the inventor of a very practical electronic component." She laughed.

"He seems pretty handy with a bat," Joe contributed.

"Oh, and long before that he had become a journeyman carpenter working through high school and the University to support his family," Lesa inserted as possibly of further interest with regard to his ability to handle a piece of wood. She laughed, adding much to what had so-far been rather colorless sports commentating. "Anyway, Ray maintained that his responsibilities had been for the universe, its origin, its logical structure, the laws of nature, and in short, I guess, abstractions. He did realize that it was funny, by the way, but he felt guilty for being such a lazy slob and leaving all the hard work for Helen."

They shared a laugh at the inversion of usual perceptions of difficulty with Tim interjecting, "Sometimes you wonder how guilty God must feel!" into the hilarity.

"Quite."

After the colorful interruption Lesa continued, "But here we see Mac and Ray doing what each does best, applying what Ray knows about how the universe works to effect a desired result without having to call up a miracle. It is just physics after all. I think Mac is in tune with that."

They laughed as they teased about Ray's by now well-known edicts about the behavior of reality. She told them about what Mac had told Ray in New York before his second grand slam concerning a pitch down and away being the same as over the middle of the plate, if one took a different stance, having said, "It's just relativity after all."

They chuckled again at how Mac had been able to get into the spirit of Ray's thinking.

"But do you know what I've figured out about Ray and everyone else?" Lesa asked the two rhetorically.

They looked at her expectantly.

"Even physicists have fantasies, so whether it's a miracle or not misses the point really, it's more a matter of what kind of fantasy we choose to live in and who's willing to live in it with us. It's easy to get a lot of people to share a fantasy in baseball. Look at you guys; you've made careers of it and have got millions of people in on yours."

She laughed and they laughed at themselves.

"Mine, on the other hand, is rather private," she added coyly to which they guffawed.

While this was going on, what some would consider a miracle in the form of an infield error, by others just a difficult play that was not made, or (she 'hesitated' to say as she laughed aloud) the other players having been bribed to blow the game, there were two men on base. Maybe it had been the extremely loud booing that had the infield edgy Lesa had suggested finally. Again, Mac had a hard decision and again he held for winning. That was, after all, what Mr. Win was all about.

All these head-hopping suppositions and hypotheticals about what must be going on in Mac Heller's mind were being discussed with second guessing by Joe, Tim, and Lesa up in the booth. As they all discussed the various improbabilities of Ray's consistently having had the bases loaded, Tim McCarthy was once again struck by the odds. True, Tim was a statistics man, and as Ray would have pointed out, you can't look at the odds of what has *actually* already happened; "that's looking down the wrong end of a telescope."

Bayes' theorem and her airtight contracts had almost guaranteed the bases would be loaded, Lesa reminded them. They weren't sure.

In any case Ray Bonn was coming to the plate one final time for real with a game on the line and the bases loaded against a new generation of Steinbrenners' Bronx Bombers. Ray could tell by watching his walk to the mound and the delay of a switch that the new skipper toyed with the idea of walking him. But they would have had to bring in bulldozers to clear the debris off the field if he had done that and he would have had to have been taken off under an armed guard, going down in infamy for ruining the retirement party of Ray Bonn. Maybe George had called down to the dugout to demand that they pitch to Ray. Not even the staunchest Yankee fans would ever have forgiven Yankee management for walking him this at bat, because Ray Bonn was after all, in some sense, theirs too. What Alturis Romero had experienced in Seattle with the boo-birds would have been nothing in comparison.

In the end Girardelli had opted instead to bring in their newest hurler sensation, called up mid-season just this year, who got the ball up to the plate at over a hundred miles an hour with some action on the ball. It would be a totally new look for Ray. That he would have lost a notch or two due to his advancing age would be why he was retiring. Jose Pasao once more had a snide comment for Ray. "Is this going to be a bunt, a blooper, or a bomb?"

Ray looked down disdainfully at the smirk behind the mask. "This," Ray smiled, "is going to be 'deja vu all over again!'"

Ray didn't dislike Jose, or any of the Yankees any longer. It is a lesson learned as part of what Shaara called, *For the Love of the Game*. Yankees are just the most notable and noble opposition in this game; they are at the top of the mountain one attempts to climb. George Steinbrenner spent all that money just to provide that function.

As he had sat there between innings of this game, it had all been a musical whirl like in Billy Chapel's last game. He had respected friends on that other bench, and if they had not been so formidable what meaning would any achievement of his have ever had? It was defeating *them* that had made his reputation.

But the hurler now was new. Mareno Ricuzo was but a revered memory. The great ones come, and then they go. Someone new comes up. This guy was a lefty. The first pitch he threw was *heat* that swished across just in front of Ray's eyes to impress him, he supposed. It did.

"Ball one!"

The next pitch somehow curled back in from way outside away from him. Ray was certain it had been at least five inches off the plate, but it was "Strike One!" nonetheless.

Without even looking at the umpire this time Ray backed out of the batter's box and walked around to bat left-handed against this guy.

No one had hit one of his pitches out of a park yet, and in fact since he had been at the Major League level there had only been one hit, an infield hit by Hiro, by any left-handed batter.

All this was noted and annotated by Joe and Tim. Lesa was asked why she thought Ray would opt for the most difficult position from which to face this guy. "He must know the odds," Tim said. "Wouldn't you think?"

"Do you guys remember that game two years ago in New York?"

Of course they did. There was no one with 'baseball' in their vocabulary who didn't.

"Then you remember the ninth," Lesa said. "Well this is just 'deja vu all over again'."

Both men laughed, appreciating Lesa's allusion to one of the great Hall of Fame catchers, Yogi Berra's humorous comments. As they were laughing there was another windup.

Ray stood as far back from the plate as he could get – Mac's relativity at work Lesa supposed – and then came the very same pitch as the previous one, except that Mac Heller's pseudo relativity fixed it. Ray had swung out in front, but with his bat angled back so as not to pull it too far and foul it off. There was the now familiar crack of the bat and the ball soared high into the sky down the right field line. He had got under it a little; there was no doubt this guy was tough to hit. But when the towering fly ball came down it was barely inside the foul pole and just on the other side of the outstretched glove of the Yankee right fielder, between the wall and the first row of seats. It had barely cleared the wall and escaped the glove, although certainly memorable for its height.

Ray Bonn had indeed gone out with "deja vu all over again" as Joe and Tim were both gracious in conceding. Then with expected tears of joy duly noted by cameras, Lesa hurried away from the broadcast booth. She had things to do.

When the commotion had calmed down a little, Tim said, "Joe, you remember Iris in 'The Natural', Right? Well, she said, 'I hate to see a hero fail. There are so few of them.' Well, Ray is now a hero who will never have failed us. I imagine Lesa would say the same thing about her slugger, don't you? It's more than could have been said of Roy Hobbs, Joe Boyd, or certainly any real slugger. Ray Bonn is made of better stuff."

Joe nodded his head thoughtfully, "Now there's a testimonial for you." Then he asked in a simple matter of fact manner, "Where do you place this guy, Ray Bonn, after a few years, Tim? I mean after we've had time to think about it a little and videos of all his swings have been analyzed and re-analyzed to extract as much of the magic as possible? How's he compare with the Bambino or say, Barry Bond?"

"Joe, I'm not actually qualified to comment on the likes of Ray Bonn. He's in a realm I know nothing about. I think we should maybe let Roy Hobbs sum it up in his words, when it comes to slugging, Ray Bonn is 'The best that ever played the game'. That's how good I think he is. We've lost a good one."

Joe stamped it, "It'd be tough for anyone to disagree with that, wouldn't it?"

Ray's relief was extreme. Going by third base he had slapped Alto's outstretched palm like a willed action in a lucid dream. The bat ceremony was re-enacted by Ray and Hiro one last time, one of the most memorable rituals of Major League Baseball coming to a close.

Interviewed after the game, of course, the reporter asked Ray if he had been aware of Helen "up there looking down on him."

Ray looked at the reporter disdainfully as one might inspect a spot of dirt, a bug, or a piece of lint, and said nothing.

"Well, I just thought..." the reporter mumbled.

"No, you didn't," Ray said scowling. "My Helen is *dead*! Do you have any idea what that means?" The reporter didn't like it but sucked it up.

The interview began all over again and very awkwardly this time. "We saw you talking to Jose at the plate; what was said in that conversation?"

Ray replied, "Jose just asked me whether I planned to go out with a bunt, a blooper, or a bomb."

"And how did you respond to that, Ray?"

"I just said that this was going to be 'deja vu all over again!'"

Up in the booth Joe Brett and Tim McCarthy looked at each other? "Isn't that just exactly what Lesa said, Joe?" Tim asked.

"It sure is, Tim! Those two are two peas in a pod, aren't they?"

"Yes indeed. Yes, indeedy, they are," Tim allowed. "But I've got a question for Ray. Could you guys hook me up?" Then when Ray had been given earphones, Tim continued, "Hi, Ray! This is Tim McCarthy up in the Hot Box Sports booth," he paused. "Can you hear me?"

"Hi, Tim," Ray responded to the sounds in his earphones and stared at the camera. "Yes, I can hear you just fine."

"That was another great swing, but I've got a question, Ray. Everyone knows your opinions about miracles and that it's all in the physics, so what I want to know is how your hitting ten grand slams – nine of them in a row – can be reconciled with statistical probabilities. It seems a little more than just improbable to me, Ray. It's downright impossible!"

"That's the wrong use of telescopes again, Tim."

Joe and Tim both laughed. "How can that be?" Joe asked. "Where's the telescope?"

"Well, Probability and impossibility apply to events that haven't happened yet. Statistics apply to large numbers of events – typically hundreds at least. You're asking about the probability of events after they've already occurred, aren't you? That's one hundred percent Tim. Probability doesn't apply. Let's say I had flipped a fair coin one hundred times and gotten one hundred heads in a row. How would one square that with probabilities in your mind? Isn't that the essence of your question?"

"Yes! That *is* the question, Ray! How is it you could flip one hundred heads in a row?" Tim affirmed. And then, "and I'm betting you could do it."

"'How?' is a totally different question. What if I had flipped a head and a tail alternating until I had fifty heads and fifty tails? Would that bother you as much?" Ray asked.

"No, of course not! That's fifty-fifty, right on the law of averages!"

"How about five heads in a row followed by five tails, repeated ten times?"

"Law of averages again, Ray."

"Okay, Tim, your problem really is that you're confusing statistics with probabilities. You seem so comfortable with your law of averages, I'll bet you a million of my dollars that you can't get either one of those two combinations in ten twenty-four-hour days of trying. You want to take me on?"

"I don't have an extra million lying around, Ray."

"Well, you're wrong anyway, because all those cases – a hundred heads in a row, or a sequence of head-then-tail fifty times, fifty heads and then fifty tails, or five-and-five ten times in a row – have exactly the same likelihood. The only reason you think those cases are so much more likely is because they're similar to a kazillion other combinations that are also fifty-fifty. Statistics. Let me be more specific Tim; there are ten-to-the-twenty-ninth ways of getting fifty heads when you flip a coin a hundred times and only one combination of all heads or of fifty heads followed by fifty tails for that matter. But whatever *specific* combination of heads and tails that you get after a hundred flips of that coin will be exactly the same likelihood (probability) as the hundred heads. You flip a coin a hundred times and whatever sequence of heads and tails that you get will each have been exactly that unlikely. It's just that a lot of them are disguised by being similar to so many others. But there is a hundred percent chance you'll get some combination."

"You've got to be kidding me, Ray!" Tim was irritated.

"Nope. I'm not," Ray said, disgusted and reaching for his earphones seeming to be done with that little bit of idiocy.

Tim came back with, "Wait, Ray! That makes no sense! This kind of thing just doesn't happen!"

Ray seemed somewhat tired, as he replied, "Of course not. Your key phrase there was 'kind of thing', Tim. Classes of situations like flipping fifty heads in one hundred flips of a coin are phenomenally more likely than flipping all heads or all tails. But what you're missing here is that each one of those situations like, head-tail-tail-tail-head-head-tail-head... etc., is no more likely than flipping all heads. There are just more combinations that comprise the class involving exactly fifty *total* heads. There are kazillions of them,

like I said. Does ten-to-the-twenty-ninth have any meaning for you, Tim? That's a digit followed by twenty-nine zeros. But whenever something *actually* happens, Tim, it is a *single* situation or sequence of events not disguised as a member of an entire class of similar combinations. Everything is unlikely, Tim. *Everything!* That's one of life's most important lessons. When you flip a coin a hundred times, whatever you come up with will have defied odds of ten-to-the-thirty-second-to-one! I know it boggles the mind that there should be more ways of flipping a coin one hundred times than there are inches in the accepted circumference of the universe, but there are. There really are and don't doubt for a second whether the sequence you flip actually happened just because of that or you'll be classed as legally insane. *Something* happens, Tim. Always. It has to. One hundred percent. *That* is just physics."

Tim and Joe looked at each other, as baffled as a couple of ostriches blinking at a bright sun after pulling their heads out of the sand, wondering how on earth this sports program got so far off in that direction.

The reporter on the field laughed terminating the interview with a begrudging, "Thank you, Ray. You have certainly entertained us these last two years."

Ray thought of a lot of sarcastic rebuttals, but luckily, "Thank you" was all that came out.

But Tim had gotten a second wind. "Ray, please listen to me. A fifty-year-old who hasn't swung a bat in thirty years comes up from the sticks and gets to swing a bat at Yankee Stadium. Doesn't it make sense to ask, 'What're the odds of him hitting a home run?'"

"Sure," Ray acknowledged. "What did you place those odds at?"

"So close to zero you couldn't measure the difference," Tim emphasized.

"Me too," Ray agreed. "Well, close enough for government work. That's why that country bumpkin was so pissed off at being put into that situation, Tim." Ray laughed. "He really doesn't like striking out."

"But he hit a home run, Ray. How do you explain that?"

"We were wrong, Tim, dead wrong. You've never been wrong before? We each used what we knew at the time to compute the odds, probabilities. You just placed them a lot closer to zero than I did," Ray continued laughing.

"Yeah, but now you're saying we weren't even making sense."

"No, no, Tim. We were dealing with a hypothetical then. Odds apply to hypotheticals, not actuals. There's a category error here, Tim. You've seen the movie, *The Sting*, right?"

"Yeah, sure."

"After they've run the race and you know the result, it's no longer fair to ask someone to bet against you on a long shot. Right? Guess why? Let's go back to physics, Tim. In quantum theory the probability of every possible outcome progresses with separate wave functions as if each might be the eventual outcome. When a measurement occurs, the waves of all but the one that actually happened 'collapse'. Poof! They're gone, and you know what? They never actually existed at all. They were just hypothetical.

"That's physics, Tim.

"All the overwhelmingly many ways in which I could have failed at the plate have all collapsed now, Tim. They never even existed at all. I could have walked, struck out, been hit by a pitch and killed, lined out, popped out, flied out, hit a grounder and been thrown out, or just insulted the umpire and got thrown out on my ear. What kind of odds would you have given for each one of those? Striking out was probably your favorite, but in retrospect, the odds of that shouldn't have been very high, do you think? You were wrong. I had more data than you. I was always pretty good at hitting baseballs - a long way, Tim. Every one of the other supposed options had a lower probability 'cause I always swung for the fences," he paused, "except for that one time, of course. The only way this charade kept happening was if all the other possibilities didn't happen; those were the rules of Lesa and George's crazy game. Since none of them happened it kept going. It was rigged, Tim; let it go. Have a nice day."

Ray handed the earphones back to the reporter and started to walk away when the reporter stopped him. "Tim has another question," he said.

"Ray, I'm sorry, but fans deserve a better answer. No other living soul will ever match this performance. You have to know that. How do you as a physicist square that in your own mind?"

Ray was exasperated; this was no part of any contract. Tim, you admit I had a chance of hitting a home run, right?"

“Yes.”

“Okay, take that number and multiply it by itself nine times. That’s the lower bound of the answer.”

“But...”

“Tim, have you ever heard of the ‘infinite monkey’ theorem, which says that a monkey hitting keys on a keyboard at random for an infinite period of time will eventually type out the King James version of the bible?”

“Yes. Are we going there?”

“Only because you insist.” Ray virtually sneered. “We don’t know when that most unlikely sequence will occur, whether his first several million key strokes or after a trillion years, but it will almost certainly happen.” He paused. “Luckily in the case of the bumpkin’s home run sequence, it happened early on. And there’s corollary to that theorem, Tim, which states that if the monkey in question likes pink and we paint the ‘E’ and ‘T’ keys pink, the holy book will be much more likely. For the bumpkin, fences are pink Tim. Got it?”

“No, I don’t Ray, but we have to get off the air.” Tim had given up and was laughing along with Joe and everyone who watched.

“Good. Maybe you ought to spend some time addressing the odds of the bases having been loaded each time the bumpkin came up in that game. Maybe you can use statistics to solve that problem Tim.” He handed the earphones to the reporter and strode off.

Getting back to an empty dugout he was in a very bad mood; he knew he had been a pompous asshole... again... worse than ever, another major reason for fans not to like him... for him not to like himself, for Lesa to read him the riot act... again.

What if twisting his wrist had resulted in a pop up that first at bat in Yankee Stadium? Or what if the ball had lodged in the webbing of Hidalgo Manuel's glove? Those were millimeter misses. If that first flip of his 'fair coin' had turned up tails, what then? It would have been over; never another at bat. It was in the contract for God sake. Who would Ray Bonn have been then? That's a question everyone asks themselves all the time. What if?

Wasn't it pompous of him to have even spoken of a *fair* coin? There was nothing fair about it. How had he even gotten an at bat at Yankee Stadium? Wasn't Lesa's handing him that coin a magical thing in itself, not just another fortunate outcome of the flip of a *fair* coin? Nor could he have shared a Nobel Prize without her sprinkling magic fairy dust all over them both.

After all, wasn't a 'fair' coin defined as one for which one hundred heads in a row does *not* happen – very often. And what about each subsequent flip of that coin? Any one of those flips coming up tails would have terminated the phenomenon now known as Ray Bonn. Ray Bonn was not some metaphysical being standing back behind a protective glass like Maxwell’s daemons watching the coin flipping; he *was* the coin flipping. He was the outcome of all the contingent coin tosses; anything else was the most flagrant fallacy of looking down the wrong end of telescopes.

Thus, disconsolate with improbabilities, he began thinking of Helen his 'only-child twin'. Had Ray *felt* her up there looking down? How utterly absurd. All that was left of Helen was up on the ridge overlooking the Canyon Creek Reservoir, not up in the rafters of SAFECO Field for Christ's sake. She was lying flat on her back in a coffin facing up into the void... rotting. 'She?' No, she wasn't lying up there. Only what was left of her body was up there. None of the molecules and atoms of which 'Helen' was now composed... or decomposed... had even been a part of the charming child whom he had grown up 'loving', nor even of the Homecoming Queen to whom he had first 'made love'. The aging Helen, whose death had devastated him, was physically completely different than all the earlier Helen's, even if continuously recognizable in form, a beautiful form now vanished from heaven and earth.

He was completely devoid of thoughts for a few moments of meditative incomprehension.

Then the improbabilities of the origin of the 'only-child twins' that Helen had related to him intruded on his thoughts. On that night so long ago when their mothers had supposedly conspired unbeknownst to their unsuspecting, but eager, husbands to synchronously conceive children so that Helen and he could grow up together.



So what? Over several nights each of their fathers had probably contributed a quarter of a billion unique haploid possibilities from which their conspiratorial mothers could pretend to 'plan' their families. At conception each of their parents contributed a haploid cell that was only one of many millions of possible combinations of chromosomes in their own individual genetic make up, not counting the inevitable crossover that occurs during meiosis, further complicating the picture.

On one surreal conspiratorial night there had been on the order of ten-to-the-thirtieth power of possible sets of 'only-child twin' zygotes anxious to be realized instead of just Helen and him. If all these quasi actualized contenders had stood in line, hands locked, to try out for the roles in the 'only child twins' production, the line would have extended hundreds of times further than the accepted diameter of the universe itself – even if Ray did not accept that particular limitation as fact. All but Helen and he had been turned away, losers, with no 'right to life'. Was it for bad acting? No, just the fickleness of fate. He and Helen had been lucky to be the ones to have won the lottery to live at all.

After a moment's silent meditation, his mind raced on. Helen had been only one in ten-to-the-fifteenth of the possibilities for whom she might have been. Ray noted after a brief calculation that the earth had a surface area of about ten-to-the-thirteenth square feet. Therefore, if all these possible Helens had been realized and stood with arms at their sides, packed in like sardines as close as they would fit on an earth without oceans, it would take hundreds of earths just to contain them. Grieving for each of them was beyond the capability of the human heart... truly overwhelming grief. Honest pro-lifers must be a very sad lot.

How many in that combinatorial DNA lottery of only-child-twins would have been as compatible and could have experienced the joy that he and Helen had in actuality? The sequence of intermittent joy and sorrow had been essential to their roles. How many of the alternative Helens would have knocked Cousin Julie on her butt in those key lines of her role? Those were all non-questions. He could not "feel" anything for any or all of those hapless souls "looking down" on this, their sole sullen unelected representative who had been lucky from the beginning. One must let them all go to whatever nether world reclaims collapsed wave functions and lost possibilities. The tragedy of not having lived at all. One had to let them all go – even the actual Helen now.

Ray was glad he hadn't broached these topics for the reporter on national TV. It would have been even worse than what he had done with Tim. They would have hauled him off in a straight jacket. But nothing Ray ever said was intelligible to hardly anyone anyway. Just Lesa.

Finally, in a more sanguine frame of mind, he looked out into the real world he had luckily been brought into up in the hospital in Concrete to experience all its sensations. He realized now as a continuation of these sensations that the Mariners must indeed be putting on some special celebration. Cecil was yelling for him to come onto the field where a stand had been swiftly put in place in the infield. There would evidently be a concert performed. A grand piano was all trussed up and helplessly being hoisted to the platform. It dangled very un-classically from cables; he sympathized with the piano's restriction to using classical physics to resist this charade of performing in a most unlikely situation, denied by its very size the privilege of quantum tunneling to the outside of this stadium. He felt the indignity almost personally, knowing that the forces of the mechanisms arrayed against it were too great. It would have to perform even in this inhospitable environment.

Watching the suspended instrument reminded him of Lesa singing *I Needed You* as Cynthia played her grand piano in their 'cottage' up near Boston so long ago now. Ray wished he had asked Lesa to come today. He thought now of her falling into his lap with her arm around his neck as she had hung on his neck another time in their suite at the Sheltry Hotel maintaining that *she* was this Ancient Mariner's "bird of good omen". She had been. She would have enjoyed an occasion like this; it would have made it better. He wasn't up to this on his own. He needed her – one more flip of the magic coin. But he had known that they couldn't trust each other in public. But who really cared?

Cecil had taken the opportunity to join Ray in the dugout. While Cecil explored the dugout, Ray still sat distracted on the back bench, one last time waiting to be taken down and used. That bench had seemed to be the closest analogy to a church pew he had ever occupied... here inside the fantasy beyond the double

blue doors of the church of reason – the one seen when looking into Lesa's mesmerizing eyes. She had put him here.

Thus, once again Ray waited for his moment, a benediction of which he would be the principal – the ancient Mariner whose tale seemed now to have been told. But why had he been left here alone? He began to look around; there were people looking at him suspiciously or like they knew something he didn't. They smiled at Cecil and him.