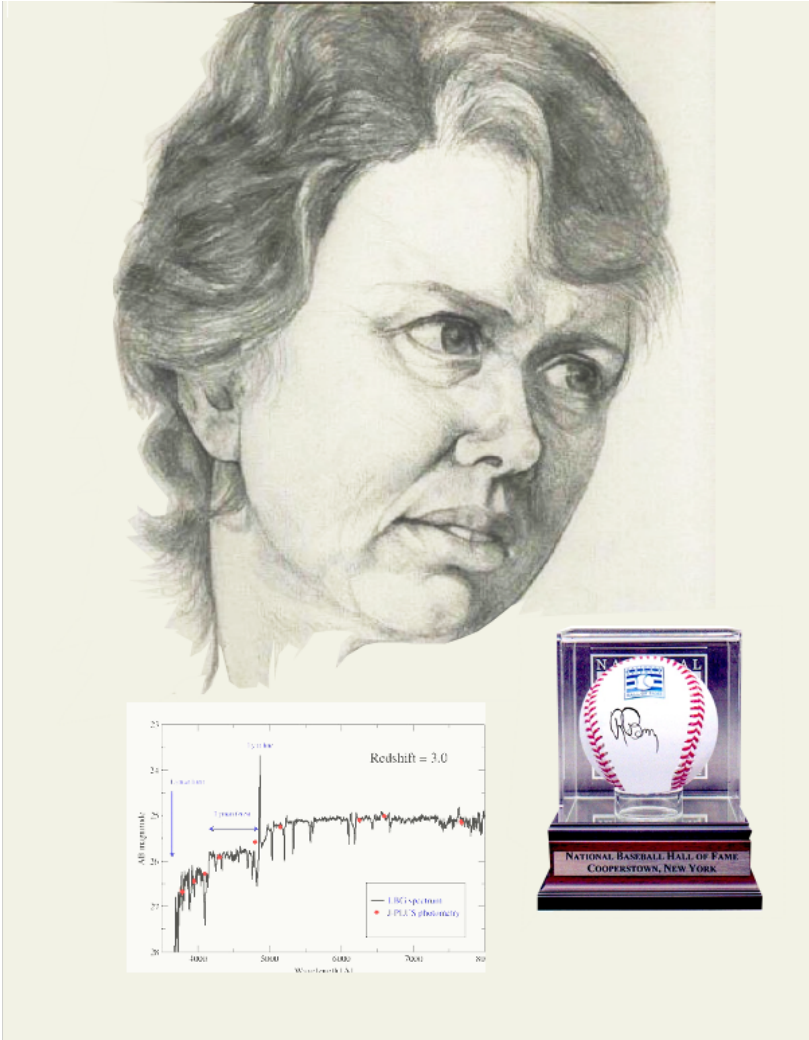


Cosmological Considerations **(third in a series of four novels)**



R. Fred Vaughan

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Vaughan Publishing

About the Author

The author was born and raised in the Skagit valley of Washington State. He and his wife reside down a private street in the greater Seattle area. They have raised two children of whom they are very proud.

Mr. Vaughan took his degree in physics at the University of Washington in Seattle. He spent thirty years in electronics research engineering publishing numerous technical articles in the proceedings of conferences in his field for which he received prestigious awards. Several patents have been issued on his inventions.

He has also written many less technical articles and essays that have been published in technical journals, trade magazines, and high IQ journals. He edited a society journal for many years and edited an intellectual blog.

Not unlike his protagonist Ray Bonn, his avocation has been the investigation of alternative theoretical explanations of physical phenomena. His interest in, and opinions concerning, the philosophy of science have motivated much of his writing.

Yes, he is a Seattle Mariners fan and hopes that one day they will indeed win a World Series.

FOREWORD

Cosmological Considerations is the third of the four novels which together tell an epic tale of several generations of the Bonn family. The individual titles and topics of these novels relate to physical theories: relativity, thermodynamics, cosmology, and gravity. The all too human arguments that ultimately lead to major discoveries in these intellectual fields of study are treated empathetically in respective novels. It is in many ways as though each novel were a tribute to Simplicio, Salviati, and Segredo of Galileo's *Four Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences* – unwitting participants in scientific debate. The driving force in each novel is scientific discovery, but there is conflict with the outside world of major league baseball, family issues, and internal demons that traumatize endeavors to clarify and publish scientific discoveries. The stories themselves center around human actions, personality, and character. To the extent that a desire exists or arises in readers to understand mathematical formulations, separate technically sound accounts have been relegated to non-fictional volumes; only the human aspects are topical to each novel. Yes, this means that there are eight books in all.

These novels are romance novels in the sense that Saul Bellow's novels are romance novels, i.e., character-driven rather than plot-driven fiction. Despite romantic interludes, these books are not *about* romance per se, rather they *include* romance because we are by and large a romantic species. Prodigious success and misfortune of the Bonn family, like those that befell Job in the Old Testament account provide clarification of character. Plots, to the extent that there are plots at all as against random advantageous or catastrophic events affecting the protagonists as they would the reader, are secondary to the development of the protagonists' character and scientific publication endeavors.

Ray Bonn is aging, having become somewhat of a curmudgeon. There were secrets he had hoped Helen would have revealed during her lingering illness including the reasons her father might have given for committing suicide. Ray did not keep secrets; what you saw was what you got. But the women he loved seemed to embrace a different code of ethics that frustrated him. Settling into a domestic life, Lesa became less uninterested in collaborating on scientific investigations, an activity that they had enjoyed to its fullest extent previously. Ray had dreamed of Lesa helping him finish his decades long attempts to finalize a revised cosmological model that did not rely on the accepted myth of creation

from nothing in a big bang with an inflationary period followed by evolutionary expansion. For Ray, explanations involve logic and not a one-time scenario of events and epics like a shaggy dog story that gets modified each time someone detects an inconsistency.

Years earlier Lesa had been scheduled to appear on Larry King Live with Ray to provide the opposition perspective of an established physics community on Ray's more speculative ideas. Ray teased that she had fallen for the 'snake oil' and the snake oil salesman. She readily agreed, but she had not been taken in; she saw the value of Ray's ideas and his abilities – both intellectually and athletically – and proceeded to exploit them both. She had noticed an allusion in his book to work he had done on entropy, her expertise being thermodynamics. She insisted on collaborating with him but without accepting acknowledgement, a source of contention with the side effect of Lesa's 'duck taping' Ray to a contract to go up to bat as a Mariner in Old Yankee Stadium. Three generations of the Bonn family would thus live with the echoes of 'déjà vu' all over again' with regard to the celebrity of baseball stardom.

Throughout this series of novels, the love of science and enthusiasm to make new discoveries in a particular field is the uniting thread. This heady endeavor is interwoven with revelations of tragic events that Lesa and the Bonn family would continue to suffer. Each volume in this series is accompanied by a physics text attributed to the protagonists that is the backstory of each novel.

Without being a direct family member or main character, Julie Davidson's presence nonetheless looms large throughout these novels as leitmotif. Her exclusion provides an emotional foundation to the flow of events in each novel; she is in many ways the Charles Marlow of Joseph Conrad novels – there but *not* there – to clarify 'what happened when no one else was looking' and just as insurance when needed. But it is never about her.

The value of any novel depends ultimately upon the validity of its appeal to what engages the interest of its readers. This includes irony, inevitability, mystery, sensuality, jealousy, and other usual expressions of human emotional involvement. Authentic human intercourse as readers would experience it is what is sought vicariously in fiction. These novels include that as well as an aspect of human experience that is too seldom addressed in this genre but is central to the normal conduct of our modern day lives – intellectual intrigue. As critic, Peter Stern stated with regard to Thomas Mann's epic novel *The Magic Mountain*, "seeing that modern men are as often intellectuals as they are gamekeepers or bullfighters, Mann's preoccupation is, after all, hardly

very esoteric". Why then should a novelist be defensive about describing the exhilaration of intellectual discovery, of enlightenment? Nor should promoting the thrill of scientific advancement be anathema.

Sinclair Lewis excelled when he finally put satire aside to write *Arrowsmith*, a novel saturated with words and scientific processes his readers had most likely never heard before. Despite widespread bemoaning of a lack of mathematical ability, vast numbers of the novel reading public have taken courses in modern algebra, calculus, physics, chemistry, biology, and genetics; we understand the appeal of scientific advancement, the unequalled enchantment of scientific discovery, the yearning for truth. No justification should be required for a central theme that is the discovery of alternative scientific explanations of phenomena with which we are all familiar, but whose explanation has remained technically flawed for centuries. No human emotional experience could be more amenable as the central theme of a novel. But this is not 'science fiction' because the science is not fictional. The basic equations, diagrams, and graphical data are a warranty of authenticity of the fictional description. They must be witnessed as surely as evidence is necessary in a court of law. Jurors see a weapon they could not create or use, but its presence is required to execute the case. So there are a few equations and graphs; they are authentic even though presented merely as evidence. Skip them if you must

Scientists are human beings, cut from the same cloth as athletes, farmers, housewives, carpenters, or ditch diggers; these capabilities overlap. Scientific acumen does not preclude athletic or other abilities or reduce vulnerability to irrational decisions that affect all our lives. Exceptional abilities to understand mathematical formulations that explain physical phenomena do not exclude appreciation of the sensual beauty associated with such formally described phenomena or the wonderment that goes with such observational experience.

Jealousy, empathy, rudeness, kindness and the full range of human behavior and interests are typical also of those who are scientifically inclined. Misfortunes and the awful coincidences that sometimes affect certain lives more than others – the Hyannis Port Kennedys come to mind – does not occur more or less frequently for those with scientific abilities. The Bonn clan was so afflicted although they are scientifically rather than politically inclined. Scientific ability may actually amplify associated human emotions due to a fuller understanding of correlated phenomena. Preference for the term ability rather than knowledge in a scientific context derives from the distinction between 'knowing how to' and 'why' as against a vague familiarity with associated facts.

Yes, of course, there must be a readership market – if a market even matters in intellectual discussion. It probably shouldn't. Some things must be written whether there are readers or not. Writing for readership rather than what an author feels in his bones would not be good. J. D. Salinger considered his critics and readers a distraction and thus continued to write without publishing his work. What is written as literary fiction is more truthful than an author's autobiography. Much of that truth he or she may not even be aware of how true it is. But maybe scientists and mathematicians, of which there are many, might just enjoy reading about people who share a similar style of thinking as well as more vicariously about ballerinas, musicians, ball players, astronauts, gamekeepers, and bullfighters. Nor should we diminish the pleasure scientific laymen take in vicariously experiencing the excitement of scientific endeavors and the strange implications of the phenomena thereby discovered. The gamekeeper Mr. Millar in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* enjoyed reading about the atomic physics of his day. And why not? Atomic physicists of the day must surely have enjoyed reading about Lady Jane. Learning about new discoveries of our age and how they were made is a meaningful activity that engages us all.

Not all scientific reasoning included in these novels will be immediately familiar to most readers. But technical discussions, figures, and equations are, without exception, interspersed with associated interpersonal reactions with explanations, are clarified by the arguments of the protagonists that should enable lay readers to experience the emotional impact and enable them to share the ecstasy of scientific discovery.

Or so one hopes.

Fred Vaughan

THE ANCIENT MARINER:

...

*Since then, at an uncertain hour,
That agony returns:
And 'til my ghastly tale is told,
This heart within me burns.*

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner
by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Cosmological Considerations

#1 Curmudgeon's Complaints

"Give me some more of that coffee, Lesa. It's colder'n a witch's tit up here. Brrrr!"

"Okay, okay. But what do you know about witches' tits anyway, Ray Bonn, you old curmudgeon? Pull that slicker up over your shoulder, you'll get your death of pneumonia. You're getting wet."

She reached over him to pull the plastic tarp over his shoulder so that the mist of rain that continued to fall would not further accumulate as beads of water on his jacket. The bill of his cap poking out from under his hood was covered with larger beads that had already merged; some rolled down and dripped onto the plastic cover that was laid across the blanket on their laps.

Coffee steamed as she poured it from the thermos into the cup she had handed him to hold. He cupped his hands around it. It was clear that he had wanted it more as a hand warmer than to drink.

"Drink it," she said. "It'll warm you up from the inside."

"I need to get warmed up, not get blisters on the roof of my mouth."

Putting the thermos away, Lesa looked out onto the field where cheerleaders were hopping around preparing for a yell.

"There's Ellie, Ray. She looks cold – those little short skirts and bare legs in this weather. Can you imagine? They should have gotten rid of this chauvinistic custom years ago, shouldn't they?"

"You're not just jealous that you never got to display your wares in a marketplace like this, are you? This is where it's at in a public school, Lesa. That's a custom no one wants to get rid of. I guess you couldn't be expected to know all that, always having been in high-class private schools," Ray jeered. "Those are the hottest little items to be had at Lakeside High, the hottest of the hots. No, Lesa, they're not cold." He put the cup up close enough to his lips to blow over its surface, sending steam out into the night air. "Why don't they put a roof on this damned stadium anyway. It isn't like we don't pay enough in taxes."

Cosmological Considerations

A yell with blow horns and frolicking girls was in progress so Lesa ignored his sardonic comments. She was enthralled watching Ellie being thrown into the air and caught by a couple of male cheerleaders.

Ray watched with a cynical eye. “Male cheerleaders for Christ’s sake. Why aren’t they out there playing football like men?” He continued to rant.

When the cheer was over, Ellie came running off the field ahead of the others. Then proceeding up the stairs of the stadium, she approached them, all smiles. “Hey, Grumps! Wasn’t Roger awesome in that first half? The scouts are here, you know.”

“Yeah, do I know. He told me. But aren’t you cold? You forgot to get dressed.”

“Oh, Grumps. Hi, Auntie Lee. Wasn’t Roger great? I’ll bet he’s the best high school quarterback in the country, don’t you? Don’t you too, Grumps? Honestly, don’t you?”

“He’s pretty good,” Ray allowed begrudgingly.

“Pretty good’, Ray, for heaven’s sake, the boy is amazing,” Lesa objected. “Have you been watching this game. It’s not las though the Blue Hornets aren’t a good football team – they were ranked too. Your son is fabulous. Admit it, you couldn’t have been any better than that when you were young.”

“How would you know, you weren’t there.”

“I know because I know quarterbacks don’t get any better than Roger has played tonight.”

“Yes, Grumps. And he’s going to the dance with the Homecoming Queen, just like you did your senior year. So there,” Ellie gloated

“He better not do it like I did, or he’ll be in serious trouble,” Ray mumbled almost under his breath, but Lesa heard him and frowned for him to shut up.

Ellie hadn’t heard him. Still bubbling with enthusiasm, she insisted that Ray give her an answer to, “Isn’t that cool?”

“It’s wonderful, Ellie,” Lesa answered instead. “Be sure to order the photos.”

“Oh, we will. I just love him.” she assured Lesa, and then seeing her parents coming through the gate at the end of the football field, she said, “Oh, good, Dad got away from the hospital soon enough to get the second half.”

She crowded past the fans sitting in their row and hurried down the stairs and off around the track to meet Allie and Tom.

“That girl’s trouble, Lesa.”

“Oh, Ray, will you let it go. She and Roger just have this puppy love thing going. It’s really cute.”

“Cute? It’s puppy incest, that’s what it is.”

“Shhh,” Lesa tried to silence him. “It’s innocent, Ray. And anyway, so what?”

“So what? For one thing it’s illegal, and for another...”

Lesa poked Ray in the ribs under the blanket.

Cosmological Consideration

“What?” he reacted, and then looked at where she was looking as she welcomed the Wilsons by motioning them to come on up to the seats they had saved for them.

“Hi, Tom. I see you were able to get off for some of the game at least.”

“Yes. It looks like I’ve missed out on a lot of Lakeside scoring though. Ellie tells us that Roger’s been terrific again.”

“Yes. He’s been awesome and Ellie’s done her flip in that new cheer they were working on. It went off without a flaw.”

Allie had finally pulled away from some of the mothers who congratulated her on having produced a Homecoming Queen.

“Hi, Daddy,” she exclaimed as she made it to the remaining saved seat on the covered blanket. “Hi, Lesa. I’ll bet you two are a proud Mom and Pop right now.”

Why on earth would a fifty-year-old educated woman still call her father “Daddy” he wondered. It was embarrassing thirty years ago and it’s a hell of a lot worse now, he thought. But he just said, “Hi, Allie.” What was the use?

“Well, I am anyway,” Lesa said, looking over at Ray disdainfully. “Ellie’s anxious for her dance to begin, I think. I am so happy for her.”

“We are too. It sure is a happy time for both our kids, huh.”

The teams were back on the field and the referees were getting into place.

Tom leaned over to address Ray. “Do you think Roger will play much of the second half with them already up by twenty-five. Will they pile on a little to boost their state ranking?”

“I wouldn’t think they’d worry much about the score as long as they win,” Ray responded. “They’re already ranked first; all they have to do is get past district. So it doesn’t really matter how much they win by I wouldn’t think.”

“They’ll get past district,” Lesa said as though still obviously irritated at Ray for not being enthused enough about anything, or maybe, everything.

Ray knew he was somewhat of a wet blanket on all the aspirations of these fine people he was directly related to in one way or another. They were all so much younger than he was, although not all that young anymore, he realized. Anyway, he couldn’t help it. He felt the way he sounded – cross. It was just the way he was, he guessed.

If Roger continued to excel as he had been, he certainly would be highly recruited by PAC Ten schools. If he got a football scholarship, that would probably take precedence over everything else in his life and seal his doom as an athlete instead of a scientist, Ray thought cynically. Why was Lesa so ditsy about that? Didn’t she know that if he went to a university on a football scholarship he might as well major in Swahili to pull down the grades he and his mother were addicted to? If he left this stuff here in high school where it belonged and took up a serious major in physics or biology, he’d have a meaningful career. Instead, he’d probably end up sitting up in some announcement booth on drizzly nights like this, spouting truisms to a bunch of stupid beer drinkers after he’s too old to compete anymore. Ray and Lesa had

Cosmological Considerations

been over and over this – once with Roger there, mostly just listening and laughing at them.

“You all right, Daddy?”

“I’m fine Allie. Just more realistic than some of the rest of the members of my family apparently.”

“I haven’t heard anybody say anything unrealistic, have you, Lesa?”

“Nope. Nobody has but Mr. Eeyore here. You have to think reality is a pretty bad place to agree with him these days,” the women ridiculed.

What was it with these two, Ray wondered? They’d been chumming and abetting the crime of simulating the situation with the ‘only child twins’ ever since Ray and Lesa had been married. It wasn’t as though he hadn’t complained loud enough about the inappropriateness of every aspect of that charade of theirs. He didn’t really like his and Helen’s life being reenacted by amateurs, especially by such closely related kids as Roger and Ellie. They were too nice of kids. Ray and Helen had grown up together and married. That had been an essential theme of that whole production, and that could not happen here in this copycat charade put on with his and Lesa’s son, Helen having been dead almost twenty years now.

The crowd was on their feet screaming. Ray stood up to see over the fans in front of him. The blanket and its plastic cover slid off his knees as he stood up; he had been the last one anchoring it down. After he picked it up off the wet floorboard in front of them, he was just able to see Roger juke and leave a defender sliding along the wet ground. Ray had seen him intercept the pass before everyone had stood up; Roger had good anticipations. The Blue Hornet quarterback had telegraphed where he was throwing it and Ray had watched Roger head in that direction, collide in midair with the intended receiver, take the ball and head back down field. Now he was doing some fine open field running. He’d better be careful or they’ll draft him as a safety for defense, Ray thought, seeing the humor in his second level concern. Finally Roger had been driven out of bounds at the 35-yard line. Ray watched his son’s expression as he stood up now out of bounds. He was on this side of the field, fairly close to where they sat in the stands. There was no gloating smile as he pulled the grass from his helmet, no smile at all.

Roger was his son after all, no doubt about it. He was all business when he was competing. You’d almost think by looking at Roger that he didn’t even enjoy it. Ray knew it was the joy of his life – well, one of his joys. Ray thought he knew just what Roger was feeling because it was just the way Ray had felt so many times in similar situations in his own younger years.

“Pinecones don’t fall far from the old tree, do they Ray?” It was Tom, leaning over to talk past the women again.

“I don’t know, Tom. I’ve always thought of myself more as an old oak tree I guess, if that’s what you mean.” He smiled. He liked Tom a lot, and wondered if Tom knew it, what with Ray’s responses never reaffirming anything Tom had ever said. He should fix that; it was a hell of a way to treat a son-in-law you liked. Allie had done well marrying Tom. But why hadn’t

Cosmological Consideration

he cautioned Allie that these two kids were too closely related for all their shenanigans? The appearance was bad enough; the reality was worse. Tom was a medical man after all.

“Oh, yeah,” Tom laughed, “I guess it’s ‘acorn’, isn’t it?”

“Ray’s just an ‘Old oak standing tall, wishing he was eighteen again,’” Lesa sang the refrain to the merriment of the four of them who guffawed too uproariously, Ray thought.

Anyway, he didn’t really wish he were eighteen again. Who would? That was some bad shit.

A couple of plays later Roger placed another six points on the board with a long pass right on the money. “He is amazing,” Tom said. “Wow, I’m glad I got here in time to see at least some of these heroics.”

Ellie was out there on the field again doing the traditionally accepted taunting ritual of, “Why, why, why? We’re Lakeside High; that’s why! Rah, rah, rah.”

“I wish I had a mute button,” Ray mumbled.

Lesa frowned and turned to whisper into his ear, “I’m just glad no one can hear you mumbling away over here, Ray. But will you please cut it?”

“Was it something I said?” he snickered.

“Yes, it’s something you said! *Everything* you’ve said.”

“Is Pops being asocial again, Lesa? What’re we going to do with you, Daddy? I wish I could have been up the Creek in high school when you were wowing Mom and all the other girls at Canyon Creek High. I’ll bet Marsha was eating her heart out at your Homecoming.”

Lesa looked over at Allie awkwardly. Ray noticed and wondered what that was all about. What was the big deal? So he had gone out with Marsha once. So the hell what? Helen had always made much more of that than it was worth. It had been her excuse for going out with Jonesy to the Prom. So once in fifty years of happiness he and Helen had had a minor spat. What of it? Anyway, Helen had been dead almost twenty years. It always came back to that refrain. Twenty years.

“Allie, you don’t know anything about it.”

Ray saw Allie look at Lesa who was insisting silently that Allie desist. Women!

Lakeside had kicked off again and the Puget Sound Baptist Blue Devils failed on three straight attempts to get the ball downfield on passes. Roger had almost been able to intercept another one, deflecting it out of bounds. Then Lakeside had proceeded moving the ball on quick passes, a quarterback sneak for over thirty yards and another pass for a touchdown, and then another quarterback sneak for a two-point conversion. It had been that way all night. Roger was on fire.

Ray began thinking about the Midas touch with which he had seemed to brand his family. They had always seemed to be able to get whatever they had wanted and in the end its value had always seemed suspect. His own life had been the primary case in point, he guessed, but as a point of fact he could

Cosmological Considerations

imagine no better life than he had had. And in spite of all the good things, he had always been cynical and had worried a lot – sometimes with good cause, but he had to admit, usually not.

Right now it was Roger and Ellie. Roger a magnificent son, Ellie a most charming granddaughter. But he worried. He worried because each of them seemed acutely aware of the splendor of the other, just as Ray – and everyone else – were. Why Allie and Tom didn't worry about it like Ray did, and why Lesa didn't, was simply beyond him. They were all brilliant people. He didn't like to explicitly formulate for them why he worried so much, so he hadn't, but he did worry. He had, of course, been quite specific with Lesa, as he had been again tonight.

Lesla had insisted more than once that, "Everything'll be okay."

"But what if it isn't? What if they get some hair-brained notion that they love each other more than they should? More than the respect such prohibitions deserve? What then? Shouldn't they at least be warned about that?"

"Ray, we'll talk about it one day if necessary, okay? But not now."

Lesla was not good at fulfilling such obligations. Ray remembered back to his entrapment into that damned Yankees game well over twenty years ago now that she had promised she would explain. She hadn't. He wasn't sure she had ever fully explained what in the hell she was up to. Then she'd been going to explain some sort of understanding that she and Helen had come to twenty years ago about some sort of secrets – which she hadn't. Damn her.

The Blue Devils failed again, and the Lakeside offence was coming back out onto the field. Number fifty wasn't with them this time. Ray looked over to the sidelines to make sure Roger was all right. Any parent with a child who ever played football knew that feeling. That was an excusable worry.

Roger had his helmet off, walking around with a couple of his friends. His friends were laughing and carrying on; meanwhile Roger was talking with them as they cajoled, but almost without emotion. Ray was proud of him, but the kid should relax a little in a situation like this. It wouldn't totally blow his image, would it? Ray certainly didn't think it would, scouts or no scouts, but then in thinking about it, Ray realized that he didn't know what Roger's image of himself was. As a matter of fact, he didn't know what his own images of Roger and Ray Bonn were. Certainly it was not as Lesa saw either of them, but in any case, those were just images, not the reality.

He wondered whether Lesa had ever told Roger to lighten up as she had Ray on so many occasions. Not that it would do any good.

Anyway, people liked Roger; he had a good way with people just like his mother, whether he bubbled with enthusiasm or not. He wasn't so damned sarcastic and cynical as his old man, at least – yet anyway. That was good, Ray acknowledged.

Lesla was pushing a cup of coffee into Ray's hand. "Drink it," she said. "The fourth quarter is going to be a bit chilly without much to cheer about."

Cosmological Consideration

Of course Ellie was down on the field in the cold drizzle trying to drum up some spirit for garbage time to warm the cockles of everyone's heart.

"Thanks. You've had that thermos opened and closed so much that this stuff is about drinking temperature now."

"For you, Ray, only for you. Nobody else wants any because it's too damned cold."

The three of them were looking at him, snickering.

"Tom and Allie are coming over after the game. They have Ellie's dress, so the kids can both get dressed there and we can all get our photos. Tom wants to play some cards afterward."

Ray nodded and continued to sip his coffee. The fourth quarter went quickly. No one took any time outs. There was obviously no point.

The four older folks – or the two older folks, a somewhat younger folk, and one ancient curmudgeon, sometimes still referred to as The Ancient Mariner – sat around talking while they waited for the kids to arrive after the game. Then shortly Ellie and Roger were there, Ellie now off getting dressed appropriate to a Homecoming Queen, tiara, and all, while Roger was upstairs getting his tuxedo on.

As Ellie emerged from Ray and Lesa's bedroom, Lesa exclaimed with obvious sincerity, "Oh, Ellie, that dress is so beautiful. It just sets those 'beautiful, beautiful brown eyes' of yours into sparkling." Ray watched and realized that Ellie was indeed extremely beautiful, but he couldn't really follow Lesa's sentence. Anyway, Ellie looked so much like Helen had at that age and that particular significant event in her life that he had actually done a double take when Ellie walked out of their room and down the hall toward them. He had done that on other occasions when Ellie had surprised him. For a moment it would be as though the ghost of Helen Bonn was coming to him again, and then the realization that Helen had been dead for twenty years would hit him again.

Ellie saw his look as implying the approval it did, beamed, and then thanked Lesa's for her praise.

"You know, there was a picture of Mom in high school where she looked just like that. Do you remember that Daddy?" Allie commented.

"Yeah." Of course he remembered. It was taken on a homecoming night just like this one – too damned much like this one, he thought.

"Was that the night I got started?" Allie blurted foolishly.

Ray saw Lesa trying to get Allie's eye again to get her off any related topic, he supposed. That was a good idea.

"I think the angels brought you, Allie," Ray said cynically much to Ellie's pleasure. "Or was it a big ugly stork? I can't remember that far back."

"Grumps, you are too much."

Roger stepped through the door then coming from upstairs with his tux on. Ray noticed Ellie turn toward him and blush all the way down to where her gown stopped it, covering only what absolutely had to be covered. Well, it

Cosmological Considerations

used to have to be covered, anyway, Ray's cynicism taking over again. That look was more than a little bit of two 'twins' innocently liking each other, Ray knew. He looked over at Roger. He saw a similar expression on Roger's face too, too similar an expression. The kids had it bad. This was not the usual respectful love brothers and sisters share.

Roger turned, pretending to be unaffected, and went on into the kitchen to open the refrigerator. Lesa followed, the doting mother. He took out a box with the corsage. Lesa had her hands in there enthusiastically helping to remove it. Roger patiently let her help until finally, impatiently he just grabbed the spray himself and started back toward Ellie with Lesa still foolishly holding the box, which she laid down on the worktable as she followed him back into the hall.

Roger walked up to Ellie who continued to blush. He removed the pin from the corsage, putting his fingers under the cloth of the gown on her chest to keep the pin from poking her. He did it so familiarly and comfortably as though he had done it a hundred times. Then very calmly he placed the corsage over her heart to pin it. It was as flawless a performance as his heroics had been on the field – too flawless. Ray knew flawlessness not only implies dexterity, but it also implies a lot of practice. Allie had her camera flashing and Tom caught the whole thing on video. But Ray thought, he had *really* caught it. It didn't seem as though anyone else had.

The two posed for their parents' photographic extravaganza and then were donning coats and were on their way.

Ray warned, "Drive carefully, Roger," as the other three parents smirked.

"You don't want him to drive carefully?" he asked the other less concerned parents of the pair as he closed the door. "Is that it?"

"The point is that they'll be driving only a couple of miles," Lesa spoke as spokesman for all three. "And they're trustworthy."

"Do you really believe that Lesa? I mean the 'just a couple of miles' aspect? I don't."

"So what do you believe, Ray? Do you believe they'll be sight seeing at Niagara Falls before we see them again, is that it?"

"Very possibly. Mount Rainier at least." Then abandoning his own defense, he asked, "You guys wanted to play something?"

"Yeah. I need to have some fun, Ray. I'm getting burned out. Sick people, people dying, I'm sick of it."

"Me too, and I haven't even been watching it, but some things you don't have to watch in order to know they're happening and they're despicable. Are you still refusing to accept that retirement is just around the next corner? It's supposed to be the Golden Years, Tom, the greatest of all relievers of stress." Ray laughed his cynical laughter as he headed off to find the card table. "But don't you believe it for a moment. Waiting for God ain't all it's cracked up to be. He's one hell of a slow poke. Let me tell you that much. Do you know where the cards are, Lesa?"

Cosmological Consideration

Well, sure, he shouldn't have said what was on his mind again, but he had. So what.

"You okay, Ray," Tom asked as Ray began pulling out the legs on the table. "Is there something I as your doctor should know about?"

Lesa watched Ray as she brought in one of the chairs. Allie had another. Then Tom, went off to find a third. When Ray came back with the fourth, the conversation among the three had seemed to stop as he turned the corner to enter the room.

"Is there something that you three are all happy about knowing that I don't? That's the real question here. I'd sure like to belong to this family again," Ray said sarcastically.

"Honey," Lesa began, "It's just that you are so negative on everything that everyone's on pins and needles around you all the time."

"So... what're we gonna play, hearts, just so we can drop the black queen on Ray Bonn and pretend we're not playing pin the tail on Eeyore?"

"We haven't played bridge for a long time," Allie said cheerfully. She was not easily put off by his sometimes-neurotic behavior; she had grown up with it. "You and Mom used to really like playing with Andrew and Charmaine, remember?"

"Yeah, we did. Lesa and I played with them some too, and with you two as well, didn't we? I thought we were having fun. Why'd we quit? Was it because we weren't babysitting anymore? Or was it something I said?"

"That was probably part of it, but let's play, okay, Ray," Lesa said spreading out the cards on the table to draw for partners.

They played a rubber with Tom and Ray as partners and then they did husbands and wives. Ray actually enjoyed both games. Playing games had been a good idea. Tom and he had won the first game; he and Lesa had lost the second. Lesa didn't usually lose at anything, Ray realized, and was convinced that there might have been something more than mere luck involved here. She had missed an important finesse when she and Allie had been playing against he and Tom that could have won that game, and she had blown her communication to the board on a hand she had played in the second game. Was she playing gracious hostess, or was she just totally distracted?

After Allie and Tom had gone and they were getting ready for bed Ray asked if everything had been all right.

"Of course, but why do you ask?"

"Well, you seemed a bit distracted when we played."

"What do you mean?"

"You lost two games you would never have lost at any other time. You always win at games like that unless your cards are atrocious."

"Ray, I'm sorry. I was thinking about being your black queen and it distracted me something frightful. Was it that obvious?"

"No, it wasn't obvious. I'm sorry about those nasty comments I made. I know I get carried away."

Cosmological Considerations

“No. Don’t be, Ray. I know I’ve been awful to you lately, haven’t I? I’ll bet my tits are even cold.” She managed a chuckle. “I’ve been the witch with the cold tits, haven’t I? I’m tired of myself,” she paused, “just totally sick of myself. I should have stopped it before it got this far. I will, Ray. I want to fix it – fix us. We love each other more than that, don’t we?”

“No, you haven’t been awful, nothing was frightfully obvious about how you played, and my only complaint is that you’re just not extremely communicative on any issue that bothers me a lot,” he managed to smile at her with some real affection. “Yes, we do love each other more than that. A lot more.” He did so love this woman. “But I’m just not right either, Lesa. I know I’m always cynical, and I know I’ve been worse lately. I’ve been the classic character in the Titian painting of the guy no one can like with none of the excuses of a Sir Isaac Newton.”

“You’re worrying about Roger and Ellie, aren’t you?”

“Yeah, but I guess that’s just my hang up though, isn’t it?” He couldn’t avoid a certain amount of sarcasm even if he appreciated that they were at least addressing the issue.

“No, it isn’t just your hang up, Ray. It’s important; I know it is. We need to get away, so we can address it calmly. We haven’t got off by ourselves for too long.”

“Is leaving the kids alone going to help with that problem?”

“Ray, please don’t. Did you have anything planned for tomorrow?”

“Yeah. I thought we were going up to the University to talk with Professor Smith to try to find those old plasma scattering articles. You hadn’t forgotten that, had you.”

“Oh, yeah. I guess I did forget. Wow, I guess I’m really tired tonight, how about you? Do you think we could put off that discussion with Dr. Smith? I would call his office in the morning and reschedule it for another time if you wouldn’t mind.”

“I guess I am tired too, but I’m going to sit up a little. I know I won’t sleep even if I go to bed, and I’ll just end up keeping you awake. If you’ll agree to call Smith, then I won’t worry about that and we can sleep in a little maybe. We can see him another time.”

“Okay, but don’t go putting a stopwatch on Roger tonight, Ray. He might even stay over at Wilson’s, you know. They put him up there sometimes with nobody doing anything wrong. Will you trust me to go good for Roger just one more time? I feel certain I’m right or I wouldn’t insist. Then we’ll work out what should be done later. I know I haven’t been sticking to my word on having important discussions with you and I haven’t deferred to you before I’ve acted on things that I should have asked you about. I’m sorry, and I’m very sorry you weren’t able to enjoy tonight to the fullest. Roger is fabulous. Do you know what he reminded me of tonight?”

Ray just looked at her. It was enough response.

“You, Ray. He reminded me of you when I was sitting up there in George’s private room in Yankee Stadium and hoping against all hope that it

Cosmological Consideration

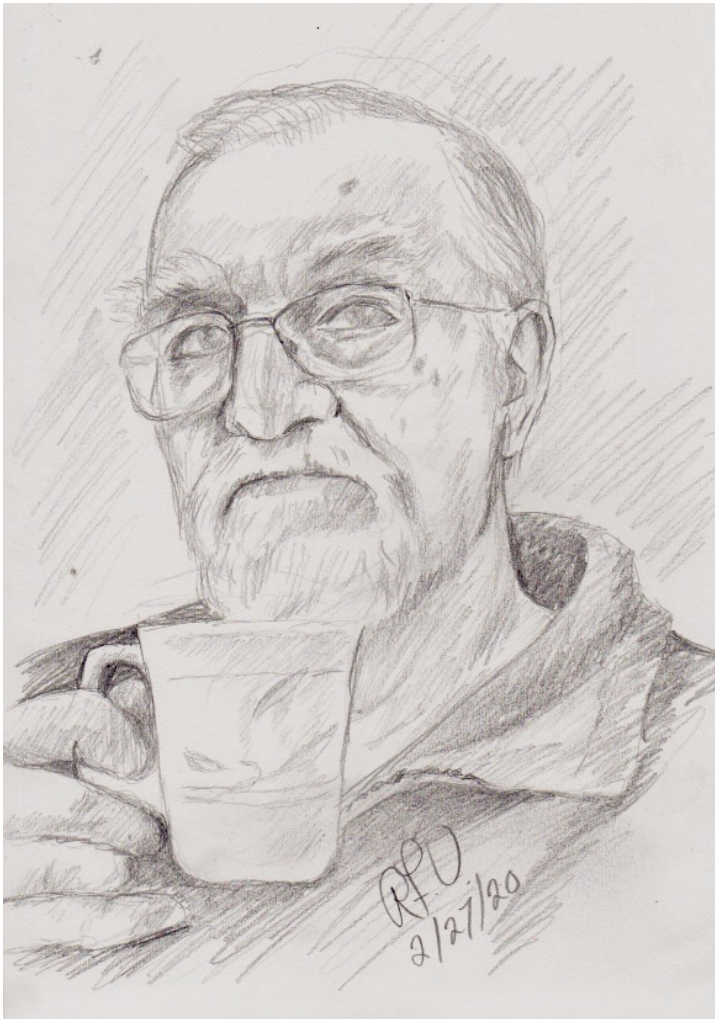
would work out as I had thought it would. And it did. Both then and again tonight.”

“Yeah. You definitely make things happen, Lesa. I was proud of him too. I’m in here looking out, no matter what it looks like from the outside. I’m still in here seeing what’s happening.” He smiled then.

“I know you are. I know the guy in there who is always looking out. I like him. We’ll get it worked out. We’ll get him out of that dark hole.”

“Okay then.” Ray kissed her fondly, turned out the lights, and left to go into the office. He had to spend some time alone getting over his hurdles.

But he might want some coffee. He did want some coffee, no might about it. He had a lot of thinking to do. In the kitchen he made a fresh pot and sat down waiting for it to complete its process. Looking at the ‘can’ as he sat there, he took note that his ashes would not end up in a can. It was plastic.



Curmudgeon

#2 A Newly Married Couple's Problems

Things began to unravel the day after their wedding, way back a long time ago now. They had begun with a plan on a combined honeymoon slash book signing tour of Europe with Edna. Lesa knew French, but no Italian. Ray knew virtually nothing in either language, a little German. What should they take? Would they need French and Italian dictionaries? Germany was out.

"I've arranged for an interpreter to accompany us everywhere and to be our guide," Edna had assured them. "We'll be fine."

Later Cynthia noted in talking to Ray, that she would have liked to be their interpreter. "Is that possible? Are you feeling well enough for that kind of a trip?" Ray asked. "Could Fredrik come along too?"

Lesa got involved and discussed possibilities with Edna as well.

Edna didn't like it. It was too much like when Helen had started out on that book signing trip and she and Edna had gotten into it. This was a serious endeavor. They needed the publicity and the sales.

"Edna, I'm the wife here now and it's our honeymoon. You and I get along just fine. Cynthia won't interfere with anyone."

"Well, okay," Edna guessed but it was not a cheerful acceptance, Lesa noticed.

She talked with Cynthia, who said that she and Fredrik had just discussed it. Fredrik worried about her and the baby if she got too tired, being away from her doctor and in short, they had both agreed it would be better to put off a trip like that until after the baby had come and was walking. Then hopefully she and Fredrik could travel with them to Europe. She would love to show them where she had grown up.

Being the next day after their wedding their families began to disperse. The cleanup was under way. By the time they were through with that, Lesa was a firm believer in taking Cynthia's approach to housework. Get help. She was exhausted. Allie had some names of good people who did housework. They would arrange that after they returned from their honeymoon.

Edna had flown out already and would meet them at Heathrow. She had work to do.

"Honeymoon?" Lesa had exclaimed, "Ray, it seems more like a work assignment to me."

Cosmological Considerations

“Yeah. We probably shouldn’t have gotten Edna involved, should we?”

“Oh, it’ll be fine once we are on the way. I always really get into this sort of thing once it has started”

“I remember, only too well!” Ray replied, only half teasing her. “Don’t pull any fast ones on me this time, okay? I have *never* played soccer.”

That day came, and Edna was there to meet the already weary travelers as soon as they came wheeling out of customs. She was standing with all the other taxi drivers with their impersonal signs. And right beside her was Sharon.

“Sharon, I am so surprised,” Lesa said, hugging her.

“She wanted to come,” Edna excused.

Thus, Ray started right out being irritated with Edna – and Sharon. Déjà vu all over again, he thought.

“Cynthia can’t come, but Sharon can?” Ray complained to Lesa as soon as they were alone. “That makes no sense.”

“Oh, Ray. It’s okay. We’re going to have a good time no matter what. It’s our honeymoon, remember.”

They did. Sharon actually acted to neutralize some of Edna’s austerity and instill a little humor into their times together.

They did the book signing in a little bookstore just off Piccadilly Circus. Edna had booked them at the Thistle Piccadilly hotel. In the several days they were in London they did several bookstore signings with eager crowds in every case. They also had some time to browse the plunder in the British museum, over thirteen million artifacts stolen from every continent and culture in the world. They marveled at the Rosetta Stone and remembered back to Margot Mueller’s grand praise of their work as a ‘Rosetta stone’ of thermodynamics... and other related memories. They wearied of the rooms full of mummies.

“Do you know what they did with bad girls in ancient Egypt, Lesa?” Ray asked as they looked from one to the next.

“I can only imagine,” she said, bored but waiting for whatever pun came along.

“They laid them in coffins and eventually they became mummies.”

Then I would like to be “a bad girl in Egypt,” she said.

They strolled on to witness the architectural ruins of ancient Greece that had been rebuilt as huge buildings right inside the museum.

“The Brits were awful,” Lesa exclaimed finally.

“Now you can’t go thinking all folks is lowbrows,” Ray teased. They were occasionally recognized – usually by touring Americans they noted – but they didn’t care. Their love was totally legitimate now, not that it had ever been anything else, but now they did not have to worry about what anyone else thought about it. It felt quite different now. They could stroll hand-in-hand, or with Ray’s arm around her waist. It was so different than when they had had to be so careful in expressing fondness for each other. When they had strolled through the Met so long ago their happiness had had to be veiled.

Cosmological Consideration

Then very soon they moved on to Paris where their interpreter joined them. She was very pleasant, but now there were five and being alone together as a honeymoon is supposed to be was more difficult. The book signings went very well. There were probably as many English translations as there were French ones that got sold.

They did the Louvre twice in the little bits of spare time they had. They went up to the second level of the Eiffel tower and looked down through the thick glass at the tiny people far below them.

“I prefer the Space Needle,” Lesa said.

They were getting tired by the time they got to Florence. Again, the bookstore signings with their interpreter becoming ever more important to this process. It seemed to go well enough. It seemed as though there were a considerable number of books being signed and purchased, but again they noted that no inconsiderable percentage of these purchases were being made by touring Americans. Europeans didn’t need their purchases signed or passports stamped Ray guessed.

They did the usual tours while in Florence. During one of these Lesa was pleased to note that Ray must have picked up his penchant for carrying his jacket over his shoulder from an uncircumcised Jewish King made famous by Michelangelo. Sharon made a point of there being certain features of the two gentlemen that were not all that dissimilar.

The two physicists wanted to do a side trip to Padua because of the history of physics there. They were tired of book sales and signing. Edna and their interpreter arranged a trip on which they departed right after an early breakfast at their hotel. First, they went through Pisa observing the ostentatious bell tower and the famous Piazza del Campo, “Square of Miracles” to which Ray should never presume, Lesa assured him. Finally, by the most round about route, they arrived at Padua where everyone but Lesa and Ray wanted to see St. Anthony’s Basilica and nothing more. Ray and Lesa were too tired to remonstrate; they hadn’t even wanted to have included Pisa. Everyone was tired. Everyone was cross. In short, the day was a disappointment.

“I just want to go home, Ray. To hell with Rome,” Lesa complained that evening as they went to bed without even having supper. They were totally exhausted.

“To hell with Rome, indeed,” Ray agreed. “The only problem Sweetie is that our flight leaves from Rome,” he teased.

That wasn’t funny she had insisted. Didn’t he understand how exhausted she was? That whole week of the wedding before they left was exhausting, and every day since was just piling on more and more oppressive weight. He insisted that he did know and felt much the same.

They let Edna and Sharon tour alone the next day. Then the following day they had headed to Rome where they holed themselves up in the hotel because that was what Lesa wanted. Ray certainly had nothing more he wanted to see on this trip. He too wanted to be home.

Cosmological Considerations

Once home, they had collapsed into each other's arms with only Allie and the two kids coming by occasionally those first few days. But Lesa was too full of nervous energy to be down long.

Weeks after having returned from Europe, Ray was holding Lesa as she slept. In that state, she might have been what one could consider serene, but at no other time. Even when she had been exhausted, she could not have been considered serene. Probably no one could; that was a different concept.

However, her enthusiasm and excessive energy were never dissonant or noisy, or in the least bit scatter-brained. There was meaningfulness about her activities and a purpose to all she did that had a relaxing effect even though Ray was probably forced to be as busy as he had been at any time in his life. She managed him a lot like Helen had, but she kept him more involved in their domestic life. However, as Ray had become inclined to tell anyone trying to get him involved in something or other, whether major league baseball, or political action committees, he and Lesa were physicists first and foremost. But that was increasingly just *his* story – not hers.

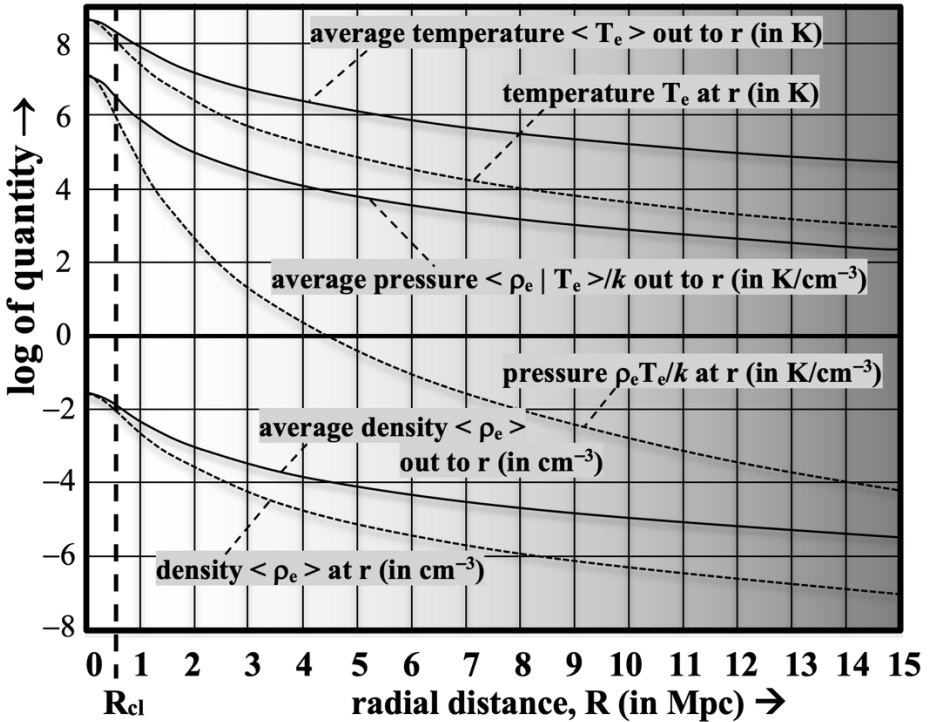
So sure, before too long there had been some research into plasma scattering being done, which was Ray's escape from the other activities and chores that Lesa seemed always to have awaiting him. He could usually pull her away from most anything she was currently involved in by merely mentioning some intellectual challenge or other in physics or a mathematical theorem whose proof had eluded him. That would be enough to initiate hours of that marvelous fantasy behind the blue church doors he had associated with her eyes in the Alpha and Omega bookstore those several years ago even by then. But in any case, the burning fire of their work wasn't like it had been. It was merely an interlude and seemed more like the dying embers of that fire.

Ray was working on the impact of the variation of the distribution of the electron density and temperature of the intergalactic plasma centered in galaxy clusters. He would like to have had Lesa's help on this because it involved statistical analyses with which he was not very confident. Since redshift in his model was determined as the product of these parameters, it meant that redshift would be increased tremendously through galaxy clusters and would spread the redshift of the galaxies within the cluster into the long so-called 'fingers of god' groupings of galaxies on redshift surveys. That increased redshifting was what produced this so-obvious effect, *not* dark matter. Cosmological redshift was a statistical accumulation of light passing directly through and near the centers of an astronomical number of clusters. Ray so hoped Lesa would become enthused about the possibilities of this aspect of his scattering model of cosmology, but so far it hadn't seemed to interest her that much.

Luis Marmet who had been given an early version of Ray's model for review, had subsequently written a critique of it and many other conjectured 'tired light' models (including his own and his father's) and had characterized Ray's as not being viable based on his claim that "it requires a million times greater hydrostatic pressure than supported by observation." Clearly Marmet

Cosmological Consideration

had not grasped the difference between the product of averages and the average of a product – averaging over all of space. When averages are taken over all galaxy clusters, each of whose separations are on the order of 100 Mpc¹ or greater, the universal average electron density can be as low as 10⁻⁷ per cm³ or less, the average temperature less than 10⁵ K, and yet the average of their product as large as 5 x 10³ K cm³, required by the scattering model to match observed cosmological redshift. This average is a million times greater than the product of the individual averages – countermending Marmet’s claim.



Representative temperature and density as functions of the distances from the centers of galaxy clusters

Marmet also claimed, rather gratuitously Ray thought, that Ray had simply mishandled a change of reference frame between (secondary) detection and emission in the scattering process. He had said,

“The physics of the emission of red-shifted radiation is incorrect: a correction (transverse Doppler) from the frame of the electron to the frame of the observer is considered, but mistakenly the correction

¹ An Mpc is a ‘megaparsec’ that is a unit of measure of distance. A megaparsec is one million parsecs, or about 3,260,000 light years or 3.0857×10¹⁸ cm.

Cosmological Considerations

(aberration) from the frame of the emitter to the frame of the electron is ignored. Electrons re-emit light at the same frequency as they are receiving it. If they have a high velocity, then in their reference frame, the radiation is shifted to the higher frequencies due to the aberration angle. This shift compensates exactly the red-shift due to the transverse Doppler effect.

This evidently involved Marmet having been confused with regard to each high-speed electron detecting light from a unique region on the incident wavefront closest to each electron at the time the scattering took place in that region in the detecting electron's frame of reference. It is from the opposite direction of aberrated light. Light detected by a coincident but 'stationary' electron would derive from a different location on the wave front, but light from that region would not have been emitted simultaneously in the frame of the high-speed electron. It would be aberrated and not be seen until considerably later because of the non-simultaneity and extreme distance of remote events.

It was complicated and Marmet hadn't understood it. Ray was tired and decided to go back to bed. He entered the bedroom and crawled into bed very quietly without disturbing Lesa. But he could not seem to get to sleep. He was exasperated with Marmet's criticisms.

"Bull shit!"

Lesa stirred. "What is it, Ray? Are you awake?"

"Yeah, sorry. Did I wake you?"

"Didn't you say something?"

"I didn't think so," Ray replied, wondering to what extent his expletive had rocked his body, next to which she had lain so comfortably.

"You did," she insisted. "I heard something."

"Snoring maybe?" He squeezed her to him feeling and loving everything about this wonderful woman. "You feel great, Lesa."

"So... tell me." She persisted, "What were you thinking about?"

"Oh just Marmet. God!"

"L'Rey Marmet doesn't matter."

"Yeah, I know, but it's annoying. It's Luis by the way"

"I know, but don't waste time with Marmet's comments. Think about the criticisms that the biggies of the cosmology community might level when they become familiar with your work. That's all you need to address."

"Luis' take will probably be everyone's knee jerk reaction and I'll have to address it over and over. I need your help with the more difficult issues. There's the intractability of the 'Lyman-alpha forests' you could help me with."

"The absorption lines from protogalaxies of the neutral hydrogen gas distributed throughout the intergalactic medium?" It was a problem Ray had first mentioned to Lesa a long time back. She had immediately hopped into the draft of his book that he had tentatively titled, *Cosmological Effects of Scattering in the Intergalactic Medium*. She had initially followed his writing with that same enjoyment she had had with all the materials he had given her

Cosmological Consideration

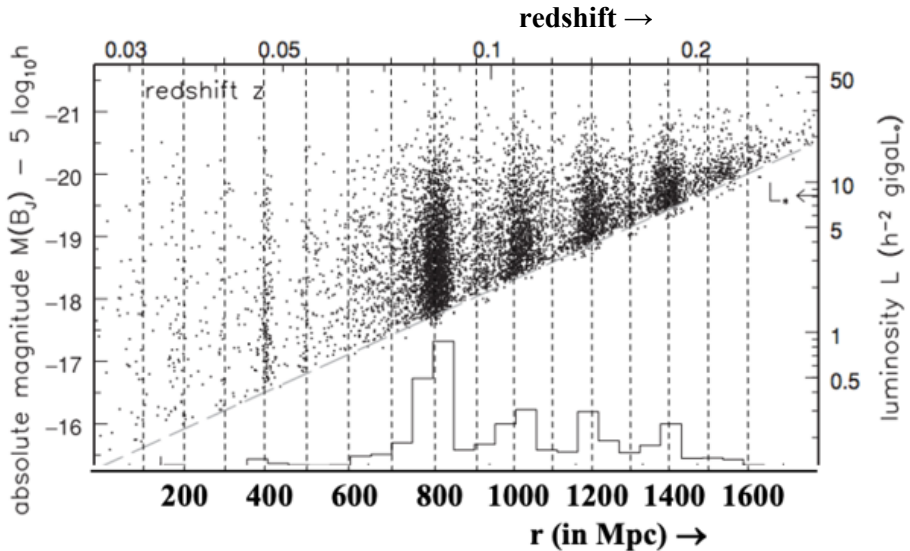
previously. It was as if these too were all her own ideas that she was trying to ferret out. She had soon identified the holes that he had told her about and adopted them as her own problems. But her interest had seemed to wane. "I know, I have been going to spend some time looking into that. I will, but I don't think it will end up being a problem for your model."

"And the distributions of density and temperature whose average product produces the average cosmological redshift-distance relation."

"You've solved that problem."

"No. Not completely. The kernels of the pressure distributions must be what causes the appearance of quantization in numbers of galaxies at distance intervals of 200 Mpc with only redshift as a metric. You know that diagram I synthesized from Sparke and Gallagher of the survey data. I think it involves the cross correlation of the density of galaxy clusters in the universe and the hydraulic pressure distribution within clusters themselves."

"Yes, I know. It is intriguing. But I'm really tired right now Ray. Can we just go to sleep right now like that night you were ill, and I slept in your 'private sanctuary' at the Sheltry? Remember that? It was even better once we got it together down on the coast."



Luminosity of 8,438 galaxies near 13^h 20^m in the 2dF data. (Data missing below the diagonal is due to instrumentation limitations responsible for less density at greater redshifts.) – adapted from Sparke and Gallagher (2010)

"I'll never forget. I'm not sick tonight," he toyed. "And we haven't been fighting."

"What time is it anyway?" she asked, obviously becoming wide-awake.

"Let's see, 4:30, I guess. We've got a few more hours."

He felt her palm flatten on his stomach and slide down toward where he lived, where he *really* lived, not where he reasoned, but way back behind the

Cosmological Considerations

store front that covers for business that toys with the pleasure centers that lead to addiction. She lifted her head and kissed his lips. Rolling toward her, he reached under her gown and found once more those distant hills of fantasy.

That was pretty much the way Ray and Lesa's life together had begun. With a bang, one might say! Off in directions he would not have expected. What were the odds? He might ask Tim, he thought as he lay there now, holding Lesa again on another night. How many nights in a row could one man get lucky? Not very damned likely tonight, Ray thought. As close to zero as he could imagine right now.

Lesa had made him watch a recording of his ridiculous argument with Tim McCarthy during that interview after his final baseball game, laughing at him all the while the argument played on the TV, and coaching him as if she were Edna Robinson on what not to do next time. There wouldn't be a next time, Ray had insisted. But he had forced her to let him see the portion of the show in the eighth and ninth innings in which the illustrious Doctor Lesa Sorensen had attempted to reveal the inner workings of her client, soon to be husband, Ray Bonn – again, shamelessly before a national audience. He teased her about every pompous phrase. Like how much credit can you get for one predictable ‘*déjà vu*’?”

"You're going to pay for this, Ray Bonn," she had said. "You're going on Hot Box Sports for the World Series, Mister. We'll see how *you* like it."

"Are you kidding? The Mariners aren't going to make it this year."

"Whether they do or not, you're going on the show as color commentator just to see how well you like it. You and Tim can argue about the statistics of whether there is even a universe out there for all I care if that's what the two of you want to do." She had laughed at him.

"Not on your life," he had said.

"I'm still your agent, and I'm getting you on there, Ray, if I have to do it with duct tape again."

"Oh, no, no, no, Sis'r Hot Box," Ray had teased, but she had been seriously angry, he could tell. He worried that there might be hell to pay when the World Series rolled around. But here he was alone again, having missed the World Series altogether. With Lesa on his arm now he remembered why he had not had to worry about whether there really would be hell to pay. She had not felt well enough to go to even one World Series game. Whether he woke her up with an audible expletive about how data was being accounted in the standard model or not, there was not likely to be any intimacy this night with Lesa feeling as crummy as she'd been feeling.

Ray still worked alone on his latest concerns about how the universe works, thinking about it by himself again. Occasionally they discussed cosmology or other topics in physics, but it always came back to conversations concerning the new arrival. Lesa had morning sickness all day long some days and that went on for weeks.

Cosmological Consideration

Supposedly she would be feeling better very shortly according to Doctor Sharon, since this phase of pregnancy does not last for the entire ordeal, in fact, supposedly again, not very much longer. The next phase would be easier, even if an increasing general discomfort of the stretching of a single beautiful cocoon to house both an uncomfortable mommy and a greedy baby, with the plumbing and wiring ineptly designed to not quite accommodate that dual or triple functionality in the human species.

Ray felt guilty for having done this awful thing to Lesa. He had told her that and she had attacked him vociferously between retchings, explaining just how happy she was to have his scourge upon her. So he didn't console her that way anymore, if he consoled her at all, for this gross inconvenience, but he felt very sorry for her all the same. He didn't know whether it was a lack of a feminine side, just a general lack of sensitivity, or just plain selfishness, but that he felt no urge to procreate yet again at his age was a basic fact.

The prospect of coexisting with another teenager, this time throughout what were supposed to be his 'golden' sixties and on into platinum seventies did not appeal to him in the slightest. Her exclaiming how wonderful it would be did not convince him. Allie was expecting again now too. The whole world seemed to be into procreating as some sort of a show of power. We must be going to have another war to end all wars, he thought cynically. Maybe the overpopulation problem should be given the top priority on their liberal crusade, Ray thought.

Allie was due – in the parlance of women – at the same time as Lesa. The two women had spent an inordinate amount of time together during those early months of their marriage. Ray could not help wondering whether the pheromone synchronization thing that had so excited Helen about their mothers – and nuns in convents – had been kicking in. Well anyway, their child would definitely have playmates, kissing cousins or aunts or nephews or some other ungodly incestuous relationships depending on who had what. And billions upon billions of peripheral unborn relative possibilities.

Lesa squirmed next to him. He could feel her little belly right up next to his waist. He liked the way she still slept right up next to him as the lovers they were. Her enlarging breasts were against his chest now too. They had not lost their allure for him. He looked down at her in the dull light of early morning. Friedrich Nietzsche had been right; a breast certainly could have whatever purpose one chose to assign it.

"You okay, Ray? I like being here next to you. Is it too uncomfortable?"

"I love having you there. I'm sorry you're uncomfortable, and I'm glad it's you who wants this so badly."

"You have to want it too, Ray," she said excitedly, almost angrily, wide awake now. "That's important. You're going to help me through this. Get yourself into the mood for playing a lot of baseball with him."

"Him?"

Cosmological Considerations

"I think so, Ray. That's how I envision it. We'll know for sure pretty soon." She kissed him as he squeezed her gently. "I miss our love making, Ray, and I know you do too," she said as she touched him to feel his interest.

"I do miss it. It's been wonderful."

"It will be again, Ray. Meanwhile we have a lot going on this weekend with our soiree tomorrow afternoon. Then I'll arrange with Sharon to see if it'll work out for her to be my doctor. I really don't want Tom. I like him fine, and I know he's a good doctor, but... well, you know."

Ray knew. He didn't really like it either, not that that mattered.

"We might have her live with us a while at the end. Is that all right?"

"Sure. However works best." He wasn't sure.

Then they left that as Lesa proceeded thinking more exclusively of her soiree as she called it.

"I'm looking forward to getting to know Julie a little better, after having heard so much about her and then talking with her at Helen's funeral. She knows a lot of important people." Then after a moment, "I think she's nice."

Ray chuckled. "You know, whenever Helen and I would talk about Julie, we always came around to her being a 'good person'. 'Nice', I guess that would be. But we usually started out using the terms like floozy and Venus of Willendorf to describe her."

Lesa laughed. "You're going to be calling me that pretty soon, I'll bet, with the way these things are developing. Anyway, it will be good for you to get to talk with someone from your past."

"It will?" Ray's thoughts diverted to Friedrich Nietzsche again.

"It will, I know, and you enjoy it too, okay? I know you two had something going on, back then. So what. Talk about that too. You need to address some of your issues from back then."

"Issues?"

"Yeah, issues."

They talked on a little longer, but not about his "issues", before Lesa had slipped back into the nether world of sleep.

Ray was left to his own devices, or was it vices? How much energy is involved in the decay of a neutron into a proton and an electron? Let's see, a neutron is 939.6 Mev, a proton 938.3, and an electron is about 0.5. That makes an energy difference of about 0.8 Mev divided by the speed of light squared. That's a photon with a wavelength of about ten-to-the-minus-tenth centimeters, a Big Bang type number. Therefore, if all the matter in the universe had resulted from neutrons being spewed forth from the infrequent but spectacular eruption of black holes as perhaps signaled by the gamma Ray bursts for which specific sources could not be identified, and that are randomly distributed across the sky, then... But how would neutrons emerge from a quark soup?

Black holes can't erupt, but according to the standard model the most gargantuan of all assumed black holes, the universe itself had? As a loner, he had to represent both sides in every argument until sleep took him captive.

#3 The Company of Friends

The very next day Julie arrived early.

Helen had not had her cousin Julie up to visit her and Ray in the last several decades. In fact Julie had never been to visit them in all the years that they had been married. Why that should have been the case became more and more mystifying and disconcerting for Ray the more he learned about how closely Helen and Julie had worked together throughout their lives. That Helen had not trusted Julie and him to be in the same house together since that episode up at Raven's Creek, buried now by decades of water and time, was a fact of which they were now both poignantly aware. Julie and he were finally in the same house, and right now they were alone together in the same room.

Lesa had apparently come to believe that skeletons don't belong in closets. Julie could hardly be considered a skeleton by traditional standards for such entities. She was a full-bodied woman, who had narrowly escaped the fate of the Venus of Willendorf by both her vivacious proof of continuing survival and the still curvaceous distribution of her bulk. In some sense she was, though definitely not a skeleton, a talisman in Ray's closet, nonetheless. Although Lesa had not suggested that she had invited Julie here for the purpose of purging her soul mate's soul or any such inanity, stating rather that it was her skills in working for environmental causes, that purging had had something to do with Lesa's motives. It was obvious; Ray was quite sure of it.

It amazed Ray at just how much we retain of the morphological form of our bodies even as they shed their cells to become totally different physical entities several times in an interval of decades. Ray could tell that Julie had not changed in many essential ways. She looked amazing for her age. She always had at every age. Despite having put on a little weight, she was still the same voluptuous woman, fearlessly in love with life and its possibilities.

They had hugged when Ray first greeted her at the front door. There were tears in her eyes, probably brought about by thinking of the one through whom they were related and by whom they had been kept apart. They both cheered up immediately when Lesa came bubbling along. Then as the long weekend progressed, Ray realized that the Helen he should have known so much better,

Cosmological Considerations

he hadn't. Why, for example, would she have worried about the two of them ever disrupting his and Helen's happy home? They wouldn't have.



He had always thought of Helen as being as free of jealousy as a person could get, and Lesa as a more ruthless protector of her own interests – remembering back to her seeming concern about Professor Margot Mueller. But he saw that it was not that way at all. He knew that Helen had informed

Cosmological Consideration

Lesa of their experience up Raven's Ravine, and yet Lesa had done her damndest to get the two of them into rooms alone so they could talk it out, he presumed. It was a good idea. Certainly Lesa would be aware that irreversibility and the arrow of time were both on her side of that ledger.

"I've been ashamed of myself all these years, Ray," was how Julie began after they had quite awkwardly found themselves alone together in the living room that morning as Ray entered looking for a book he had mislaid. Julie had been scanning through that very book.

"You needn't have been," he said. "We were kids."

"I was older."

"And sooo beautiful," Ray teased finding himself more comfortable in her presence with such a comment than he ever would have thought he would be.

"You were a hunk, too." She seemed to lighten up then.

"Yeah. And those were meaningful times, weren't they?"

"Yes. Those times gave meaning to my life, I guess."

"You brought meaning into ours."

"Yours too?" she asked somewhat diffidently. "You always seemed somewhat aloof. You never seemed to get involved."

"That's just Ray Bonn. He's a funny guy, the only son of Adam – Cain and Able all rolled up as one."

"That fact wasn't very much fun for you back then though, was it? I don't think we handled that whole thing very well, did we?"

"You mean Helen knocking you over on your rump or me being Adam's son?" He laughed, but too conspicuously preferring an awkward situation to avoiding the deeper issue to which Julie referred. "No. I don't suppose we did. We were kids; we didn't know how."

"Do we know how now, do you suppose?" Julie had a frankness about her large dark brown eyes when they locked onto yours as she spoke that could be quite disconcerting. Ray was still bothered by it, and he wondered how many men had been caught not looking at the eyes, knowing that they should have been, and that Julie would be watching to see where they focused their attention. But her stare demanded a forthrightness for which Ray was seldom willing. "We'll see, I guess," he finally answered.

"You loved your father though, didn't you?" she asked as unabashedly as she had tossed the guitar to its twanging agony and had so immediately proceeded to unfasten his belt all those many years ago.

Lesa came in at that point, looking from one to the other. They were just then facing each other silently so that Lesa had not known that anyone was even in the room. "Did I spoil something?"

"No, not at all. It was I who spoiled it by asking Ray a most impertinent question about the Creek," Julie responded courageously.

Lesa looked at Ray. "And you didn't answer?"

"No," he said, "But the answer was going to be yes."

"Now that tells me a lot," Lesa said chuckling as she continued whatever search she was on, out into the hall and on toward the kitchen.

Cosmological Considerations

"I'm sorry again, Ray," Julie said as she sat back down after Lesa had gone.

"Well, don't be, again... or ever. It's really nice to have you here and to be able to talk with someone who knows about those old times."

"Yes. I miss that too. There isn't anybody now. Jonesy is such a cluck," she laughed. "Helen and I didn't really talk about the 'Creek', and I shouldn't have brought it up now."

"Oh, I think you should have. Why else do you think Lesa orchestrated this. Everything can't be about the environment, can it? I'm guessing some of it must be about you and me. Anyway, I suppose otherwise we'd just dance around these things the rest of our lives, huh?"

"Yes. Do you think we could go for a walk or something, Ray?"

"Sure. You got an apple?"

"No, Ray." Julie's big eyes became long angry slits. "No apple today."

"Good. Then I won't need my guitar."

"No. You won't need that either" she said angrily.

"You're getting to be an old lady, Julie, and thwarting a lot of my youthful dreams about doing it right next time."

They both laughed, Julie a little uncomfortably.

"We have a nice pond and a waterfall out back with some decent lawn chairs around it appropriate for old folks like us to dream of a long-forgotten paradise."

"Good," she said getting up to follow him out through the kitchen where Lesa was puttering around getting ready for the dinner after the group discussion later in the day. "I saw it from an upstairs window. Do you have any forget me nots?"

"A few... but I remember a lot more. Would you like some to wear?"

"Where are you two escaping to?" Lesa asked as they passed through the kitchen to the back door.

"We need to talk about flowers out by the waterfall where we can be free from the constraints of civilization," Ray said. "We'll come back to help you when freedom ain't worth nuthin" anymore."

Lesla just rolled her eyes.

"We've got some laundry that's been dirty for a while," Julie said, laughing. "Can't you tell? I do want to help you with that though, Lesa. This is an important thing you're setting up. I really appreciate that you're doing it."

"Well, I have no doubt that what you guys are talking about is of the utmost importance as well," she replied with a secretive smile. "I'm guessing I may not see you two for a while if you're going to do all the laundry."

After they were in the yard with the back door slid shut again, they headed down toward the terrace that surrounded the larger pond. Julie said as they walked, "You do know that Lesa knows all about that incident up at the waterfall in Raven's Ravine. You know that, right? Did you tell her?"

"Yeah, Lesa knows. I guess Helen told her. I didn't. But I'm used to women knowing everything about me. Anything you want to know by the way?"

Cosmological Consideration

Then as the waterfall came into view, Julie seemed impressed, "You guys did a pretty good job of re-creating your 'secret place', I'd say."

"Do you think this is a good spot for a commune?"

"Quit it, Ray." He could tell he had upset her with his repeatedly teasing about that incident. "I need to forget all about that aspect of my past."

"I'm sorry, Julie. I really am. The whole thing seems so silly now though, doesn't it? But for a long time it wasn't silly at all, not for me at least, you became an obsession, a vision hiding way back in there behind my eyes. This landscaping here – neither Helen nor I ever mentioned how similar the layout was to our Raven's Creek sanctuary. That's a bit strange, isn't it?"

"It is strange, Ray. Weren't you conscious of how you laid it out?"

"Well, I'm the one who did lay it out, and I just thought it looked good. Helen seemed to have too. She suggested a couple of features – a waterfall, being over there instead of here for example," Ray pointed out the difference. "I guess that's what we thought up at the creek too. It just felt right for a place to sit down with nature and forget about the adult rat race."

"It's nice, Ray," Julie allowed, "but communes are a thing of the distant past, aren't they?" She smiled with only a slight chuckle, more just a clearing of her throat. "I know it was a long time ago and it does seem absurdly silly now, but I think it made a big difference in our lives, don't you? You with 'I'm-not-Julie' and me with nobody. I probably wasn't very good for you and Helen... not that first summer anyway." She hesitated. "Your dad knew it, didn't he?"

"I dunno. He never formulated much except with sarcastic one-liners, equations, and his slide rule. But he flat out didn't like you and your 'pimple-ass' friends much, that was for sure, huh? I don't know that he ever worried about me that much. But let me tell you, if Helen hadn't stepped in when she did, I think I'd have been your sole property for as long as you wanted me."

"His disdain was made pretty clear." She laughed as she remembered. "Phil and Jack were freaked out by him, so they took off. You were kind of stuck between a rock and a hard place there, weren't you? Helen on one side, your dad on the other, and me totally infatuated with you, Ray, despite loving my cousin Helen. Did you know that? How infatuated I was? I didn't want a commune; I wanted you. And all I ended up with was Jonesy."

He paused thoughtfully, "It seems like I always have been between some hard rock and something else even harder. I guess that maybe everybody is but, no. I had no idea that I was not alone in the world lusting for someone I couldn't have. I had it pretty bad for you, although I think we had turned each other into mere objects. I couldn't get those beautiful images of you swaying under that waterfall out of my mind. They're still there, Julie." He laughed incongruously, "along with Helen saying, 'Isn't she beautiful, Ray?'"

"The only image I have of you is you sitting there singing. You know, it came back so poignantly when you were singing with Lesa after that last game of yours. I do remember another hard thing," she said smiling.

"Yeah, me too. The rocks and hard thing that everyone must survive."

Cosmological Considerations

"Others don't have as much of a hard situation as you had up the Creek."

"It was alright. We survived."

"Sometimes I think it might have been easier on us all if Helen had relaxed and let us – well, me – go ahead, don't you? I went up there for that purpose and I didn't plan on letting you go very soon. I couldn't get you out of my head after that. It would have caused a ruckus though, wouldn't it?"

"One hell of a ruckus, probably fucked up all our lives. Now all these years later I don't think it would have been better. Fidelity isn't all that natural of a human condition I found out then. But remembering Helen's squeal kept me on the straight and narrow through other possibilities, so I'd have to say that that worked out all right for me – in the long run, anyway – and for Helen, and now for Lesa, I suppose. Helen certainly was the expert on what Ray Bonn needed as against what he might have wanted one minute to the next. You have to give her that. It worked so well that I don't think he ever really knew what he wanted other than not hearing the squeal." He laughed as Julie inspected his expression.

"I give her that... and a lot more. She was an amazing little girl and an even more amazing woman. I loved her; you know. She helped me turn my life around, but she didn't trust me around you, did she?"

"I didn't think about that until recently when I found out how much you and Helen had done together during all those years. Other than that one incident I never thought of her as a jealous person, but I guess she was."

Ray sat down thoughtfully watching the water rolling off the ledge of a replica waterfall and down into the pond where a lone white lily blossom floated among undulating green pads with a few other knobby buds of promise. "You know, after that first night on Larry King, Helen confessed to me that Lesa not being Julie made it easy for her not to be jealous."

Just then they heard voices, Lesa's and Sharon's. Sharon must have just arrived. Lesa pointed the direction for Sharon to get down by the trout pond where Julie and Ray were sitting.

Ray rose to meet her halfway, pecking her cheek in the European style and having his pecked in exchange.

"You look great, Sharon. It's good to have you. I suppose Lesa's already pumped you for medical advice."

"Yeah. She's fine."

Ray introduced Julie to Sharon, both averring to have heard good things about the other.

"Well, the Bambino strikes again, huh?" Sharon teased. "Another grand salami. You think we'll need the DNA kit for this one?"

"I think Lesa deserves all the credit or blame, whatever it is."

"I dunno, you don't seem to shoot blanks cowboy. How about bottling some of that snake oil up so I can join the hit parade of pregnant ladies."

Ray didn't know exactly how to react to her sense of humor with its total lack of decorum in front of someone she had just met.

Cosmological Consideration

"I'm serious about the bottle, Ray." She laughed her raucous laugh again, "And the snake too." Then she turned to Julie and said quite politely, "It's nice to have met you, Julie. I'm sure we'll get to know each other better this weekend. I'm going to go see if Lesa needs any help."

Ray sat back down with a quizzical smile on his face.

"Jeez, Ray, was that some kind of demonstration of just how awful I must have been up there at the ravine?"

"That's just Sharon. You know when Helen was ill and we I finally got around to discussing our times up the ravine with you, we mentioned your boobs, of course – sorry, but we did. Significantly, however, any conversation with you in it always came around to how smart you were and what a nice person we thought you were and what a positive force you had been in our lives. I think Sharon would like to be Lesa's Cousin Julie, but personally, I don't think she's got what it takes."

"She thinks those things are boobs, Ray? But we know what boobs are, don't we," she laughed her generous hearty laugh. "So will Lesa ultimately come around to being jealous of Sharon... or me?"

Ray laughed. "Not a shot. Anyway, I've been trained, remember. I'm also getting to be an old man, but maybe more importantly, Sharon is lesbian, I think. There's a reason for the bottle. Lesa and you? No, I can't see it."

"Really. Usually, I can tell right off. You sure – about Sharon, I mean."

"No, I'm not sure of anything, but she spends most of her time with Edna Robinson and I've never seen either of them eye a guy."

"She's looking at you."

"Through a bottle for humor."

Julie laughed to terminate that digression.

"Helen was kind of envious of your body though, wasn't she?" Ray said. "I imagine that seeing the way I drooled at you back then made her jealous."

"Yes, I think she was a little jealous, and I had tried to make my exploits look grand to her. If she only knew how much I wished I had could have looked and acted exactly like her. I don't think I ever told her. I should have."

"Your exploits did seem pretty spectacular to young kids from the outside looking in at least."

"But Helen was an amazing woman, wasn't she?" Julie chose to change directions again. "You know, when I heard you chew that reporter out for the religious crap about Helen being up there looking down on you, I knew you had survived the way she would have wanted you to."

"And you? How have you made out?"

"Oh, I'm a survivor too, you know."

They sat there peacefully for a minute or so longer.

"It's sure pretty out here, Ray, and the sound of that waterfall is so soothing. But I think I should probably get back in to help Lesa and learn to appreciate Cousin Sharon a little, don't you?"

"Yeah, me too, I suppose," Ray said, laughing with her.

Cosmological Considerations

"Lesa's an amazing woman too, Ray. I suppose she'll be getting us together along so we will have other opportunities to talk."

"Yeah, I don't think she worries about us much. Anyway, we have a bunch more of the weekend. Maybe we'll find another chance for a conversation. Maybe we can take turns strumming that guitar in there later. I'd like to hear some of those old folk songs again."

"Yeah, I'd like that. I'm sure glad for how things have turned out for you, Ray, after all the hard times. You're one tough hunk of man."

"And you? Are you in a good situation now?" They were standing and beginning to walk back toward the house.

"Well, I've had so many men, ...been married to a few." She smiled knowing he knew all that. "They weren't the answer. None of them. I'm not looking for that kind of answer any more. I like the kind of stuff that you and Lesa are getting into now. It's a meaningful way to spend one's days. Well, at least as one gets older." She smiled a smile that said, "My life is fine right now, but I sure liked the way we were."

They were at the kitchen then where Lesa sent Ray off to another room on a task and Julie began helping Lesa with something or other. The three women chatted away happily. Ray could hear them from where he was doing some dusting. Sharon and Julie weren't having any problems with each other.

The soiree seemed to be a reasonable beginning to a determination of what causes would be most worthy of Ray and Lesa's time, effort, and money, and that of others who seemed eager to get involved. It turned out to be a much more pleasant experience than Ray would have thought. He realized that he could have made his and Helen's lives more rewarding by having taken more of an interest in what had mattered so much to her. He felt good about at least living up to her dying request in this regard.

Most of the people who had been at the house the night of his retirement from baseball were here again. The exceptions included Eddie who was worrying his orals; Jamie and Judy whose twins had come and were now down sick with something or other; Edna who was pushing some new book; and Cynthia and Fredrik whose eight pounds of boyhood had been born in the interval. In fact, Lesa and Ray had just returned from a pleasant several week stay in Boston earlier in the week. Lesa had been thrilled to help Cynthia with all those babyhood chores that nearly nauseated Ray.

But, in addition to Andrew and Charmaine (whose attendance at such a gathering somewhat surprised Ray because of Andrew's definite libertarian leanings), there were several new people. Judy had indeed found someone who knew how to get foundations off and running. Sandi Williams was an expert at getting balls rolling and keeping conversations lively. Her experience included a stint with the Gate's charitable foundation. Eddie's Lisa had come back without Eddies (Big or Little) but with friends John and Louise Smart and her own little heart-stopper for wannabe mommies, Lisa Marie whose life in the outside world had begun some months before.



Ray's friend Andrew

The Smarts had worked for liberal causes most of their lives. Cousin Julie was familiar with them from having worked together with them on one cause or another down in the Bay Area, first with John's parents and later as an 'intimate' of Louise's father.

Charmaine had contacted several of Helen's other associates who had helped on similar endeavors on other occasions, and some of those women were present. Ray was surprised to find out that Charmaine was actively involved in such liberal causes, Andrew's counter opinions notwithstanding. He found it humorous to watch Andrew's expressions as he seemed to be

Cosmological Considerations

finding out for the first time what his own wife really thought about issues and where some of his money had been going. He and Ray made eye contact a few times and both had started laughing to the chagrin of both Lesa and Charmaine and others less able to show it.

That Andrew seemed to be getting it, even at this stage of his life, had surprised Ray. Ray had never tried to communicate his feelings on such political issues with Andrew. He wouldn't have thought it would have met with much success if he had and ruined what they did have going. Now Ray could tell that Andrew was appreciating Charmaine's role in this production.

Primarily the occasion was the establishment of a network with whom decisions for where to place effort could be discussed in the future. But it was a start, and several projects were proposed.

Ray hadn't really been intending to raise hell by proposing reforestation of the Sahara, which Andrew enthusiastically supported, but apparently it was the general opinion of his proposition that he had done just that.

Lesla said, "Okay, Ray. You and Andrew do the groundwork to determine whether there is anything at all to justify even discussing such a huge endeavor."

"You think it's impossible, don't you? Is that it? Why?" Ray asked, not just argumentatively, but out of a sincere interest in what she might think on this issue. Apparently, she sincerely thought he had just been rabble rousing.

"Probably not impossible for you, Ray, but for the rest of the known world," she said curtly.

Ray could tell that Andrew was tickled by even the prospect of such a domestic squabble in paradise, but Ray wasn't. That wasn't what he had been after at all.

Lisa's degree had been in 'Environmental Science', they found out, whatever that was, Ray hadn't heard of it before that day. He should look it up some time to get a better feel. However, for one reason or another she showed some interest in whether, in fact, such a gigantic restorative effort might be viable. She mentioned a "Greenbelt" project that was on-going in Africa.

"The Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai initiated a similar effort in which thousands of women planted 30 million trees throughout Kenya as part of her Green Belt Movement," Lisa said making eye contact first with Ray and then Andrew. "Are either of you aware of the success of that effort?"

They weren't. But John had a degree in biology with some marginal applicability to what would be required. "It would be a lot tougher with the Sahara, of course." However, he said that if Ray wanted him to, he would join their effort to investigate the feasibility of plant growth in the soils of the lower Sahara where the loss of arable land had been, and was continuing to be, the most devastating. He'd find out what sort of trees or other plants would have the best chance of survival and just how much water would be required to sustain plant growth.

So Lesa had to lighten up a bit, and agreed that sure, they could at least entertain the possibility. "I know the water desalination and distribution

Cosmological Consideration

problems are hugely important issues, if that's what you're thinking, Ray. Surely you must have thought some about that and have some ideas, to spring it on us like this." She was probably just testing him.

Sheepishly Ray announced that he wasn't sure he had any clue. "I haven't run any calculations or seen experimental results to get numbers if that's what you mean. But I've wondered whether the effect that forests have on weather, would return if the forests were restored. In short, how much of the devastation is irreversible," knowing that term in and of itself would have meaning to Lesa. "And besides, what about solar energy; hundreds of millions of square miles of solar panels could surely be put to good effect." Andrew was enthralled.

In the end Lesa had to allow that some minor aspect of their communal activity should be spent looking into it. Since he had indeed been interested, even if only superficially, in what might be involved in reversing weather patterns that seemed to change with deforestation, it could be fun. Andrew was a good engineer who would put out a real effort, Ray thought. John signed up to work with Andrew on that project. The desalination and distribution problems were huge to say nothing of the emerging solar energy perspective. But the primary thrust of the get together was to identify other already established projects where money and effort would do the most good.

The light supper on Friday night that Lesa had arranged for after their discussions was very different than what Helen would have laid out, but that everyone enjoyed the occasion and was enthused to change the world was evident. Ray watched all their excitement somewhat cynically from the head of the table where Lesa had placed him.

Somehow, he could never avoid being Ray Bonn just the designated hitter looking on from his seat on the bench in the dugout.

But Ray Bonn had Lesa on his arm again; she was snoring softly. The growing bulge of her belly leaned heavily against him with what she supposed to be a boy inside. He felt no cynicism at all about that. But what he thought about now was something else.

Among Helen Bonn's last whispered syllables had been those used to express her clouded awareness that Ray had not revealed the full extent of his life-long aspirations to Lesa to whom he was now wed. Eddie's Lisa had exposed that right off, so that was out of the way. But that was the tip of an iceberg by the name of Ray Bonn. As in the case of what had been extracted from him that first night, what he had told Lesa had been true – all of it. Ray never lied. But like the horse trainer who, when interviewed to discuss his younger brother's current success in having developed a champion racehorse had said, "I taught him all he knows... but not all *I* know," Ray tended to withhold that kind of pertinent information. Maybe it was just a game.

Often, he had omitted what might better have been said, and revealed what might better *not* have been said at all. His not telling the truth had not been an issue that Helen or anyone else would ever have had to worry about in his regard. She had always known as surely as she knew anything about her

Cosmological Considerations

husband – and she had surely known everything there was to know, having grown up with him – that Ray Bonn was incapable of formulating a lie.

It was rather a reticence to freely relate peripheral additional information about himself that had often frustrated her. Maybe it was just because he had worked on projects for the DoD where one must limit the distribution of information to those with an explicit need to know, with the errors always having to be made on the side of silence and secrecy. Ray had an aversion to the spoken word anyway, except for those occasions when he got on a blab blab blab roll, as he referred to such occasions, for which he always had the deepest despair afterwards.

His reticence to 'open up' had sometimes been a source of major contention between Helen and him. They seldom had what could be called arguments really, because that was not Ray's way, just Ray's reticence.

Now he found himself face to face with this same old problem, but with a new wife, another wife who loved him, and whom he loved dearly, albeit differently than he had loved Helen, and than Helen had loved him. But he could tell that although Lesa did not mention it, she too often became irritated by his strange withdrawals into himself. The fact that she did not have the time, or apparently the continuing interest to work on physics with him, left him with his same old private internal wonderings. He must address this aspect of his character, he supposed, since he knew that whether Lesa worked right beside him or not, she would at least be interested in, and provide help with such issues. Better to learn how to share his thoughts verbally even at this end of his life than not at all, since it did seem that something should be done about it.

Lesla had stepped into the role of Mrs. Ray Bonn, albeit without changing her name for a second time, as complacently as she had accepted his ideas of the inner workings of cosmology, thermodynamics, and relativity, and so much else of a much more personal nature. She enhanced everything she touched. Ray knew that hers had not been an abject solicitude but rather a mere settling into a ready-made environment so totally compatible with her own familiar modes of thought. That she and Ray seemed to resonate at some deep cognitive level was something that neither of them had ever considered worth doubting. So, it seemed to him, she had accepted a domestic role very much along the lines defined by precedence. That those lines had been defined by someone else did not seem to bother her at all. It wouldn't. That that someone had been her friend, Helen Bonn, merely added in so many ways to the ease with which she and Ray had begun their lives together as having more or less already bonded under the auspices of Helen's gradually lifting shadow. But there are always problems. That was to a large extent what their Nobel Prize had been about – no free lunch. Even at the lowest levels of reality, there are always problems.

Right now Ray listened to the gentle purr of Lesa's snoring, a pleasing resonance he remembered from that eventful occasion years back now – that first night they had met, holding onto each other on the couch in the main room

Cosmological Consideration

of their suite there in the Sheltry. Lesa had just finished baring her soul to him because capriciously she had felt that they were, in some obscure sense, soul mates. She had disclosed everything. Well, all of which she was aware. She had not been able to recall certain of the gorier details of her mother's murder. She told him later that a few more pertinent details had gradually broken free of the tangles in which that event had become enmeshed in her mind. It was still obscure. But everything of which she had any conscious grasp would willingly have been given up to anyone, especially to Ray. She had absolutely no tendency to be reclusive.

And yet... the promised explanation of that for which Helen had told Lesa she needed forgiveness from both Lesa *and* Ray had not been forthcoming. Probably it was just that their lives were so busy right now that there hadn't ever been time.

As he lay there holding her and thinking of that first encounter, he recalled having at some time or other learned that abused children would become friends with strangers very quickly. Was that it? Had he just been 'anyone' who had happened along? No. He had not. He knew that he had been very special to her from the first – not just *someone*. He was, in fact, the one person who happened to have had a leg up on the problem she had been working on at the time, whose mind worked the way *hers* worked. He had approached that, and every other problem, the same way she would have, methodically, successfully. Now they were together, but not without problems still to be worked out, but importantly, together.

The fact of Lesa's pregnancy was having a significant impact on their personal lives, their sex lives, and their working relationship. None of those aspects of their joint being was so important that she (and therefore they) did not put every aspect of that new child's life at the top of any list of what had to be done, and what would have to be put off indefinitely. Now that still unborn fetus came first.

As Ray lay there, Lesa on his arm snoring, he thought about Cynthia and Lesa's biological father Fredrik postponing an occasion of traveling with Ray and Lesa for just these reasons. He was certain that that trip would have worked out fine, Edna or no Edna, Sharon or no Sharon, and gone much more smoothly with them along. Cynthia would have gotten across the subtleties that mattered most to Ray and Lesa both with regard to what they had to say and questions that needed answered about their books. Now they would not be able to take that enjoyable trip for the next umpteen years. He didn't think either Cynthia or Lesa – or Fredrik for that matter – had realized how having a child would tie a family down. He did. Oh, well. They could anticipate a pleasant trip in their far-off future even longer this way.

Compared to Lesa having a son – that had by then been confirmed as, in fact, going to be a son – not much else mattered to Lesa, or to Ray for that matter. But despite apparent normality, Ray was obsessed – always had been. Whatever conversations or activities occupied his days, his nights were very different. He would awaken in the early hours consumed with conjectures of

Cosmological Considerations

how the universe works. Why it works that way. If he expressed his interest in aspects of astronomy or physics to his friends or even Helen (until she had given up on it – and then, of course, died), they would leap into some news item they had read concerning a new planet having been discovered, did he think Pluto should be considered a planet? Does the Milky Way have a black hole at its center? Concerning any of which Ray had only casual interest at about the same level of hearing that a tornado had once again leveled a trailer park in Tennessee. It was just news, not of scientific interest to him.

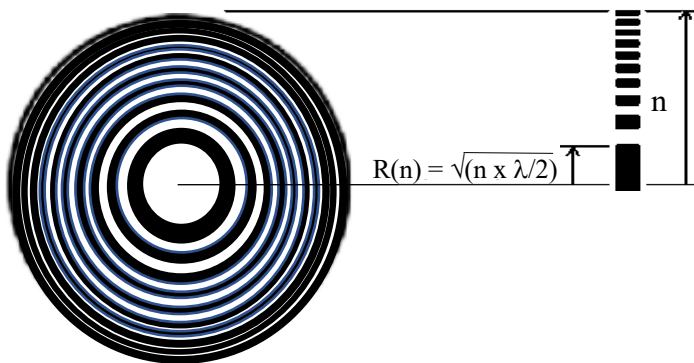
Cosmology was his consuming interest. And that was associated with an almost instinctual sense that the universe is as it is not as an on-going repercussion of some miraculous primordial origin whether Biblical or quasi scientific. The universe is as it is because it can be no other way – a matter of logic, his version of Voltaire's Professor Pangloss who advocated that we live in 'the best of all possible worlds' (universes), only for Ray it is the *only* possible universe. It is in a stationary state, very different from the debunked Steady State universe of yesteryear. If any aspect of existence were to be any other way, nothing could exist at all. His obsession was such that he was compelled to address any aspect of '*how* it works' with an untiring effort to discover the logical explanation of '*why* it works that way' and it could be no other way.

So in the middle of any given night, he would be working away like one of Grimm's little shoemaker elves discovering cosmological secrets with Lesa snoring beside him peacefully.

#4 Ray's Cosmological Obsession

The work that Lesa had begun looking into with him when he had first reestablished contact with her in the late spring and early summer after Helen had died had involved several major problems. These needed to be solved before a viable alternative to the standard model of the Big Bang and an evolving universe could be established. It had enticed and frustrated Lesa just as it had Ray over a much longer span of years. There had been areas of research that he would work on enthusiastically for several months until he finally accepted one of the challenges as an impasse, and then he would shelve his work and not bring it out again for a year or so. This had gone on for well over twenty years by then. Gradually, however minor accomplishments had accumulated, and a glimmer of hope had shown through his body of work.

Ray had taken a graduate level course in optics while at university because the coherent interference intrigued him. Constructive as well as destructive interference occurs when two wave functions pass a point in space within the 'coherence length' of each wave function; this involves photons with on the order of ten million wavelengths (λ) of the radiation. Spherical wavefronts (surfaces of constant phase) emanating from a point source of light can be assumed for all practical purposes to be plane surfaces over appreciable areas of the planes if the detection of the light takes place at a great enough distance. This area involves central Fresnel zones whose sizes depend upon the distance from the source and the wavelength of the radiation.



Fresnel interference zones of constant phase on a planar surface

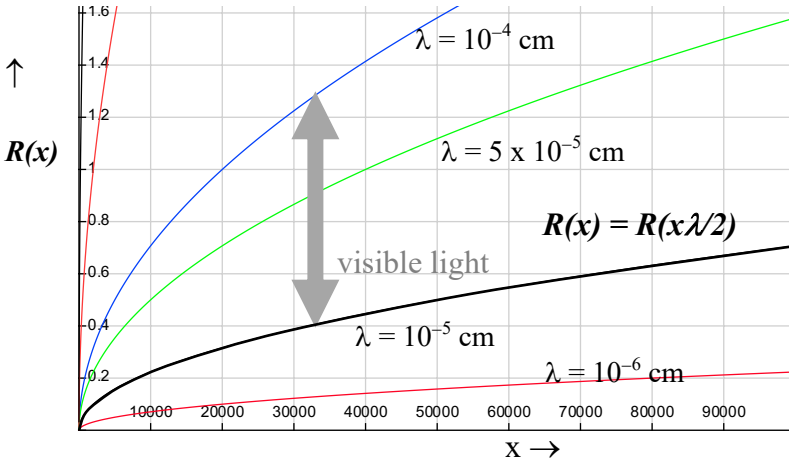
The radius of the area of the central zone on the plane of constant phase is very dependent on the value of the wavelength. At a large distance $x \gg \lambda$, the

Cosmological Considerations

radius of the inner Fresnel zone is $R(x) = x \tan \theta \cong x\theta$, for small values of θ , where θ is the angle to the perpendicular of the plane from the source.

$$x / \cos \theta - x \cong x (1 - \cos \theta) / \cos \theta \cong \frac{1}{2} x \sin^2 \theta \cong (x \theta)^2 \leq x \lambda / 2$$

$$R(x) = \sqrt{x \lambda / 2}$$



Radius of the central Fresnel zone as a function of distance in centimeters

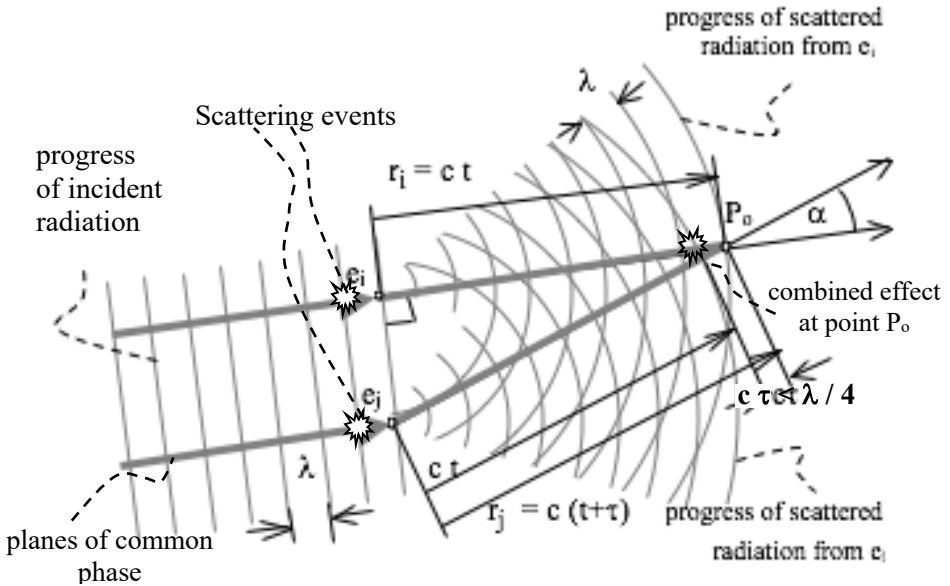
Ray's initial breakthrough had been realizing that however sparse electron density in intergalactic plasma, forward scattering of photons does occur. Tremendous distances to redshifted galaxies accommodate an extremely large number of scattering events in the propagation of a photon from such distant regions of the cosmos to observation here on earth, notwithstanding the fact that individual photon replacement intervals involve astronomical distances.

What is involved in the forward scattering process is that photons are 'cloned' by a replication process – a process formerly thought to be reversible. Lesa hated his use of the word cloned in this context, but that is what it is. Any net change in the dynamic state of the ensemble of electrons involved in replication would involve a transfer of energy and momentum from the photon to the electrons. The most famous advocate for this *not* happening was Yakov Zel'dovich who averred that the electrons whose motions are altered in the process must return immediately to their former state after the replication has taken place. In short, that there can be no net transfer of energy or momentum from the photon to the electrons; thus, no red shifting of radiation associated with the scattering process. This opinion became a final nail in the coffin of all so-called 'tired light' theories of cosmological redshift even though initially favored by Edwin Hubble. As proof, Zel'dovich claimed that if it were not the case, the direction of photons would be altered, ultimately blurring and totally obscuring images of distant galaxies after the innumerable replications.

Discrediting Zel'dovich's proclamation would constitute a cosmological breakthrough. But... there is, in fact, a mechanism whereby energy and

Cosmological Considerations

momentum are transferred to scattering electrons that does not alter the direction of the photon despite the decrease in its momentum and energy. The mechanism involves coherent constructive interference of scattered radiation.



Conditions for in-phase coherent forward scattering

Ray's initial intuition was as simple as accepting 'there is no free lunch', that all physical processes must involve energy exchanges. Having written a book on irreversibility with Lesa made that a no brainer in retrospect. He rejected the notion that forward scattering cannot alter the wavelength of a cloned photon. Earlier work by Born and Wolf had been thorough but their analyses leading to that conclusion had not considered relativistic effects.

Kirekoff rigorously refined Huygen's wave propagation process. Electrons along the general direction of a photon's path contribute to the cloning process. Constraints of in-phase coherent reinforcement define a domain throughout which electron scattering contributes to the process. This coherency domain defined by Fresnel zones is the same shape as a domain originating at a point source, a region where plane waves can be assumed rather than spherical wavefronts. Outside of the central Fresnel zone, reinforcement alternates between destructive and constructive so that the net effect is small from outside this region; A line to/from any point in the central Fresnel zone is no more than a quarter wavelength greater in length than the centerline to the point P_0 .

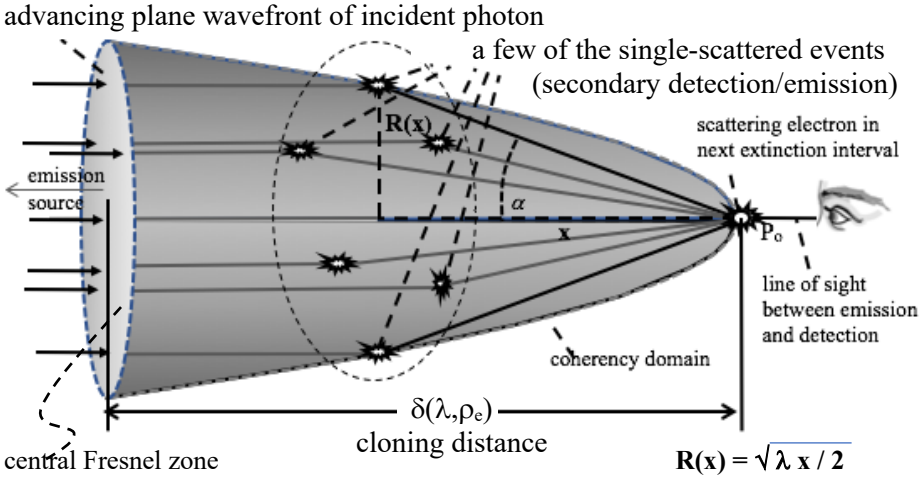
The length of this domain as applied to forward scattering is inversely proportional to electron density and wavelength. This cloning distance is how far light travels in a medium before the speed of light becomes that determined by the density of scattering electrons in the new medium rather than that of the medium it just left. In verifying Einstein's Second Postulate using light from pulsars in globular clusters, this distance was determined to be:

Cosmological Considerations

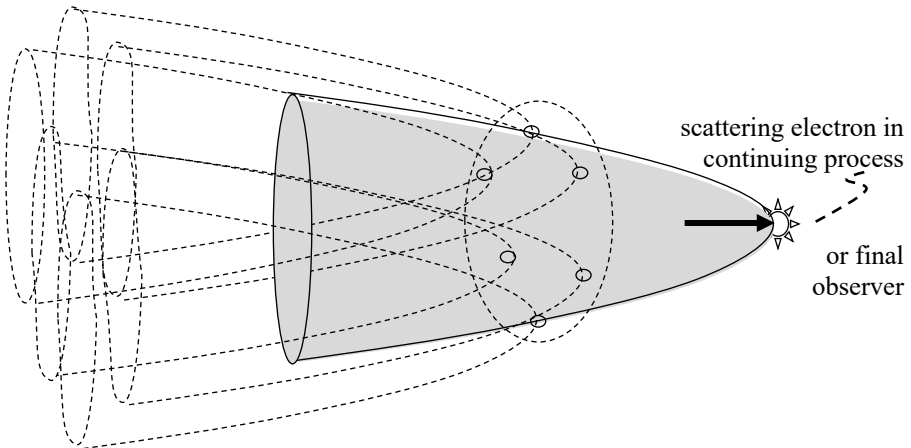
$$\delta(\lambda, \rho_e) \approx m_e c^2 / (\rho_e e^2 \lambda) \cong 3.55 \times 10^{12} / \lambda \rho_e \text{ cm.}$$

Here m_e is the mass of an electron, c the speed of light in a vacuum, ρ_e is the electron density, and λ is the wavelength of the radiation.

For visible light, the number of electrons involved in a single cloning process in intergalactic plasma is on the order of 10^{36} . It is a continuous process, not discrete, involving all electron in the path of the incident radiation.



Coherency domain in a scattering medium



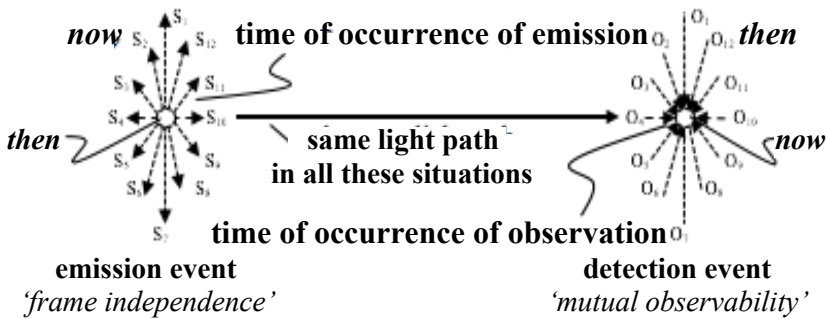
Collaborative coherency domain contributions

High velocity electrons in a plasma such as the intergalactic medium require a revised conclusion. Interpreting Hubble's discovery of increasing redshift with distance as a Doppler effect of recessional velocities of observed objects had been accepted by default since there had seemed to be no other viable mechanism that produced redshift. However, electromagnetic wave functions induced from high-speed scattering electrons can be shown to have

Cosmological Considerations

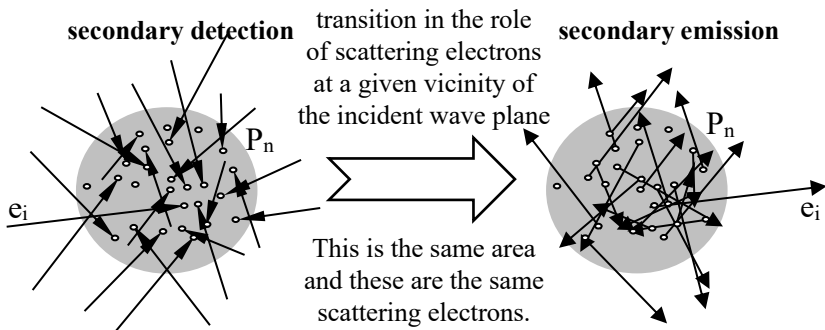
altered wavelengths using Einstein's special relativity that addresses a transverse component. Thus, even without a recessional velocity, induced secondary emissions from electrons (contributors to the cloned photon) are unilaterally redshifted with the cumulative effect indistinguishable from a recessional Doppler redshift of photons emitted directly from the object. His recognition of the mechanism had required Ray's familiarity with relativity. Implicit in the Lorentz equations is the concept of 'frame independence'; it involves the fixing of an emission (of electromagnetic radiation) event relative to the observer's frame of reference independent of the velocity of the source of the radiation that is emitted. Radiation from sources that are in coincidence at the time of the emission event *will appear in the same direction* for an observer – any observer.

alternative motion of coincident sources S_i of an event **alternative motion of coincident observers O_i of an event**



'Frame independence' and 'mutual observability' in relativity

The scattering from electrons at or near the plane of common phase of the incident radiation involves a transition of electrons entering, to those leaving, an area of approximate coincidence where secondary emission takes place.

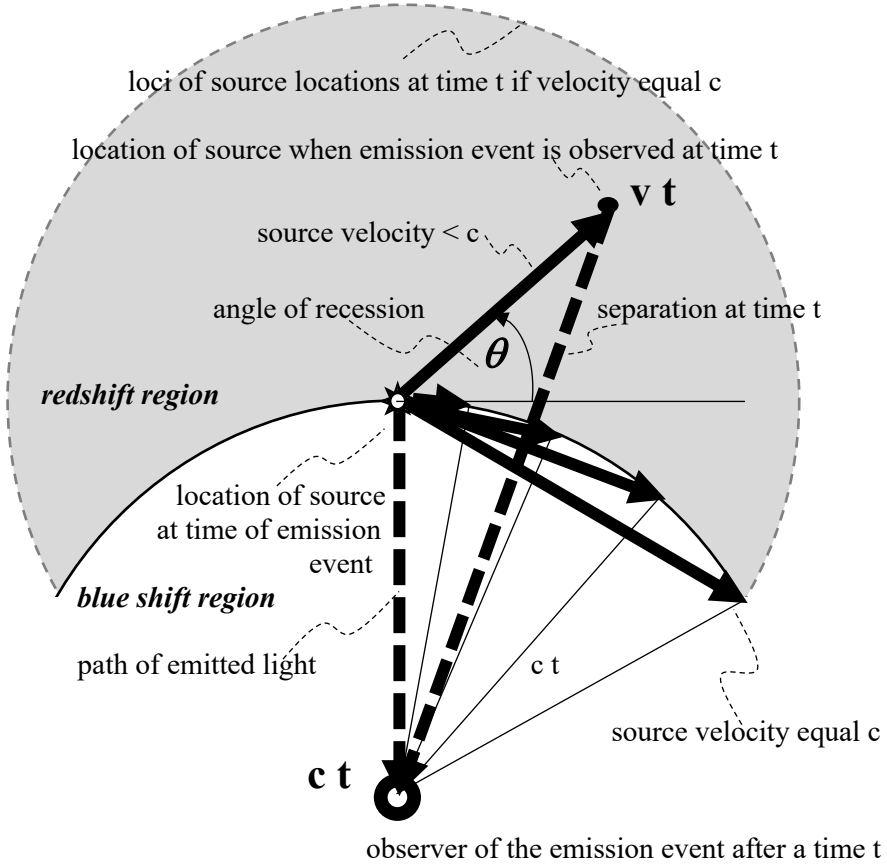


Neighborhood of a group of scattering electrons at detection and emission

However, the observed wavelength of that radiation will differ depending on the net change in the separation of the source and observer *by the time the*

Cosmological Considerations

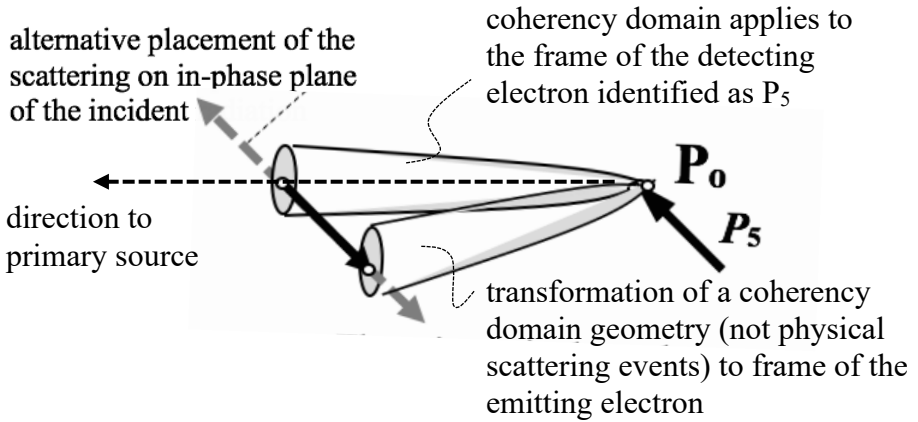
observation takes place. If that distance increases following the emission event in the frame of reference of the observer, then the radiation is redshifted in proportion to the ratio of the distances. If it decreases, then the light will be blue shifted. Lesa had illustrated that effect for him years ago now and had provided a more specific diagram illustrating the effect of the transverse velocity on scattering electrons and then plotted the equivalence between recessional and transverse Doppler effects.



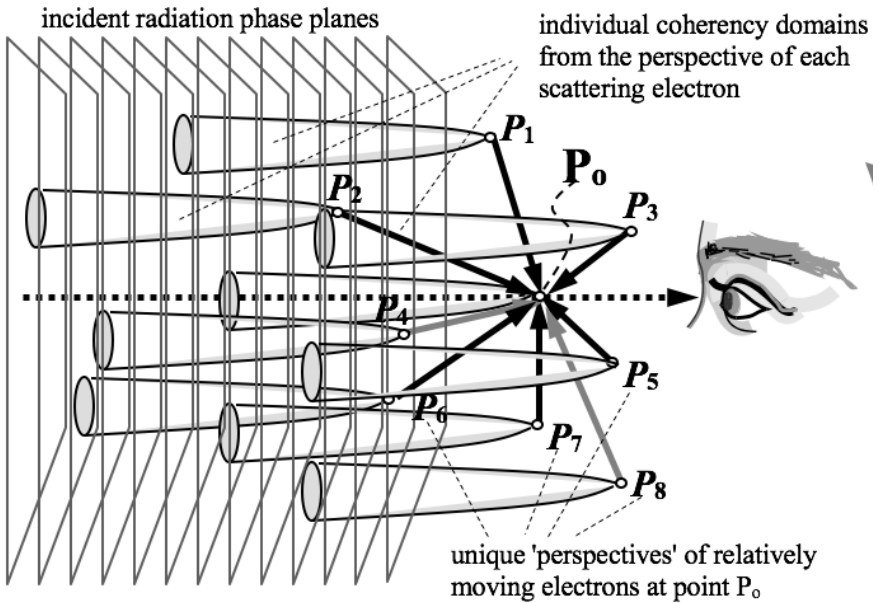
Lesa's diagram showing preponderance of redshifted light

Thus, relativistic phenomena significantly alter the coherency domains for cloning processes. The very concept of relative motion assures us that whether the velocity is considered that of an emitting or of a detecting electron is immaterial. But the coherency domain is in the frame of the detecting electron so an electron moving parallel to a constant phase plane will detect scattered as well as incident light from the direction of the primary source. This is *not* the aberration effect; it is in the opposite direction and applies to uniquely separate rather than the same events.

Cosmological Considerations



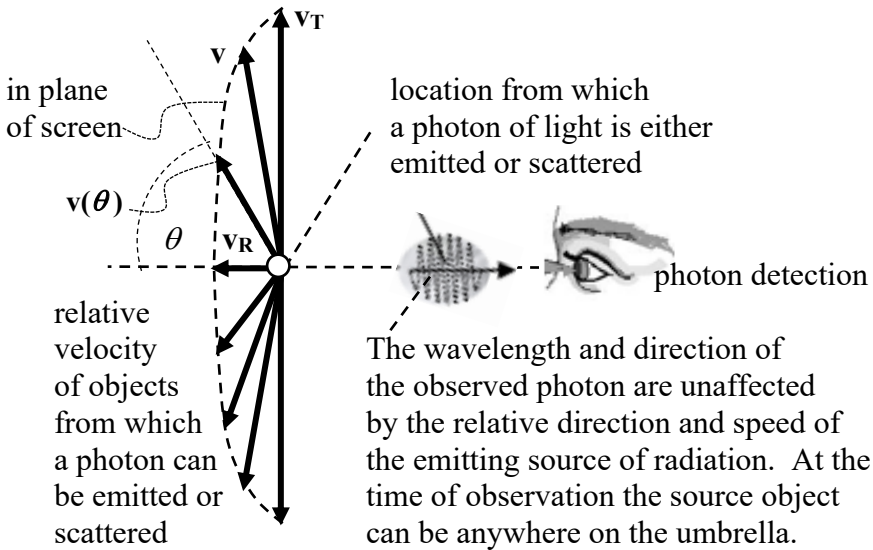
Different perspectives of a coherency domain for scattering electrons



Composite of coherency domains for scattering electrons with various relative velocities to the line of sight to primary source

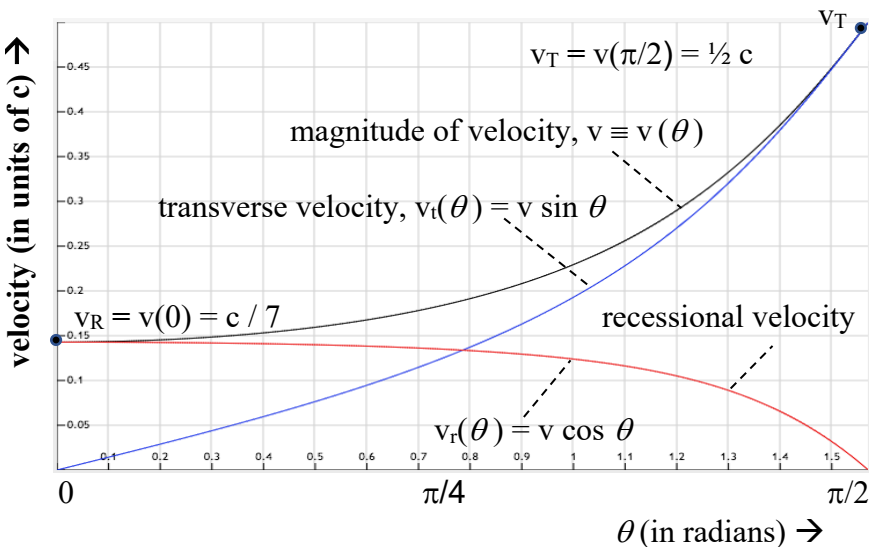
To convince herself Lesa had produced a diagram and plot that illustrated this phenomenon. The relativistic process is spread out into a penumbra of coordinated coherency domains, whose width is proportional to the velocities of the scattering electrons. There is a convergence of scattered wave functions associated with the photon such that Zel'dovich is both correct and incorrect as far as his assessment of scattering in an intergalactic plasma medium. There is a momentum exchange and there is a bending of each light path, but because it is convergent rather than divergent, there is no net change in direction.

Cosmological Considerations
an illustration of frame-independence

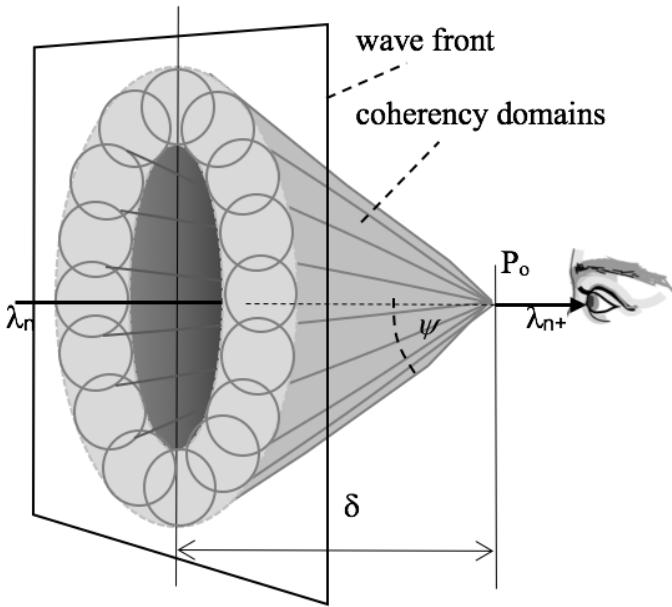


Indistinguishability of Doppler redshift of an emitted photon caused by variously directed velocities of a source (whether primary or secondary)

Redshift: $Z(v(\theta)) + 1 = (1 + (v(\theta)/c) \cos \theta) / (1 - v(\theta)^2/c^2)^{1/2}$



Range of electron velocities with a redshift that is indistinguishable from a strictly recessional ($\theta=0.0$) velocity v_R



Convergence of secondary radiation at cloning event that constitutes Zel'dovich's 'bending' of the light path without changing direction

The 'bending' is relative to the perpendicular to the 'locally stationary' planes of constant phase of the incident radiation. These planes are fixed relative to the frame of the primary source of the radiation. This is equally true in the frame of the ultimate observer if the primary source is stationary with respect to the ultimate observer. The conservation laws to which Zel'dovich deferred are essentially those that pertain to the Compton scattering effect of energy and momentum being transferred to electrons.

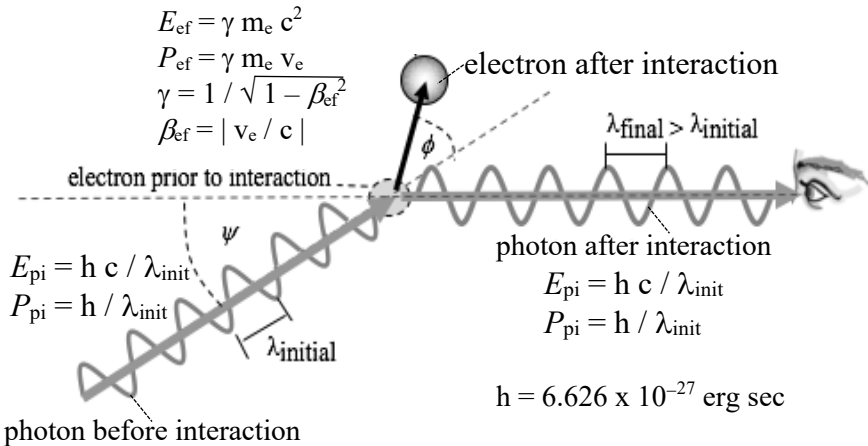


Illustration of similarity to Compton scattering conservation relations

Cosmological Considerations

The rationale for the extreme electron velocities involves thermodynamic issues. The Maxwell/Boltzmann distribution of energies in a thermal plasma specifies the average root-mean-squared transverse velocity component $\langle v_e^2 \rangle$ of electrons. The classical formula is:

$$\sqrt{\langle v_e^2 \rangle} \approx \sqrt{3/2 k T / m_e} = 4.77 \times 10^5 \sqrt{T} \text{ cm/sec}$$

The constant k is Boltzmann's constant and m_e is the mass of an electron. This solution is valid for temperatures T to about 10^8 K which is a nominal value encountered in intra-cluster plasma, this non-relativistic formula provides a fairly accurate approximation up to two or three percent of the speed of light.

It is the bending of the light path that transfers energy and momentum to the medium as Zel'dovich averred. So the length of the coherency domains δ affects a change in wavelength along a light transmission path. Applying the results of Compton's conservation analysis to coherency domains of forward scattering, one obtains the following net change in wavelength per cloning interval:

$$\Delta\lambda_\delta \approx 3 h k T / 4 m_e^2 c^3 \approx 3.07 \times 10^{-20} T \text{ cm}$$

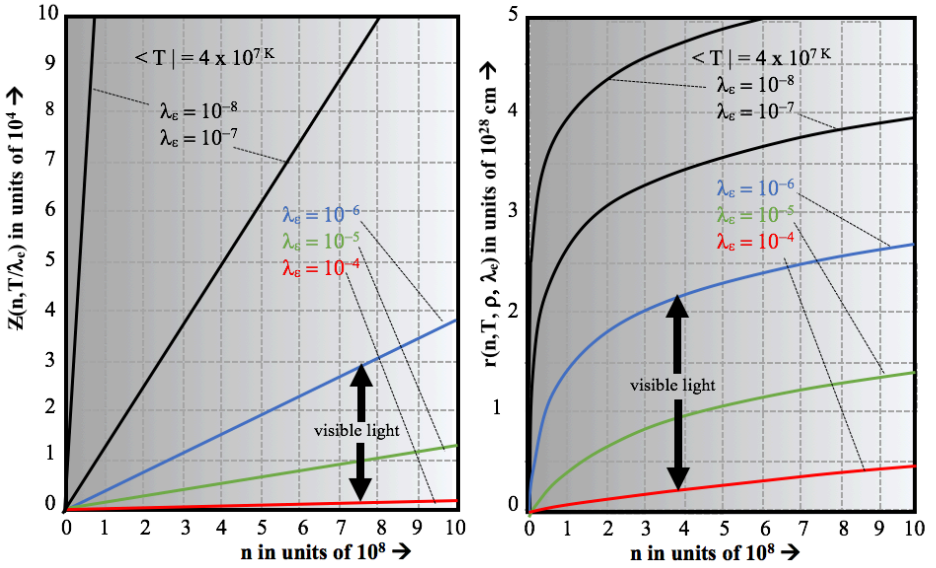
The constant h is Planck's constant. Thus, wavelength is increased at every cloning interval independent of wavelength, but that is not in itself a redshift. The accumulated change in wavelength divided by the wavelength from the primary source emission can be determined by regression as follows:

$$\lambda(n) = \lambda_s + n \Delta\lambda_\delta \cong \lambda_s (1 + n 3.07 \times 10^{-20} T / \lambda_s)$$

$$Z(n, \lambda_s) = (\lambda_n - \lambda_s) / \lambda_s = n 3.07 \times 10^{-20} T / \lambda_s$$

As seen in the plots, this does not provide a redshift-distance relationship per se. To demonstrate the relationship of distance to the change in wavelength the distance $r(n)$ as a function of the number of cloning intervals n must be established. But because the length of these intervals depends upon the wavelength entering the interval, $r(n)$ becomes a summation of the lengths $\delta(\lambda)$ that are continuously changing rather than just the total number of intervals N times a uniform length. The length of a coherency domain is also dependent on the free electron density as defined earlier. Because of the inverse relationship to wavelength, the net result is dependence on wavelength that constitutes a redshift. Using formulas derived in the previous chapter for the length of the extinction interval, we obtain:

$$r(N) = \sum_{n=0}^N \delta(n, \lambda(n)) \cong (3.55 \times 10^{12} / \rho_e(n)) \sum_{n=0}^N 1/\lambda(n)$$



‘Redshift and distance versus number of cloning intervals

In the limit as the number of extinction intervals becomes very large, the following mathematical formula applies:

$$\text{Limit}_{N \rightarrow \infty} \sum_{n=0}^N 1 / (1 + A n) = A^{-1} \ln (1 + A N)$$

And thus, one obtains:

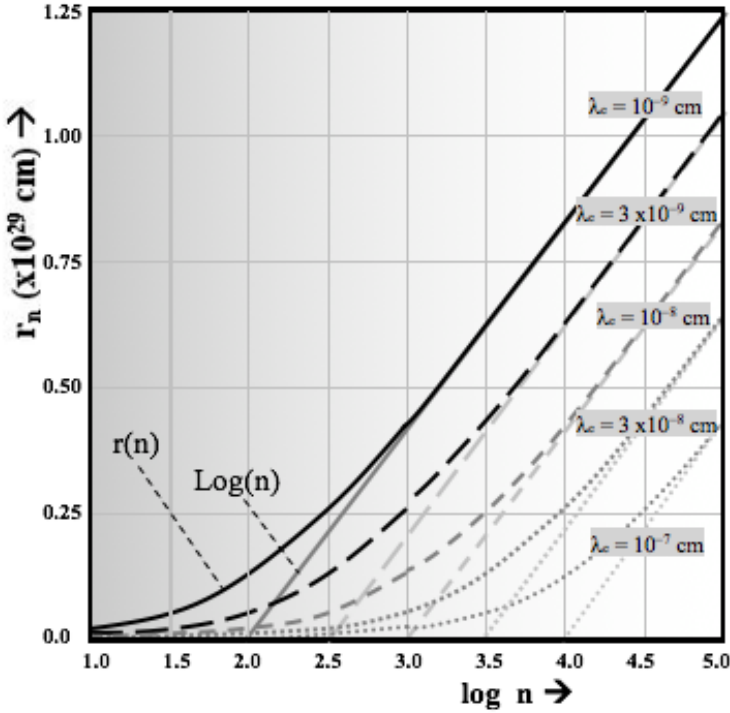
$$r(N) = [1.156 \times 10^{32} / T_e \rho_e] \log (1 + N 3.07 \times 10^{-20} T_e / \lambda_e)$$

The curves of $r(n)$ vs. n are plotted for the averaged dynamic pressure of free electrons $\langle T_e | \rho_e \rangle$ determined by averaging the product of T_e and ρ_e at each point along the transmission path. If we plot $r(n)$ vs. $\log n$ we obtain the plots below with an asymptotic approach to linearity on a log graph.

In situations for which merging the functionalities of $r(n)$ and $Z(n)$ is warranted, one obtains a distance-redshift relationship by plotting one versus the other. When one does that, the dependence on number of cloning intervals n is eliminated. Since distance is a linear function of the log of n for large n but inversely dependent on emission wavelength, the distance versus redshift plot is *extremely* similar for all values of wavelength. It is a virtually identical relationship that holds from hard X-rays ($\lambda_e \approx 10^{-9}$ cm) through extremely long wavelength radio signals ($\lambda_e > 10^7$ cm). In this way, at shorter distances we obtain a linear recessional-Doppler-like distance-redshift relation directly applicable to this broad range of wavelengths. It can easily be seen that the

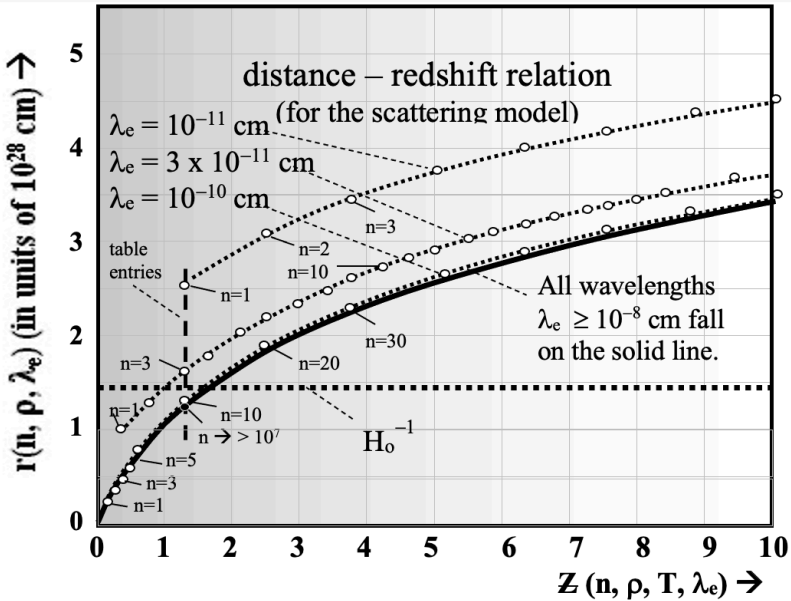
Cosmological Considerations

wavelength dependence is virtually eliminated for wavelengths greater than 10^{-10} cm. It is also clear that for wavelengths less than 10^{-9} cm, there is a unique relationship that pertains at every wavelength.



The logarithmic form of the relationship between distance and number of cloning interval

number of extinction intervals, n	initial wave-length, λ_c (cm)	redshift, Z_n (unitless)	distance, $r_n \times 10^{28}$ (cm)	ratio, $Z_n / r_n \times 10^{-29}$ (cm)
1	10^{-11}	1.268	2.560	4.592
3	3×10^{-11}	1.268	1.591	7.970
10	10^{-10}	1.268	1.277	9.927
100	10^{-9}	1.268	1.160	10.926
1,000	10^{-8}	1.268	1.149	11.035
10,000	10^{-7}	1.268	1.148	11.047
100,000	10^{-6}	1.268	1.147	11.048
1,000,000	10^{-5}	1.268	1.147	11.048
10,000,000	10^{-4}	1.268	1.147	11.048



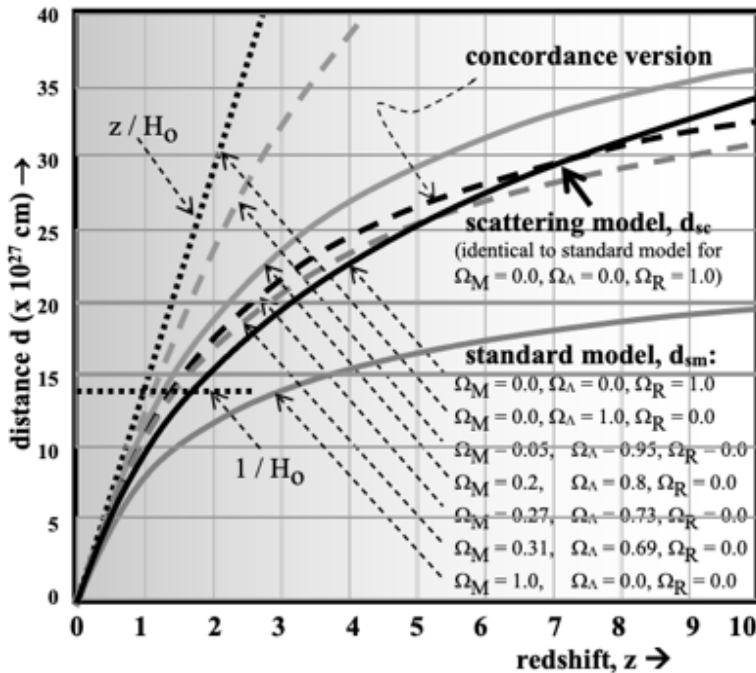
The emergence of a distance versus redshift relation for the scattering model independent of wavelength over a broad range

Ray guessed that this refresher course in the cosmology of Raymond F. Bonn was just his personal version of stations of the cross although he acknowledged that his had more stations than the Catholic observance, his uncapitalized ‘all-embracing variety of things’ – the universe. Having just strolled down the hallway of his own personal Vatican noting the statues, murals, and hangings on the way, Ray was now in his own little Sistine Chaple. He saw himself as on the ceiling reaching for significance. Beside him Lesa was on his arm sleeping soundly; he longed for her as a more constant companion, taking a more active part in their search for scientific truth. Before all his other digressions into the status of his opus he had first been awakened thinking about an alternative to dark matter, evidenced by the ‘fingers of God’ phenomena. He guessed it was because he was thinking about this on his own and had not yet broached the subject of what he was trying to work out with Lesa. He might do that in the morning. He had been withholding information, he guessed, but she was too damned fast. Sometimes she dismissed his ideas without first convincing him that they were not viable.

As so often happened ideas would come to him in the night. It was still just as it had been with Helen, he would pursue his lonely thoughts on the nature of reality until implications got too entwined to maintain in a sleepy brain without having written them down. So he got up gently now without waking Lesa. He’d work for an hour or two before coming back to bed. It was how he kept his place in the long list of complex thoughts so that he wouldn’t have to work his way up that same slippery slope over and over again on other sleepless nights. Metaphors be damned.

Cosmological Considerations

Ray had followed developments of cosmology throughout most of his life including the emergence of a ‘concordance’ model employing the parameter values that accommodated a closest fit to the actual observations of redshift of the increasingly distant galaxies. Of primary importance to the standard model in this regard is the overall density of the universe which Einstein related to its rate of expansion in accord with his general theory of relativity. Observations were roughly compatible with a value determined by Hubble’s constant of expansion rate. There had been what Einstein had admitted as his ‘most egregious error’ that Hubble’s expansion explanation exposed for what it was, and then a ‘missing mass problem’ for a time, which then was ‘corrected’ by the supposition of ‘dark matter’ that resurrected Einstein’s erroneous constant without evoking embarrassment or shame for some odd reason. Ultimately the density of the universe denoted by the symbol Ω became characterized by three density parameters: Ω_m the density of ‘ordinary’ luminous baryonic matter that we’ve known about since Mendeleev, Ω_Λ , the density of dark matter accommodating the symbol of Einstein’s greatest error, and Ω_R a density of an even more totally mysterious dark energy.



Predicted line-of-sight distance $r_{sm}[Z]$ versus redshift for various density parameter values in the standard model are plotted. Also included is the plot for $r[Z]$ in the scattering model.

The results of the scattering model were extremely similar to that of the ‘concordance’ model out to appreciable redshifts. One can plot predictions out to large redshifts, but the data does not support comparison even out to a

Cosmological Considerations

redshift of unity because the luminosities of galaxies (as great as they are) are insufficiently bright to get more accurate data. There are multiple metrics used in cosmological investigations, most of them designed to assess which density parameter values provide the best fit to actual data. Ray's model based on his scattering mechanism required only the free electron density and temperature profiles of intergalactic plasma. The product of those two parameters accommodate a best fit to observations. Primarily *only* the average of the product of the two parameters (proportional to the hydrostatic pressure) over all space, affect the performance of the model. He had plotted comparisons with different values of this product, determining ultimately a value of about $4 \times 10^3 \text{ K/cm}^3$ that produced a redshift very close to the concordance version of the standard model out to a redshift $Z \cong 0.6$ or more.

But variations of temperature and density result in local variations in the redshifting of light passing through these regions. In particular, the tremendously increased hydrostatic pressure in galaxy clusters which results in greatly increased redshifting through the central regions of clusters where galaxies 'cluster'. This phenomenon produces the intensified redshifting denominated 'fingers of God' in redshift surveys. The effect was first attributed to 'dark matter' by Fritz Zwicky using the virial theorem to determine how much additional unobserved mass would be required to produce such extreme Doppler redshifting. Ray's scattering model did a better job with no such *deus ex machina* required.

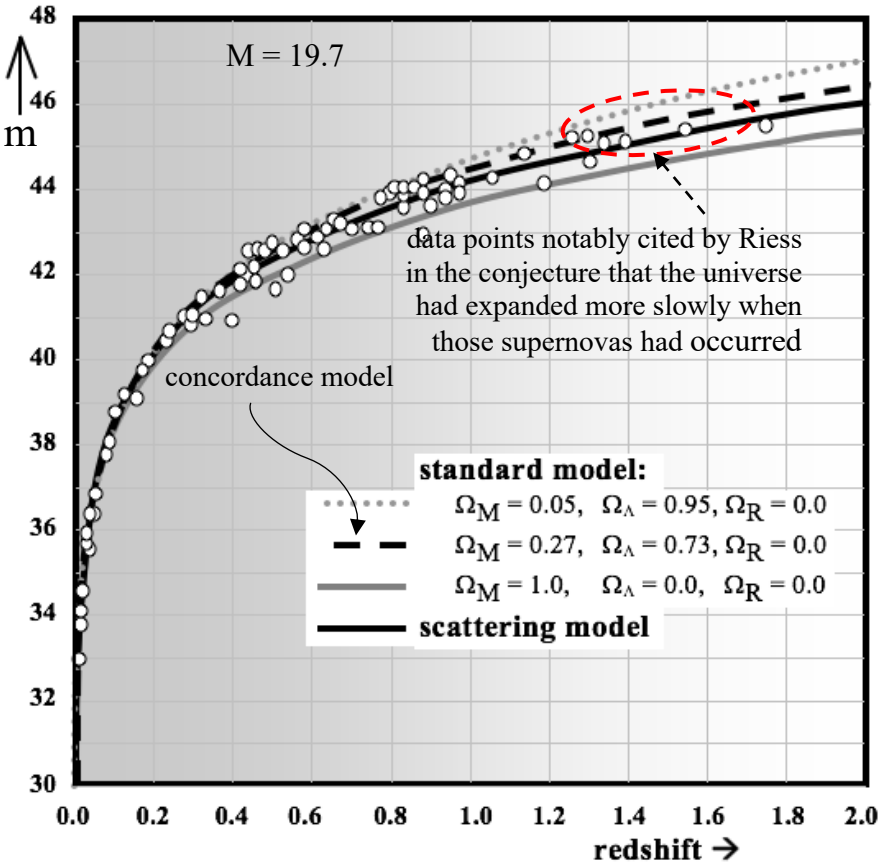
Then along had came Riess et al. with their audacious conjecture for which Riess received the Nobel prize. Their claim was that the universe had somehow suddenly accelerated its expansion with no clear reason given. This had supposedly occurred at some point in the distance/past before a redshift of $Z = 1.0$. This determination seems to have been based solely on the fact that observations type 1-A supernovas no longer supported *any* of the versions of the standard model without introducing the additional fudge factor of expansion having suddenly accelerated. This *deus ex machina* appalled Ray as had so many previous kludges that had been integrated into the standard model just to salvage the presumption of an expanding universe; each was staged as a part of what is considered by the cosmological community to be an evolving universe. Ray saw it more as an evolving rationalization.

Reiss's explanation involved quality of the fit between the concordance model and SN1A supernova luminosity data. When the data and versions of the standard model and Ray's scattering model were plotted, it was clear that no version of the unmodified standard model matched the data – the data points beyond the redshift of $Z = 1.2$ clearly did not fit the concordance or any other of the standard model variations, but they fell precisely on the plot for the scattering model.

The cosmic microwave background radiation was another difficulty Ray encountered as what was considered to be an 'irrefutable' argument that there had to have been a Big Bang, which would have to have emitted high energy radiation associated with annihilation of whatever superfluous antimatter was

Cosmological Considerations

created by whatever presumed quantum ‘fluctuation’ had brought about an origin of the universe. Expansion would have reduced the temperature of the radiation, presumably down to the current microwave background radiation temperature of 2.728 Kelvin. But when analyzed, that explanation evaporated.



SN Ia supernova luminosity magnitude data with model predictions

Ray refreshed his memory of the finding of Wagoner, Fowler, and Hoyle from their seminal paper in 1967. He scrolled through his file to where he had quoted from pages. 23 and 24 of that paper. He read it again:

"... we do think it worthwhile pointing out the following remarkable coincidence. The average spatial density of galactic material is $\sim 3 - 7 \times 10^{-31} \text{ gm cm}^{-3}$ (Oort 1958). Of this, about one third is probably helium, giving an average helium density of $\sim 10^{-31} \text{ gm cm}^{-3}$. Since the conversion of 1 gm of hydrogen to helium yields $\sim 6 \times 10^{18}$ ergs, the average energy production – if helium has come from hydrogen – has been $\sim 6 \times 10^{-13}$ ergs cm^{-3} . This energy density, *if thermalized*, would yield a temperature of

Cosmological Considerations

just 3° K. Because in a cosmological expansion baryon density decreases as R^{-3} while the radiation density decreases as R^{-4} , the coincidence is an accident if the 3° K is a relic of a cosmological fireball. On this view the expansion factor R has increased since the fireball by a factor of 10^9 so that no such coincidence could have obtained over most of the expansion. It would be an accident of the present epoch. This is not the case if the observed radiation results from the thermalization of energy from the recent hydrogen to helium conversion in stars."

More recent accurate data on the temperature of the radiation (2.728 K) and percentage of helium throughout the universe (23% by mass) alters the numbers in their conclusion slightly. But the degree of the precision of the coincidence is even more compelling. It reduces the Wagoner et al. estimate of the density of energy in the microwave background to 4.08×10^{-13} ergs per cm^3 . Accurately measured energy in the background radiation is precisely 4.169×10^{-13} ergs per cm^3 . Coincidences like these do not happen in nature without a clear logical explanation.

The standard model had adopted a supposed intermediate staging when matter and radiation became 'decoupled' after which radiation (as if from a surface) became cooled by recessional Doppler (of that 'surface') associated with expansion. About 300 years after the supposed Big Bang thermodynamic temperature was assumed to have been reduced to 3,400 K at a redshift of about 1,200. Why those numbers? An artificial coincidence established to accommodate the narrow and inaccurate explanation of photons never being scattered again until they are observed here on earth – or by orbiting instruments. But photons are, in fact, scattered continually throughout their propagation in any medium – in this case supported by the hydrostatic pressure of the intergalactic plasma medium pervading all galaxy clusters and their neighborhoods throughout all epics.

These thoughts were comfort zones for Ray. But increasingly he was just reviewing concepts with evident pleasure rather than extending them. He had become increasingly aware that his creative abilities were waning. He could still recognize good ideas, but he seemed to be unable to come up with them on his own. Lesa had thus become ever more important to any scientific achievement he could be a party to. It was usually at about that point in his nocturnal thought processes that he would become aware of the time and that he had been up for too long. He would head back to the bedroom defeated, slip under the covers as gently as he could, to sleep a few more hours before his day began in earnest.

#4 Addressing Issues

“How awful I’ve been tonight,” Ray professed to himself thinking about his behavior at the football game and afterward. Thank goodness they were all family, he thought gratefully. They would forgive him just as Lesa had. He wondered then what Helen would have done. She’d have been plenty disgusted with him. He knew that much. But she’d have forgiven him too.

There were so many issues he hadn’t addressed and there always had been. Growing up, Helen and he had used to go up to their secret place as the one place in the world that they could escape to where they resolved the major issues that children encounter. When they came down again, he would have a different perspective, resolve. They had used to spend many hours up there talking. Many of those discussions involved what their lives would be like when they grew up and were married – to each other, of course. How they would conduct themselves then when they were in control of their own lives. How much better life would be with them at the helm of their own lives. How Helen envisioned raising the children so that they would not have all the issues that she and Ray had had growing up.

There weren’t any discussions about what Ray’s life would be like after Helen died though.

The last issue Ray remembered their having discussed, or at least an issue for which Ray had consoled Helen, had occurred after her father’s death. He hadn’t seen her for a few days after it had happened, and then one day he was out in the barn moping and currying Trooper when he realized that Helen had been standing there at the corner of the barn watching him. Making sure not to look at her directly, he began including her in the idle words he used in working around his horse, like, “Well Troop, you think we ought to go up to the falls and check it out?”

Helen had softly intoned, “I hope Troop wants to, Ray, because I do.”

“I think he does,” Ray proxied Trooper’s vote, and threw the blanket over his withers, and then the saddle. The bridle was always the last aspect of his preparations for riding. He thought the bit had to be uncomfortable and so he perceived its being used as little as possible. That was how it should be done.

Cosmological Considerations

When Trooper was all saddled and ready to go, Ray bent down with hands cupped for Helen's foot to help her into the saddle. Usually she would just step over to put her foot into his hands. As often as not he would walk beside Trooper then with her up in the saddle rocking along beside him, but not that day.

"Can I ride behind you today, Ray?" she had asked.

He guessed she didn't want him looking at her face, so he hopped on and put his arm down, grabbed hers, and helped her swing up behind him. She clung tightly to his chest then and seemed to lay her face right next to his back unlike any other time they had ever ridden that way. He continued to say little nothings to Trooper as they ascended the ridge and then proceeded along the abandoned logging road all the way to the falls with the pond they had made by damming up Ravens Creek.

Helen said nothing as they rode, but he sensed her sniffing some and felt a cool dampness where tears were absorbing into his shirt and evaporating.

When they got to the clear pool, Ray let Trooper have his head to graze at the bits of grass between the ferns in the little clearing. He continued to sit there in the saddle silently with Helen's arms holding him tightly from behind. After some considerable time he asked whether she'd like to get down and sit on one of the boulders beside the pond. She didn't even answer him for a spell and then she just declined, still clinging to him.

Ray remembered now how desperately he wanted her to talk to him, to explain to him what had happened. But she didn't.

Ray knew that her father had killed himself, and however much he heard his own parents or other people discuss aspects of it, including how horrible it must have been. He knew that how horrible it must have been could only have been properly assessed by Helen. And in however many ways Helen's father had been more of a father to him than his own, Ray seemed to have had no legitimate role in that grief, in even knowing specifically what had happened. Had there been the proverbial note? That her father had "shot himself," and "with no consideration for his family," had no meaning for Ray. He wanted to know what had 'happened'. He wanted to know from Helen – the only one whose account would have had any meaning for him.

But Helen didn't tell him. He felt sure both then and now that it must have been because it was incomprehensibly awful to her. They had sat there on Trooper silently until Trooper had begun to wander further on into the woods in search of more grass, and it became distracting trying to keep him from walking through vine maple and under low overhanging limbs. When Ray picked up Trooper's head with the reins and guided him back into the little clearing, Trooper began prancing, disturbing the peacefulness that they had had.

Helen had finally said, "Let's go home, Ray." They had headed on back down to the barn then. When they got there, Helen had slid her leg over Trooper's rump while still hanging onto Ray's arm and dropped to the ground. She stood there for a bit looking away while he took off the saddle. He tried

Cosmological Considerations

not to make it obvious that he cared whether she was there or not. After he had thrown the saddle over the rail, he noticed that she was gone.

The next day she walked to school with him and made it seem as though everything was as it had always been. She asked him whether he had his social studies homework done. He watched her at school that day and the next few days as she avoided all questions concerning her father from their classmates, intimidating them into silence. Intimidating him into silence. Why could she not at least tell him? Was there something about him that defied such confidence? He wondered.

She and Ray sometimes mentioned her father after that, like how he had taught Ray to play the guitar and little bits of information about musical theory. The events in their lives that had involved him were still legitimate topics as long as that topic did not veer into the area of his leaving. Leaving. All these euphemisms like 'passing on' that are used to shut ourselves out from the reality of a dead end, from looking under the floorboards at reality.

So their rich full lives had proceeded with joint memories in so many areas including Julie's later escapades up at their secret place, and the coming of the dam, but they never discussed the real personal traumas in their lives. Those had remained anathema. It was not even as though any of these holes in their reality were treated as though they were actual holes. They were treated like the dark spot in the very center of our vision to which we all remain totally oblivious. We don't notice that empty spot, because we can't see it, and not being able to see it, seems in itself, to make it physiologically taboo.

Ray did not feel that any of this justified an appreciation for supernatural gobbledygook. Mere words that form phrases with no content, Ray digressed in thought. *These* dark places were not empty; they very definitely had content. As Joseph Conrad noted so long ago, "No man ever understands quite his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge." That was probably it, evolutionarily developed "artful dodges". It is in these deepest recesses of our own dark places where so often the real culprit of all our misfortunes lies hidden.

Those aspects of reality, for which one had to peek under the floorboards, Ray always had to address alone for himself, and it seemed... he often had thought... that it was he who had to address it for others that he loved as well. It seemed sometimes as though he had always been the cave dweller who inhabited the depressing holes and dark places in everyone's experience. He seemed to be a member of that lowest caste of society, a Shudra who is obligated to deal with those things. It seemed to Ray that these ugly tasks were left to him to search out, to explore them, and to determine whether there were any urgent dangers lurking there for others. In short, major worries, like where had his mother disappeared to, how did Helen's mother die. "Is this your father Mr. Bonn," mangled and beaten almost beyond recognition, who had eventually been dragged from the river as a mass of battered flesh and bone. Did Peter Landau really murder Lesa's mother in front of her and had Ray had the responsibility of identifying that for her? Those were the jobs that it

Cosmological Considerations

seemed to Ray had always gotten allocated to him. They could be ignored and overlooked by others because they were part of those extraordinary, auxiliary responsibilities of the one who worries the ugliness under the floorboards, who had dedicated himself to understanding how the universe works and why in the hell it works in the hellish ways that it does.

But it wasn't as though others openly allocated these jobs to him. They seemed to even hide the facts of the assignment from themselves so that he had to be able to discern without being asked when his special skills were required. Occasionally in meandering through these subterranean worlds he had found rays of light sneaking through. But perhaps since he had made such a stink of the distinction between Einstein's 'rays of light' and 'photons' of the modern quantum world in his book on relativity so long ago now, he should conform to his own prescription. But the outmoded, unscientific 'rays of light' worked better in this context. With such probing 'beams' of light he had, after all, found somebody's long overlooked biological father and that had resulted in extreme happiness to people he loved. Shedding light on good things that had been hidden in the dark was the rare pleasure of his world, rare indeed.

His coffee was done. He poured a cup of blackness, took it, and turned to head toward the office. But there was Lesa leaning against the wall waiting for him.

"May I have a cup too?"

"Sure." He got another cup from the cupboard and poured it to take over to the breakfast nook table where Lesa was now sitting. He put it in front of her and sat down across the table.

"Couldn't sleep?"

"Not with you in so much pain," she said.

"I'm all right. I just have to do some thinking about my role in life."

"Alone. Like you always have, huh?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"That's not your role, not the role I want you to be comfortable playing. We used to think together, remember?"

"Yeah. I miss that too, but that was physics. There are other things that have to be thought about... alone, I guess."

"Not always. Remember when you told me about your thinking about us on your way back from Portland after that awful time when we drove back from the coast just a day after a perfect evening with what you called 'RGB double vision'? I knew you were talking about my two pastel pink nipples as the red, the green dot I saw twice when the sun dipped below the horizon, and my two blue eyes." She laughed comfortably.

"Yeah. That had been a nice moment."

"I spread my arms like a bird, hopped on you, you held me in your arms, and I slept there until we got cold. For a while that night on the Coast we were like one peaceful being, remember? And then I ruined it all. But I asked you to remember the vision, not the awful times. Remember?"

Cosmological Considerations

“I do. You didn’t ruin it though. That was the thing. You didn’t. We got it back together and it was grand. It was the next day, with you begging me to go with you to London and me resisting. It kind of got out of control and ruined even the memory of how we had gotten it back together.”

“Well, whether we did or not isn’t the point, is it? The real point is that I was all choked up after all we’d been through, and all I knew about you and Helen by the time you brought it up again. You had wanted to tell me about what you had decided as you drove north after letting me off at the airport, but I was too mentally frail to take it on then, Ray. Especially without you right there with me to hold me, and for me to hold you. Sometimes – because I’m so... out there – I think you may forget how truly frail I am at things like that.”

“I understood. I just thought we’d have that conversation someday – at least after we married – before now. That was over eighteen years ago, Lesa. Do you know that?”

“I know. It’s like that damned Yankee game, isn’t it? I tell you I’ll explain it and then I never do.”

“How come?”

“I think it’s because I don’t understand my own reasons, Ray, and it’s easier to defer. You ask me to explain something and rather than tell you the truth, which is that I don’t have any idea whatsoever why I do what I do, and that I don’t want to have to even think about it, I lie.”

“Lie?”

“Yes. I try to make myself out to be this mysterious woman with all these good intentions who has all the answers but just isn’t talking ‘while the flavor lasts’. Remember your saying that to Cynthia?”

“Yeah, I do.” He chuckled remembering that time so long ago now. “But then I gave her the flavor she asked for, as distasteful as it was.”

“You did. You always do. I don’t. I’m sorry that I can’t always.”

“I guess Helen didn’t either. Maybe it’s a woman thing.” His smile had seemed even to him to have a bit of a sardonic kink in it.

“No, she didn’t always. She couldn’t. With me it’s a cowardly thing, Ray. With her it was something a little different, I think. She tried to tell you, but in the end, she couldn’t, and she asked me to tell you – if it was ever necessary. I guess this will sound like all the other lies I’ve ever told you, but if you would fall for that old story of mine one more time, I would think you were the gallant man I’ve always known you were. I will tell you, but please give me just a little more time.”

“You make it easy to defer such poison, Lesa.” He smiled. “Anyway, I believe you. I always do because I know that you’re *not* a liar. You just haven’t figured out the prime-time explanation yet. But don’t you think that sometimes we need to talk when there are no explanations, or at least no eloquent prime time ways to explain it? We get the answers together in physics by slogging through the ugliness until the proper mathematical phrasing comes to us.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Yes, there is an obvious enough explanation, and I am working on being able to say it, Ray. There are facts and there are explanations of facts. Sometimes facts are too stark to be presented without a valid explanation. I’ll think about it and come up with a truthful explanation, whether it’s prime time or not to help you understand the facts by Monday night.’ Remember that? Will that work for you again? Monday? Please?”

“That works excellently as long as it doesn’t involve me going up to bat in Yankee Stadium again.”

She chuckled, as he had wanted her to. Then she said, “After we get this situation all figured out, then maybe you and I can get back to doing physics together again. What do you say to that? Roger is almost raised. Watching you struggle away at that stuff day in and day out – and more nights than I am aware of – between all my assignments for you sure makes me feel guilty, and envious at the same time, for even the little bits of time you get to do that sort of thing. Anyway, Ray Bonn and I are physicists, first and foremost, and it is still just physics after all, isn’t it?”

“It is,” he said, feeling a twinkle of happiness for a change.

She got up from the table. “Now don’t you stay up too late playing with that new toy of yours, I’ve got a long day-trip planned for us tomorrow.”

“A trip?”

“Yes.” She finished her cup of coffee and sat the cup down with a hollow clunk. “A picnic sort of. I’ll let you get on with your thoughts, so you won’t get to bed too awfully late this morning.” She kissed him and strolled back down the hall.

She had said “Monday.” Hmm. It was already Saturday. Ray finished his coffee, refilled his cup of darkness, and headed for his office. His thoughts then were directed specifically to Roger who was “almost raised”.

Roger was the kind of son any father would have been proud to have sired. Sired? Well... raised. Ray had to admit that however much pride he took in him, and he did take extreme pride in him, Roger’s development into the academic gentleman, athletic star he had become had been largely Lesa’s doing. Even all of those considerable contributions to Roger’s development he had considered as uniquely attributable to him had been her doing as well. He had sired Roger. That was about all Ray Bonn had done.

She had had baseballs rolling all around the house and had encouraged – well, okay then, she had intimidated – him into playing with Roger with those toys. She had thoroughly indoctrinated Roger into the belief that a great athlete had sired him and that it was inevitable that he too should become a great athlete. Why she had inculcated that in Roger, Ray didn’t know – just one more of the incomprehensibles of his life, he guessed. And, of course, there was no lying about it. It had just seemed strange for a couple of brilliant – yes, he would readily admit that he himself was, or at least had been, brilliant too – physicists. His struggles with concentration now in trying to think a new thought notwithstanding made it hard for him to remember a different, more

Cosmological Considerations

productive, time in his life when ideas had seemed to come in hordes, barging in like conquering invaders. But remembering previous times was still easy.

Ray had obeyed Lesa's loving orders, because they were *loving* orders, and so he had played, and had enjoyed playing, too. It was another in the effulgence of good ideas that had characterized that phase of her motherhood. Having more time of his own since retirement – well in that segment of his retirement into which Roger had been born – had made a big difference. So even though Ray had been a great deal older than he had been when Eddie had happened along, Ray had entered into playing with Roger from the first. He had had time that, however selfish he might be with his time, could now be legitimately controlled by his wife since his time was no longer in the domain of those vague forces that control a family's financial future – his 'work'.

As Eddie had long ago accused, Lesa had "youngened him up". She had indeed. But his financial independence had become amenable to that having happened. Maybe she had just tuned up his various components like *the wonderful one-horse shay* that seemed always as good as new, until one day it would suddenly disintegrate into a pile of dust when a synchronous senescence had finally come to call. That was how it seemed to Ray.

He knew that Eddie could have been an athlete extraordinaire just like Roger had become if Ray had been a little more willing to enter into his achievements, the way he had now with Roger. Eddie knew it too and would probably always carry some resentment for Ray's not having been willing to do that. Even without Ray's encouragement, Eddie had been spectacular, better than Jamie really. And Jamie, coming earlier in Ray's life had received a little playing time and instruction from him and had benefited tremendously – he was a fine athlete that Ray had taken tremendous pride in having raised. But Ray had always been way too busy. With Allie... as strange as it seemed now, girls had not seemed to even be considered as possible athletes back then, to Ray anyway... back then and so Ray never even thought about her as having athletic ability. Her daughter Stephanie had just refused, but Ellie got it.

With Roger, Ray had spent countless hours teaching him how to throw a spiral while he was way too young to play tackle football. It was the same with pitching, hitting, dribbling, and shooting a basketball. Roger began in every sport with an edge on all the other players. Roger had become athletic tutor for his friends to get his teams to perform better. He had been good at that too. The entire experience of having Roger as a son had been totally different than having his other three children. That was because Ray had himself been totally different, and he knew that it hadn't been fair to Eddie who was, in too many ways, an afterthought.

Lesa had been in charge of Roger's intellectual development – and of Ellie's as well. Allie had asked Lesa to instruct Ellie, because she had been impressed by Lesa's mother's 'learning around a dining room table' paradigm and had bought into the scheme. Lesa was the shining example of the productiveness of such an approach. So, although Ray might quiz Roger on intellectual matters sometimes when they played, or used a word that had

Cosmological Considerations

increased his vocabulary, the teaching itself Lesa had insisted on doing herself. It brought back those fond memories of her own mother, Ray knew, and she was paying back, trying to get it right, the brilliant physicist who chose to out-prioritize herself. She employed a viable combination of pushing precocity, play time and, most of all, love. She had gotten it right.

Lesla had been ruthless about her teaching regimen during Roger and Ellie's pre-teen years. It seemed like the two of them were always around Ray and Lesa's home. Allie had gone back to work to get her career going again after the long lapse. That had worked out well for her. So, the childcare for both the kids had fallen to Lesa, for whom the added child was one more aspect of making the experience more enjoyable for all of them. It had been that way from the beginning, from before the beginning. But, as with her mother, although for totally different reasons, Lesa had sacrificed her career and with it, Ray's more grandiose aspirations.

Allie and Lesa had become close friends long before Ray and Lesa had reestablished their relationship. From the time Ray had been kidnapped by his family to go south to Stanford under the pretense that the physics department had actually requested that he come down, Allie and Lesa had bonded in a way that Ray could never have imagined. It was after all Allie who had had such a hard time with her father working with Lesa in New York. She had referred to Lesa as a floozy on more occasions than one. That first night home from New York when Eddie had asked the embarrassing question about whether Ray loved Lesa, he had made a real effort to get them to like her. He had tried to explain to his entire family and the few friends assembled to greet him, why Lesa's capricious behavior could and should be viewed in a favorable light. Allie and the others had been accepting of the fact that Lesa was no floozy – in love with her Daddy maybe, but no floozy. Ray had emphasized that as the object of love, he was the one who had the responsibility for defining their particular relationship and making sure that that relationship remained legitimate. Had he done that? He guessed he had convinced *them*, anyway.

It was characteristic of Allie's loyalty that once she realized that Lesa was trusted by Helen, that she herself would trust her as well. The friendship had grown from there. The 'kidnapping' incident – when Helen had gotten Ray out of the house with Eddie's help – was just so Helen could get to know Lesa for herself. Ray had come to understand that as more or less a means of vetting her out as a prospective future wife for him. As repugnant as that still was for Ray, he felt quite sure that it was the case, and that Helen had done a good job of it. Had she also vetted Lesa out as a prospective intimate for Allie? He doubted that, but he was by no means certain. But for whatever reason, Allie and Lesa became very close. So close, in fact, that Ray was suspicious that they had conspired to get pregnant at the same time just so that their children would have a close associate very much as he and Helen had had as 'only child twins'. He knew Helen had told them all about their childhood. So there had been some serious controlling going on.

Cosmological Considerations

Roger and Ellie had, like he and Helen, been born in the same hospital merely a day or so apart. Ray had learned that there is something terrifying about anything of which one can say, ‘*deja vue* all over again,’ He found something, or some *things*, about that whole situation that were very terrifying indeed about the manufactured similarities in these situations, Ray was very apprehensive.

Ray had gone through Lamaze Childbirth Classes with Lesa and found it a most uncomfortable ordeal. But he did it, and Tom had done it as well. Certainly, Tom would not have needed to, but he did – probably more for Ray than Allie who probably needed no help at all after having had two children with no complications whatsoever before Ellie. But they did it – all together.

Sharon had been Lesa’s primary physician, Tom having hired her on to a temporary position in his clinic just so that she would have full access to his facilities with her updated credentials. Then a couple of months before Roger was due, Sharon had taken a sabbatical from her primary career on the East Coast to ‘vacation’ with the Bonns to provide full personal in-residence physician care for the new mommy to be.

To a certain extent, even though Sharon was no mommy-to-be, she had been added into Allie and Lesa’s close relationship. Those had been hard months for Ray. Allie and Sharon sometimes got into it. Stephanie was at an awkward age, totally frustrated with her mother having another baby and sensing abandonment of their mother-daughter friendship for whatever it had been worth, so she had opted to be best friends with Lesa instead. Ray had sometimes had to console Stephanie, Allie, Sharon, or Lesa for the inevitable misunderstandings of too big a family, a role hardly ideal for his personality. Too damn many women too damn much of the time. He couldn’t get anything done that he wanted to do. He spent a fair amount of his time doing yard work, and jogging – an activity that had lapsed for some time before that. He also began seeing Andrew for lunch again more regularly.

Then when the babies were born it had been worse, worse in way too many ways. The screaming of a baby is, or at least Ray supposed the didactic rhetoric was correct about its being, purposely the most irritating sound in the world, demanding that care be taken to alleviate whatever the infant’s concern. As much as Ray despised that sound, he had been in on that response crew, the first there in many cases, because that sound probably grated on his nerves even more than on a maternally mature ear.

Worst of all, right from the first the two mommies took great pleasure in reenacting the single child twin fire drill of two babies nursing on one set of nipples routine that Helen had ill-advisedly told way too many people as having been what she and Ray had “enjoyed”. Oh, God, how could she have, Ray thought again. All sense of modesty was dispensed with around the house. Lesa would come walking into the office where Ray still tried to get in a few minutes a day working on his alternative redshift ideas, with little Roger and Ellie like crossed sabers suckling at Lesa’s bared breasts. No comment Ray

Cosmological Considerations

had ever made on the subject was warranted worthy of the least consideration, or therefore even of a dismissive response.

“How long will this go on, Lesa?”

No comment.

Allie had come in afterward with the two infants nursing on her bared breasts as solidarity he supposed, aggravating Ray to the point that he wanted to scream at the women in his house to get psychological help. There seemed to be no end in sight. Then to add to the hilarity of an already exasperating situation, as if such an addition could possibly have been humorous, Sharon had come in, her huge boobs bared, the two infants trying in vain to get milk where, by all tactile measures there should have been plenty, but in actuality was none. Luckily both infants began fussing very soon so that Sharon had been forced to give up that play-acting role.

No doubt that ridiculous additional twist to the charade had been conceived by Sharon, but Ray was irritated with Lesa all the same for letting such stupid shenanigans get so totally out of hand. Those ridiculous events were typical of the kind of world he lived in until finally he had been able to convince Lesa that the right honorable Doctor Aster had to have more productive things to do in her career, than trying to give him visual shock treatments on a daily basis.

Ray knew that Lesa was happy with her procreative success, Isis with her Horus, or was it Osiris. Clearly there was a Father, a Son, and a Holy Ghost involved in there somewhere, and the Father was by no means the prime fucking mover – not in this case. Maybe he never was in any case. However, things did settle down before too long after Sharon left. Ray’s role was established as athletics director – well, actually, just athletic tutor – for an infant who could at that stage only swat ineffectually at balls hanging from a mobile, and then finally a tot, that tot being very special, even in Ray’s eyes. Roger was by that point at an age for which maternal instincts were not prerequisites for appreciation. Ray was enamored with having had such a son even at his advanced age.

There was never a time when Ray was not happy to have had Roger, like he had thought there might be, having a new baby at his age. Roger had learned everything quickly. He had the precocity of Lesa and the ruggedness of Ray. Both he and Lesa loved both aspects of their baby.

Lesa had not been one of those self-centered mothers who dote exclusively on their own spawn though. She truly loved Ellie as well as Roger and as she handled them both, one would have been hard pressed to know which was her own child. Lesa had told Ray that she had decided that she only wanted to go through that whole childbirth ordeal once, and so Ellie would be the daughter that she would not actually have to *have*, or “*bear*” as the terminology goes. Although that news had somewhat surprised Ray, it had also made him happy; he would not have to go through those preliminary stages again.

Allie, for her part, dearly loved her “little brother, nephew, or whatever he is,” as she sometimes referred to Roger, as well as loving her own late flare at procreation. Each of the second (or was it third) generation ‘twins’ had

Cosmological Considerations

effectually two inseparable mothers and separate fathers who were friends. That was the stage set up for their roles in ‘the charade’.

After the absurd play acting of dual nursing, the treatment of the two offspring as though they had been strangely conceived twins did not cease. Because they were always together, Ray became athletic tutor for Ellie as well. Clearly, she had innate abilities just as Roger had, and the two of them could spend hours passing pee-wee footballs, playing catch, and hitting T-balls, as well as shooting basketballs of various sizes to baskets set at increasing heights as they grew. There was a phase that lasted several years in which Ellie was taller than Roger. Every phase of their childhood was fun for them and fun for Ray – well, no doubt for all their parents. It wasn’t like anything Ray had ever experienced in his younger years, or anything in the least bit similar to what had transpired for his older children. These two children became the sunshine of Ray’s days, and when they began school, he missed having them around so continuously.

With Stephanie and Cecil so much older, the two younger children virtually always played together. Tom and Allie had moved to a home that was only a couple of miles from that once so serene little street down which Ray and Lesa still resided. That private street became characterized more by its cheerful yells and screams of happy children than what would typically have been referred to as serenity. However, it was certainly no quiet desperation in which Ray found himself.

Sometimes Cecil would come to play too; he did not want to be left out and enjoyed the ball playing activities even if tiny tots were involved, as long as his famous grandfather played too. Thus, Ray and Cecil had become good friends during this period as well. This had helped Cecil become a fairly outstanding athlete in his own right, Ray thought. Cecil would become considerably taller and more massively built than either Ray or Tom. Cecil became somewhat of a star in high school, even if his entire team was not top caliber and didn’t get far in any playoffs. Cecil could catch a football and make a lot of tough yards afterward, block out and get rebound in basketball, and he had even hit a couple of home runs his senior year. It had been very enjoyable watching him play. Ray would yell with the younger kids sitting in the stands beside him.

It was at about this point in their development that he had been convinced to go up to bat one more time in a Mariner uniform. It had been ten years since Ray had first stepped to the plate in the old Yankee Stadium. It had been the baseball commissioner who had called Ray. What he had said was that it would be a total shame if Ray’s exploits were not ultimately to be exhibited in Cooperstown. His feats belonged in the Hall of Fame. As the rules stood Ray’s major league experience was excluded from qualification on several grounds. One of which was having played at the championship level for a period of ten years. That had been stipulated as “continuous years”, but “the Board of Directors of the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, reserves the right to revoke, alter or amend the rules at any time,” the

Cosmological Considerations

commissioner intended to propose an alteration to the rules before the requisite period prior to his eligibility for nomination. However, it would be much easier if Ray had come closer to meeting a few more of those criteria – a game ten years after his first would definitely do that for him. The commissioner had checked with the Board of Directors and Mariners management to confirm agreement that this proposal would have fan support and provide his eligibility.

Ray had demurred at first, asking that he have a few days to consider. He hadn't told Lesa about it at first. In fact, he had asked little Roger about it before anyone else. It seems that Ray being in the Hall of Fame one day had been a presumption of Roger's and of his other grandchildren.

"They can't keep the greatest hitter of all time out of there can they?" Roger had cried.

Ray had finally discussed it with Lesa, which was, of course, tantamount to accepting that it would happen. It had happened. All his children, young and old, got into the celebration as though it had been a national holiday. But Roger most of all, and as arms were twisted and events transpired, Roger had gotten to throw out the first pitch with all Ray's grandchildren standing on the mound behind him cheering. Now that had been a day – not a grand slam day, to be sure. He had gotten a hit that had ricocheted off the left field wall in such a way that Ray had made it to second though. He had then been replaced by a pinch runner and had gotten a standing ovation coming off the field. A great day really.

Stephanie had even been there, standing behind the mound as Roger threw his pitch with her perpetual frown of the period. She had tried to stop Ellie from approaching Roger before he threw the pitch, turning scarlet with humiliation when she did it anyway. Ellie had stepped right up there and grabbed the ball from Roger's mitt and kissed it before placing it back in his glove and returning to stand with the other grandchildren. It had been a special moment, of course.

Right from the beginning Stephanie had resented the emphasis on the little ones, Ellie in particular, that she had never experienced herself. Ray tried sometimes to include her in the ball catching, but she would let a ball hit her without making a move to catch it and walk off to the house disdainfully.

She increasingly had issues with Allie as she got older. Lesa took on the role of confidante and acted as intermediary between the mother and daughter. That role had never seemed to end. Stephanie had dropped out of college early to marry. Her husband was a nice enough boy, but without any considerable credentials and not much potential for going anywhere professionally. They already had a couple of children, but still Stephanie would call her Auntie to complain about the latest in the ad infinitum list of perceived shortcomings in her mother. Ray thought that Lesa had performed her role quite admirably, but many times it had frustrated her with the complications of remaining loyal to both warring parties.

These were Ray's thoughts after Lesa had left him to try to find sleep – not sequentially as presented here, but in the usual muddle of the mind.

Cosmological Considerations

In the office now, with another fresh cup of coffee he had walked back down the hall to pour before returning, he wondered as he walked about the comment Lesa had made concerning his “playing with his new toy”. She knew everything, that woman! She knew, for example that the conversation he had told her of having had with Andrew, would come down to this. This.

Sure, it was somewhat disconcerting to know that every car sold in America in recent decades could be located and its route followed in real time as it progressed. It was part of the obvious follow-on implications of the Global Positioning System technology and the loss of personal freedoms in America and elsewhere. Security. For Andrew there had been no down side – just more of the marvels of technology. Obviously since GPS had long before been telling drivers exactly where they were located as they drove the equally obvious implication is that ‘it’ also knows where you’re at. It’s just a matter of accessing the information that ‘it’ knows about your car, the car you bought and whose ID and key you happen to possess, without needing permission of an occupant’s iPhone.

It wasn’t yet general knowledge that that capability was available to the public. Ray remembered when in a time of national emergency the capability would be unilaterally revoked. Ray understood all that from having worked on DOD projects before his retirement. It made sense. So, anyway, Andrew had told him the procedures for a citizen to gain access to the capability, and Ray had followed them. He had just received the keys by secure snail mail, about which Lesa had been curious, the codes to be put into his computer to have total access to where *his* car was located at all times.

“If you forget where you parked in a huge parking lot sometime, you can use your pod and it will show you immediately. Or if someone steals your car, you can go right after them without even notifying the police,” Ray had laughed.

“Right,” she had said. “And get yourself killed by the only original ridiculous amendment left in the Bill of Rights to our Constitution. Like any of that’s what you’re likely to be doing with it. Ray, tell me you won’t use this to spy on Roger now, will you?”

Ray had just smiled in response as she had stormed off.

He supposed that she had warned Roger that his father had that capability now. That was fair. That was probably most of its value.

As he opened the appropriate GPS access windows using his ID and key for Roger’s car, a map of the region was displayed with a big red ‘X’ that indicated where the car was located. It was somewhere off of highway 410, ‘out in the boonies’ up toward Mount Rainier, Ray realized. They were “parked, motor off, vehicle right side up.” Ah, Ray thought, that’s good. How about Ellie? Was she still “right side up”? But the red ‘X’ began to move. Hmm. Back onto 410 heading back toward Auburn. That’s good.

Just as Ray minimized the window Lesa came in sleepy-eyed in her nightgown. “Ray, what are you doing? Why don’t you come to bed so we can have an enjoyable day tomorrow without both of us being worn out?”

Cosmological Considerations

“Look at this,” Ray said, maximizing the GPS window.

“Ray! Are you checking on the kids? That’s a serious breach of privacy, Ray. You quit that right now.”

“Ah, c’mon, look at this. The kids just spent a few minutes up on a side road near that old ski area checking out weather conditions. The vehicle was “parked, motor off, vehicle right side up,” and now they’re coming back after having had a wonderful time,” he snarked.

“Ray, you are bad, bad, bad.” But she laughed. “Let me see that. What are they doing way down there? What time is it? 1:30? Why’d they go there, anyway?”

“You got me. What are kids that age likely to be doing anyway? Can’t possibly imagine. Maybe Roger left the car unlocked with the keys in it and we’re watching a joy rider, with Roger and Ellie already back safely at Tom and Allies fast asleep well within your requisite two-mile radius just as you supposed.” Ray twiddled with Lesa’s emotional knobs.

“Oh, quit it. They’re just talking. Probably about you.”

“Yeah. Teenagers seldom have anything better to talk about than their aging father and grandfather.”

Lesa continued to watch the red ‘X’ with interest, changing the scale so they could now see the names of the streets they passed in Enumclaw still heading West toward Auburn. “This is pretty neat, Ray.”

“Yeah, ‘Isn’t technology wonderful?’ as Andrew would say.”

“Speaking of which, how far have you gotten on that forward scattering in the intergalactic medium idea of yours that we got jump-started before we got married? You quit working on it for quite a few years there didn’t you?”

“Quite a few years, yeah. I’m working on it again, to restore some sanity in my life. Making progress? No. Without you all progress stops. You have the little bag with all the twinkling magic dust. I’m the sloth who just can’t seem to get anything accomplished alone. But... that’s why you were going with me to talk to Professor Smith. Did you forget about that again?”

“Oh, baloney – to all of that blather. Show me where you’re at on it.”

“Same file, still looking at the Lyman-alpha forest problem, and still not making any real progress. Do you know how many years I’ve been stuck on that? Decades.”

“I know, it’s my fault again, Ray. I’d really like to get into that with you again... well, I guess I never really did get into this before we started worrying about Roger, did I.” Mention of Roger seemed to be impetus enough for her to switch back to the GPS Access window. “Well, they’re getting into Auburn now.”

She opened his Plasma Scattering document and searched out the first reference to “Lyman” to get to the section they had been discussing. She scanned it over quickly, page after page.

“Oh, I remember this. You convinced me before. There aren’t any new developments that preclude anything else in your coherent forward scattering explanation, are there?”

Cosmological Considerations

“Not that I know of other than not being satisfied with the statistics of the amount of redshift not just being an average through the variation of density and temperature of the intergalactic medium – giving it a definite rippling aspect. You said you’d look at that one time a long time ago. And the Lyman alpha forest problem which is why I wanted us to talk with Professor Smith.”

“Will he know?”

“He ought to know what’s going on in his field since he’s a biggee – as you call them – in it and he presents at all the conferences.”

“Yes. Bigees. Like Ed, but a different field.”

“Yeah, like Ed. Well, it seemed like a place to start a discussion.”

“Yes, of course it is, a good one too. Especially since your soul mate has abandoned you, huh?”

“I didn’t say that. I didn’t even think that. Anyway, you were going to talk with him – with me – remember? You’re still my ticket to getting to speak with important people.”

“Oh, quit that, Ray. What’s your approach to getting over this hurdle anyway? Are there experiments that have to be defined, astronomical observations that have to be made? Telescope time? What?”

They discussed the problem areas and the reasons that warranted it as a real problem and the extent to which there was a perceptual problem that was a different kind of hurdle to get over. He reminded her again of his background with this issue.

“I told you that I had submitted a paper to the Letters section of Nature magazine long before I had ever met you. The editor replied cordially that the plasma scattering approach didn’t seem to him to be compatible with the existence of the Lyman alpha forests.”

“So how did you respond?”

“I didn’t. I shelved the whole thing for years. It’s still on the shelf.”

“Dammit Ray. It’s a good thing I made a winner out of you at Yankee Stadium.” She was laughing now. “Why would you quit; he just wanted due diligence. What on earth is it with you? I guess Edna was right.”

As always, Lesa’s insights were exactly what Ray needed both to keep him intensely interested and on his toes to make real progress toward a resolution. They had always been able to drop into a conversation after months of not having had a serious one and be right back sharing neural cortex as they had from the first.

“It’s good to be talking with you again about this sort of thing, Edna or no Edna. I have missed it tremendously.”

Ignoring his comment, she asked, “Don’t some of the analyses you did on absorption over and above the plasma resonance absorption come into play here somewhere? What about the Lyman alpha break? The distribution of plasma density and temperature away from the center of clusters drops to where hydrogen clouds can develop, right?”

“Yeah, that’s the issue; they absorb at the Lyman alpha line, creating those jagged profiles and the Lyman break.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Let’s set aside some time to investigate the absorption in and around that line. I remember looking at your analyses of intergalactic absorption. It was impressive. I’ll look into it – and also a statistical analysis of hydrostatic pressure gradients and cluster frequencies.”

“Yeah, that would be great. I love doing this stuff but I can’t do it without you anymore.”

“Me too,” she said, “switching back to the GPS access window.

The red ‘X’ was “parked, motor off, vehicle right side up” in Tom and Allie’s driveway.

“How long were we talking?” Lesa asked. “Funny how time slips away. I wonder whether they’re in the car still or in the house.”

Ray reached over her to click on a couple buttons on the screen. “Current status duration 1 hour 11 minutes 7 seconds.”

“Oh, my,” Lesa exclaimed. “Well, they’re safe, Ray. Let’s go to bed.”

Ray closed the windows out and followed Lesa back into their bedroom.

#5 Up the Creek

Ray opened his eyes. It was bright out for a Northwest fall morning. The drapes had been opened so he looked out at the trickling stream that meandered between the ponds. The shower had just been turned on. He got up and walked into the bathroom. Through the shower door he could see the still beautiful form of the woman he had fallen head over heels in love with well before he should have.

“How long you been up?”

“Oh, hi, Hon. A while. I got us some sandwiches ready and some fruit. I thermosed a pot of coffee and another one is brewing for our breakfast. You going to shower?”

“Yeah, I suppose I should. You’re about done in there aren’t you?”

“Yep!” she said sliding the door back.

There was her wet hair just the way he had always loved seeing it, slicked back boasting the broadest most brilliant forehead in the world, he thought. She was still young, but thinking about it just now, he realized that she was well over forty, not that much younger than the age Helen had been when she died. A quite profound sadness came over him very suddenly then. There were wrinkles around Lesa’s eyes. They seemed like merely cheerful little crow’s feet, but he knew that Lesa would not have welcomed them cheerfully, that she would have noticed them at their onset. If the years had piled onto Lesa so unfairly, what had they done to him? He knew without referring to a mirror. He avoided mirrors, always had. He guessed they might reveal some of the dark areas to be avoided in his life. That was a darkness Lesa could worry about. She had claimed not to be afraid of it in the slightest. He walked over to take her in his arms; she wrapped her damp appendages around him.

“We’re together in the same universe, Ray,” she said, almost gloating to be in a position she had prophesied so long ago now.

“We are, aren’t we? And we’ve been here for a while.”

“Yep. The book helped, didn’t it? I guess we have to get that next one on ‘Cosmological Effects of Scattering in the Intergalactic Medium’ published and out there, and then keep it going.”

“’Til the last printed syllable of recorded time... and all that noise?”

Cosmological Considerations

“‘And all our yesterdays have lighted fools their way to dusty death.’ Remember how you tried to cheer me up with that,” she laughed at him.

He had his pajamas off and was stepping into the already wet and steamy shower.

“It was all words, words, words, back then, wasn’t it? We needed more.”

“Yeah, I guess we did... do.” He stepped into the shower and turned it on. He noticed through the glass that she was still talking but he couldn’t hear her. He poked his head out but she was gone by then.

There was cereal on and a cup of coffee cooling for him when he got to the breakfast nook. She was all dressed. She had about finished her cereal.

He poured some granola out of the bag and dripped some milk on it. “So... what’s the plan?”

“Canyon Creek.”

“Canyon Creek?” he fairly shrieked.

“Yes. You’ve been going to take me up there ever since we got married and you never have. Why?”

“Why? There’s no creek there; that’s why. There’s nothing. It’s just a reservoir over all that used to be.”

“I know, but the dam is there, the Riparian Menhirs I’ve heard you talk about, the layout of the land, the ridge...” she said. “Helen.”

“There’s about as much of Helen up there as there is of anything else. Nothing. It’s all gone.”

“No, it isn’t,” she disagreed thoughtfully, respectfully. “You’re still there. We have to go up there and get you out.”

Ray laughed. “Me? C’mon, Lesa. You know better than that. There’s nothing there – especially not me.”

“I want to see what there is and have you tell me about the rest... how it was. You owe me that. Then we can talk... about you and me.”

He watched her face as she watched his. He had a few more bites of cereal, chewed them as he thought about what she had said, sipped some coffee. “Okay.”

“I’ve got our lunch in the car already.”

“Oh. Okay, I’ll get my coat.”

“Better get a hat too, it may get stormy.”

So here they were an hour and a half later, turning off at Burlington ready to head upriver. They hadn’t talked much as they’d driven along.

“That was the Skagit we crossed back there, right? Isn’t this where we came for the tulip festival that time and walked among the rows of all those acres of tulips and daffodils. That was near La Conner though, wasn’t it? Didn’t we cross the river at Mount Vernon that time.”

“Yeah.”

Cosmological Considerations

Ray had been nonchalant whenever he had answered Lesa, but not very conversant. He'd been that way all the way up. A question, an answer, no conversation

"You are going to talk to me when we get there, aren't you?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Why don't you talk to me too, instead of just asking questions?"

"Sure, okay. I checked your GPS Access window before we left and closed it so Roger wouldn't see it inadvertently."

"And?"

"And he was still at the Wilsons. Probably eating breakfast."

"You didn't seem so averse to looking at that window after all."

"No. It's better than worrying. I told Roger you had it. He probably thought it was a lark driving up there and parking off 410, knowing you would be watching and eating your heart out wishing you were eighteen again." She laughed.

"I knew you would have. I would have told him if it had been you that got it. Anyway, he's not eighteen... neither was I. And I wouldn't ever want to be eighteen again."

"He didn't care – that you had that capability."

"No, he wouldn't. He's pretty open."

"Yes." She sat there as they drove on through the drenched green of dairy pasture. "For a kid of seventeen."

It had begun raining again as they had continued silently east through Sedro Wooley, Lyman, Hamilton... A Lyman without an alpha, Ray thought, amusing himself. They came upon a mile sign to Concrete."

"That should read 'Concrete, where the great Ray Bonn was born' don't you think?"

Ray looked over at her quizzically. "There's another question," he replied. "What does the world famous Lesa Sorensen think? Does she think they have the distance right on the sign?"

"She thinks that's exactly what it should say, 'Concrete, where Ray Bonn was born many years ago'. Who cares how many miles?" After another period of silence she added, "The distance is fine." Another mile and then, "So is Concrete what you and Jimmy Hoffa had in common besides both being tough guys?" She laughed nervously and corrected, "Oh, I'm sorry, another question, let me rephrase that: I'll bet Jimmy Hoffa would have preferred being cast in concrete the same way you were." She laughed a little awkwardly.

"Anyone would. That began some sweet years."

"That one day head start gave Helen a lot of control though, didn't it? Whoops, a question."

"Yeah. Twenty-three hours and a lot more personality."

"Oh, Ray, you're too hard on yourself."

"No, I'm not. It was twenty-three hours. Anyway, I liked the way it was. She made everything easier for me. So do you."

Cosmological Considerations

“Even me?” Lesa said, obviously in deep thought. “What I meant to ask was whether Helen even made *me* easier for you.”

“Well, I had a hard time with that, you know. It didn’t seem right for her to call shots that would take place after she died, but I guess she did. She did a good job of that too. Don’t you think?”

“Yes.”

They could see Concrete nestled into the side of the steep wooded hill.

“I want to stop at a florist here, Ray.”

Ray wrinkled his brow. “It’s been almost twenty years, Lesa.”

“I know. Have you ever put flowers on her grave?” Catching herself again, she asked, “Can I just use questions? It seems like there is no conversation without them, and we have to learn conversation all over.”

“No, I haven’t been up here since the funeral. She’s dead. Remember that interview you have given me no end of grief about over the years?”

“No end of grief?” That’s a strange turn of phrase, don’t you think? I don’t think it’s me who gives you no end of grief. It’s you who won’t let it end. Anyway, of course I remember what you said. It’s recorded for all to remember, and I got what you meant. It made sense to me. I got it then and I still get it. What’s not to get?”

“Sure, ask questions. It’s fine when we’re talking; it just doesn’t work well as a way to get me started talking when I’m not feeling like it. You never really helped me end it, did you? You never revealed Helen’s dying secrets.”

“I know. Oh, there’s a florist over there. Stop here and I’ll run across. You want to come in?”

Ray shook his head.

“I didn’t think so. That’s fine.” She opened the door before they were fully stopped in the angle parking. “I’ll just be a couple of minutes.”

The town hadn’t changed all that much in so many years, he thought. It’s probably too far from Seattle to suffice as a bedroom facility. The town had once been denominated “Minnehaha,” a stupid name Ray had thought when Helen had first told him.

“Well, they renamed it ‘Baker’,” she had said. “Do you like that better?”

“Of course,” he had said. “They should have left that. It’s on the Baker River anyway.”

“Well, they were proud that the Portland Cement Corporation wanted to turn all their trees gray, so they named a part of it ‘Cement City’.”

“Better than Concrete,” Ray had opined.

“Well, you know what happens to cement after a while,” she had laughed and he had laughed with her, still licking ice cream cones and heading back up the Creek.

Lesla was coming out of the florist shop with some roses. In her other hand she held her cell phone to her ear; she was happily chatting away. Probably Allie. She clicked it shut as she reached the car.

“What do you think of these?” Lesa asked holding them out so he could get a good look as he was backing out onto the highway again.

Cosmological Considerations

“I think she’ll like them,” Ray said with a bit of a cynical grin. “I was just talking to her and she seemed happy that we were coming.”

Lesa did a double take. “Ray, are you okay?”

“Yeah,” he laughed at her. “I was just sitting here thinking about a conversation we had over ice-cream cones in this little burg.”

“And,” Lesa tried to hurry him along.

“Well, I had just complained about the ugliness of the name of the town – well, the town itself was really ugly what with all the cement dust hanging on all the trees.”

“You said she was happy we were coming, Ray.”

“Oh, did I? Yeah, well, she was in good spirits anyway. She explained to me that this town was first named Minnehaha, would I like that better. Then it was changed to Baker – for that river way down there below this bridge that isn’t any more of a river than Canyon Creek.”

“Baker is pretty. Why’d they change it?”

“Cement. They were so proud of their new corporate parasite that they decided to rename their town Cement.”

“Cement? How’d it become Concrete?”

“Yeah. That’s what I asked Helen and she said, ‘That’s just what happens to cement after a while.’”

Lesa threw her head back and laughed. “Is that for real, Ray?”

“Yeah,” he responded smiling still.

“That is funny. No wonder you loved her so much. I never thought she had that much of a sense of humor.”

“She didn’t,” Ray said. “But that day, I guess she was feeling good.” As they rode on Ray asked, “Was that Allie you were talking to?”

“No. Roger. He got home and wondered where we were, and guess what?”

“Questions.”

“He clicked on your GPS Access and is tracing us.” She laughed and Ray laughed too.

“You know what else?”

“Why do you always ask me these stupid pointless questions? Of course I don’t know.” “Do you want to tell me or not? You’re still asking questions.”

“Yeah, Okay. He was stalled up there on 410. They ran out of gas. Tom had to drive up there with a gas can. Roger knew you’d been checking on him by the log on your GPS Access.”

“Log?”

“Yes, a log, Ray. There’s a log.”

“Oh, God.”

“Oh, God’ is right,” Lesa laughed again. “You forgot that the tracker can be tracked too. You two are tracking each other around in circles.”

They passed through Rockport and were coming into Marblemount.

“It’s a long way up here, Ray. You ready for one of these sandwiches?”

“Yes, it is and yes.”

Cosmological Considerations

Lesa took a couple of sandwich bags out of the pack and handed him a half she had extracted from one of the bags to Ray. “You were pretty isolated from civilization way up here, weren’t you?”

“Yeah. You wonder why the Yankees never found me.” He laughed his laugh as he took the sandwich. “Was Ellie with him?”

“Yes. They wanted to tell us about their night. Ellie had been in her glory.”

“Their night?”

“At the dance, Ray! At the dance. Can we just be Ray and Lesa looking into the past instead of worrying quite so much about what happens to the next generation? Just today? Let today be our day – you and me. Please.”

“More questions. But okay, I guess GPS or no other technology allows me to go in remotely and put shackles on them, to keep them out of trouble I anticipate until we get back, does it?”

“No it doesn’t and quit anticipating. There weren’t any ‘shackles’ for you and Helen and there aren’t any for Roger and Ellie. Of course you and I had Helen who had remote control of everything.”

Ray frowned as he watched her mocking laughter.

“But I was starting to enjoy the little bits I was hearing about when Ray and Helen went to Concrete to share an ice-cream cone. I want to hear more. Why were you in Concrete on that particular occasion?”

“What do you mean, why? How should I remember? That was over fifty years ago.”

“That drive was quite a ways back then, wasn’t it? For just an ice-cream cone I mean. There must have been some reason worth remembering.”

“I don’t know,” he said, but as he said it, memories of the occasion started to come back. It was a long way unless there had been some reason. That damned Lesa.

“Did Helen have a doctor in Concrete?”

God damn her! Lesa was like a pickaxe.

“I’m sorry, Ray, but did she?”

“Yeah, she did.”

“So that cute pun and the ice-cream cones were about all the fun to be had that day, I bet.”

“Yeah, it was.”

They were both silent again until Ray turned off of highway 20 north along Canyon Creek.

“So this is ‘The Creek’. It looks as big as Baker River all right, so why the designation, ‘Creek’?”

“I don’t know. It never seemed right to anyone I knew.”

“There’s more of a fall to it, I guess, more white water.” She watched the rapid flow of cascading water beside the road. “You ever ride a raft down this?”

Cosmological Considerations

“Not here,” Ray said. “Further up the creek I did when I was pretty young. I never had any time for that once I got into my teens. I did a little fishing, but I was working most of the time.”

“Why’d you work so hard in your teens? Were you planning on marrying early even then?”

“No. I don’t know why. Status maybe. Dad got me on, and I made more money in the summers than anyone else my age, so they all envied me for that too, I guess.”

“That too? What else? Helen?”

“Yeah, I suppose Helen was the primary thing.”

“Athletic ability?”

“That too, and spending money, I suppose, a car.”

“Didn’t you ever envy them for having more time?”

“No. Who needs time when you’re young? They spent too much of their time in the summers picketing the dam and I just wanted to forget that damn dam.”

“Oh, my God! Stop the car, pull over there on the other side of this bridge.”

“It’s purty, huh?”

“Wow. Ray, that is spectacular. So those are what you guys call the Riparian Menhirs?”

“Those is they.”

Ray pulled off on what had been set up as a lookout point that hadn’t ever been here at any time Ray could remember. It gave a full view of the dam behind the huge rock formations and the hills opening up on each side of the canyon. The sun was just breaking through and a rainbow grew in intensity up over the dam and then portions of a lighter secondary rainbow up over the first.

“Look at that. Lights reflecting through those raindrops twice. Now that could be called an RGB vision, Ray.”

“Yeah, it could. And it’s all just physics, isn’t it? The physics of the scattering of light.”

Lesla was obviously moved by what she saw. “No, Ray. Well, I mean, yes, sure it is, and it’s wonderful, the effects it gives rise to, but that beauty, that just...” Lesla was getting out of the car and walking over to his side to view the dam unobstructed.

Ray got out too and was walking beside her. “Just what? Just makes you want to go back to church?”

“Ray Bonn! God damned you, Ray Bonn. You have to try to ruin everything for me.” Lesla turned and started hitting him with her fists as hard as she could. She was obviously extremely angry with him for ruining another moment for her, he realized. “Why do you do that? You asshole!” she screamed. “You total asshole!”

Ray grabbed her arms and held them as she continued flailing, kicking at him now, and continuing to scream curses at him. He had only seen her that

Cosmological Considerations

angry that one other time twenty years ago down on the Oregon Coast. Now she proceeded to sob and sob as he held her.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I really am. I’m sick of being me, but no matter how sick I am of me and my fucking Midas touch, I’m still me. I know I need you to help me, so please don’t give up on me now, Lesa. I want you to be the one who lays that damned rose on me at the end. Don’t quit on me.” He sat her down on a log that was still damp as they continued to watch the rainbow wax and wane with the vagaries of the misty raindrops and clouds.

“Over seventy years ago Adam Bonn came up this canyon for the first time to interview for a job in the mine that was upriver about ten miles or so. When he got midspan on that bridge there, where you first saw the Menhirs and rainbow that’s when he first saw them too – rainbow and all, and he too was overwhelmed. But he also got to see the beautiful paradise of a valley that opened up between them like a fairy land that continued on up for miles beyond a little town and called Canyon Creek.” Ray pointed to the dam and seemed to see right through it and into the distance the way it used to be. “And when he stopped as we did to look at it awestruck, a rainbow arched up over it, he was never the same again. And the valley would never be the same again either.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, my father didn’t see the valley as part of the beauty, I guess. What he saw was an opportunity knocking at Adam Bonn’s door. He saw a dam right where it is now just as clearly as we do, maybe clearer, maybe a better one, maybe higher, and nothing could ever stop him from putting it there.”

“Really?”

“Really. The realio trulio Canyon Creek damio.”

She looked up into Ray’s face; he wasn’t smiling.

“I had no idea it happened that way.”

“Well, it did.”

After sitting there silently a little longer, Lesa asked, “Could we get back in the car and have some coffee and another sandwich? I’m very cold.”

They returned to the car where Lesa got out some more sandwiches. She poured a cup of coffee and sipped on it first before handing it to Ray. Ray shook his head that it was still too hot for him. They sat there eating their sandwiches as they looked at the dam and beyond.

“I am overwhelmed with grief for you, Ray.”

“For me?”

“Yes, of course for you. I had no idea how overwhelming it could be. Your home, your childhood, your family, your history, everything. Gone.”

“Ah, c’mon. That’s all a long time ago.”

“No, Ray. I kind of get it. There’s that cold gray flat dam there behind those spectacular rock formations that everyone is amazed at, and no one knows what’s in behind there, under all that water, another world, a world you lived in and never talk about. A kingdom where you were heir apparent.”

Cosmological Considerations

“I was no prince, Lesa. I was just that odd Bonn kid. That was all I ever was, all I’ll ever be.”

“Today, Ray. Today you tell me about that kid – that world, okay. Because after I lay that rose on you because I imagine you will go before I do, I want to be able to tell Roger and Ellie, and the rest of your family who probably don’t know either, just what it was like up here then.”

“Lesa, have you ever been back to that place where you spent your first six years?”

“No, I haven’t. I think the house was torn down, and I think there’s a dormitory sitting on the spot.”

“Well, there’s a dam and a hundred feet of water sitting on mine,” he said finally smiling a little. “I’d like a little of that coffee if there’s any left in that cup.” She handed the cup to him and he emptied it. She refilled it then, holding it to cool.

“What next,” he said. “You bring your scuba gear?”

“All those damned questions. How about The Ridge? Is that up there?” She pointed up across the dam to the right.

“Yeah, we just follow the road.”

So Lesa balanced the coffee cup as Ray drove, proceeding first on across the valley and began to ascend the canyon wall. When they got to the top there was another pullout for sightseers with some plaques and reader boards. “Stop here, Ray.”

He stopped, took the coffee cup, and began sipping it as she got out of the car to go over to look across at the dam and menhirs. Then he saw her walk over to the larger of the information boards. He finished the cup, sat it down, got out of the car, and proceeded to her side.

“There’s your dad, Ray,” she said, “pointing to an image of Adam Bonn as the “visionary of the Canyon Creek dam project.”

“That’s not the way he looked when I last saw him.”

“Ray.”

“Yeah?”

“Would you have liked me to say, ‘That’s not the way she looked when I last saw her,’ when you found that picture of Fredrik and my mother? How would you have liked for me to have thought that every time you told me how significant you thought my mother’s work had been? That wasn’t pretty either, Ray. It wasn’t pretty at all. There was blood everywhere. I’m guessing you probably identified your father’s body because you have always had to do those kinds of things, and now I have to see that with you whenever I think of your father. Is that what you want? Can we both just acknowledge to each other that we have seen some horrible things? They don’t have to undo everything that was done before that or what has been done afterward. I don’t want to force you not to express your sorrow the way I may seem to have, but we need to learn how to fully express it as sorrow, and not let it come out as cynicism that we let become our whole lives to ruin the good times.”

Cosmological Considerations

Ray stared at her, and as he stared, tears began welling up in his eyes and then rolling down his cheeks. She was sobbing too. They held each other and kissed a wet salty kiss. Someone drove into the lookout area, saw them, and drove off in embarrassment, he supposed.

When they let the embrace go, their hands still clung together. They stepped back to the information board. Ray had never been here before. It showed the dam in progress, with the little hamlet of Canyon Creek as it had been when he was about ten, he supposed. The angle of the photo was from this same vantage, as Ray had seen it many times coming down off the ridge, riding Trooper. He scrutinized the picture silently.

After Lesa had read the inscription, she watched Ray for a moment looking at the photo.

“Where did you live, Ray?”

“Right there,” he said, pointing to a smallish house in the last street of houses up closest to the vantage from which the photograph had been taken. “Helen lived there.” He pointed at the house next door, but not very close. There was at least one vacant lot between. “There’s the barn I built. That must be Trooper there.”

“I think there’s a boy right there by the horse, Ray. Is that you?”

“Yeah. I suppose that’s me,” he said. He looked over at her with a forlorn look. She started sobbing and threw her arms around his neck. He squeezed her and as he did, he recalled having thrown his arms around Trooper’s neck and having sobbed into his mane more than once.

“My God, Ray!” Lesa smiled up at him through her tears. “This is some trip, isn’t it?”

“Not hardly a joy ride do you think?”

“No, of course not, especially not for you. But it’s good don’t you think. I’ve never known any of this and we’ve been together a long time now.”

“That’s the high school over there.” He pointed at the various points on the photo, “The football field. Oh, there’s the diamond. It doesn’t look too big, does it? No wonder I got all those balls out of it.”

“I’ll bet if we looked around, we’d find some of those balls you hit up here,” she laughed. “Do you remember how I told Larry King that I hadn’t been aware that some of those balls were still in orbit? Well, I’ll bet they were just up here.”

“There’s the gym. It wasn’t very big. I think there were just three or four rows of seats up eight or ten feet off the floor on both sides, with just room enough for a bench outside the out of bounds line. You had to keep your feet back if you rode the bench or the refs called a technical. A kid from Marblemount, tripped me on a fast break on purpose one time. Hurt too.”

“Did you make the foul shots?”

“Oh yeah, I suppose. There’s the grade school.”

“Where you and Helen went, huh? What’s that over there?”

“City Hall – not much of a hall for not much of a city. That’s where Helen’s father worked.”

Cosmological Considerations

“What did he do?”

“Mayor – at least for a while, I think.”

“Really? Mayor?”

“Yeah. He was just a working stiff, but he cared about this little town.”

“Where’d Jonesy live?”

“Oh, Jonesy? Over there somewhere, in those trees. I lived with him and his folks for a few months when I got mad at Dad.”

“Really? Why? Was he mean to your Mom?”

“No. He wasn’t that way at all. Jonesy’s dad was though. My dad just had a foul mouth – mostly when I got into high school, I guess.”

“You moved out because your dad had a foul mouth? What’d he say, ‘Oh, God’ or something?” She laughed.

“No. He called Helen a trouble-making slut.”

“Oh God, Ray. What did you say?”

“Nothing.”

“Just moved out? Your silence is very loud.”

“Yeah, I guess.”

“He didn’t talk bad until you were in high school though.”

“That’s the way it seems to me now. Yeah. I never heard him swear when I was young, before I was ten, twelve maybe”

“Was it the progress on the dam?”

“I think so. There was probably a lot of pressure. Then those damned demonstrations that Helen was always putting together.”

“Julie has told me a little bit about that. I suppose they put some real feeling into it.”

“I guess. A lot of noise anyway.”

“Were you ever a part of it?”

“No. I was building houses up here on the ridge. I think everybody else was though, but not the Bonns. We stood for progress.”

Ray had taken a step over to a next photo that showed the same view with all the buildings demolished with just bare foundations that had been left there to be inundated. All the trees had been cut and hauled away. Lesa still clung to his arm as they observed the devastated valley that now was just the huge body of water before them. They both looked at the water at an angle that would have been down into the town. Ray quoted:

*“My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings,
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level waters stretch far away.”*

“Sands, Ray.”

“Yeah, I know. I don’t suppose depicting Ishmael here floating around in a coffin on sand after Ahab had died would have worked for you either.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Nothing ever works exactly, does it? I know the feeling. You read the tragedies and they get the feeling across, but Antigone didn’t work either.”

They stepped to the next station on the information board. The different stages of the dam development. “Thirteen men died during the development of the dam, including the visionary Adam Bonn,” it read at one point.

Lesa’s phone rang. “Allie,” she said and looked at Ray as if to ask whether to answer it.

“Why not?” he said.

“Hi.”

“Yes. We’re up on the ridge at that lookout point looking at old photos. Ray showed me where everybody lived and from whence he launched those baseballs.” She was laughing. “Yes, I had thought it was pretty amusing at the time.”

“Oh, I’ll bet she was.”

“Yeah, Roger called. Ray had been snooping and saw that they had been stopped up there.”

Lesa seemed to be sharing more laughter.

Ray walked off toward the car looking out across the ridge to where he could see a bunch of new houses going in. That had been Sy’s hay field. The barn was in shambles but still standing. However, a new upscale house, now with a view of the reservoir, was almost completed right on the site where the old house had been.

Putting her phone back in her purse, Lesa walked over to where Ray surveyed the surroundings.

“The kids are back at Wilson’s and they’re having a good time. I guess Ellie was a sensation last night and had such a good time. Roger slept in a long time Allie told me. I guess he was really tired. There was quite a bit of pressure on him what with the scouts there. She said he’s really relaxed and pretty funny now though. That running out of gas didn’t end up being as big a deal as he thought it would be. Tom is such a good sport.”

Ray listened, taking pleasure in all the things in his life he should be taking pleasure in as he stared off at the North Cascade mountain range rolling in steep green waves up toward Mount Shuksan, which was obscured now by the low hanging clouds. Further to his left he looked toward where Mount Baker was also obscured.

“It’s pretty here, Ray.”

“Yeah, I always thought so riding by here to come up and help Sy and his wife Aggie. They were about my best friends growing up, I guess. Sy was probably my age now back then. He seemed pretty old. I guess he was ancient.” A wan smile came over his face. “That was their barn over there. Sometimes I’d put Trooper in there when I helped him do his haying or other chores. Then, of course, that’s where we stored the hay.”

“Where’s the house?”

“I guess they tore it down. It was right there where they’re building that abomination.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Abomination? Nobody cares about our past, do they? They just tromp all over it,” she sort of giggled.

“They do,” he said. “The assholes.”

Lesa laughed. “So where are all those houses you built up here on the ridge?”

“They’re further along, way up there.” Ray pointed to where the road climbed an additional incline up around a switchback. The road was being re-worked there, with excavation being done to make the curve not quite so sharp. Heavy equipment was parked beside the road. Being a Saturday, no one was around.

“So that’s the switchback, huh?”

“That’s the one,” Ray said.

“Did we pass Helen’s mother’s house on the way?”

“Yeah. But it’s gone now too. Helen sold it and they tore the house down and put in that green monstrosity we passed.”

“Oh.”

They got into the car again and Lesa handed Ray another sandwich.

“How many of these did you make anyway?”

“Enough,” Lesa said between bites. “Coffee?”

“Yeah.”

They sat there for a few minutes eating and sipping coffee in silence, both of them looking at the switchback where Ray’s mother had gone off the road on her way down to help Helen’s mother, Alice.

Having handed the coffee cup to Ray after drinking half of it, Lesa said, “You know, we get so caught up in our own tragedies that we don’t realize how bad others have had it sometimes. Maybe I should just say that I got so caught up in mine that I never even thought about yours back when we met.”

“Well, mine had been a long time before.”

“So had mine. Just about as long. This is why we became soul mates, isn’t it? I mean, why we had such similar perspectives on everything. Somehow, I knew you were what I needed, that you could help me.”

“Did I?”

“Oh, Ray,” she reached over to kiss him. “You have made everything I ever dreamed of happen for me.”

“Me too,” he said. “Helen got me through it, but you’re helping me conquer it, aren’t you?”

Then they drove past the heavy equipment and both looked at the railing that had replaced the railing that Ray’s mother had broken through.

“How awful,” Lesa sighed as they passed and turned back to climb to the higher elevation.

When they reached the crest, a little settlement appeared. A sign read Canyon Place. There were a bunch of newer homes close to the edge of the canyon with direct views of the reservoir. Older homes were nestled further back. There was a little strip mall with a few cars parked before the modest storefronts. Further back was a larger building.

Cosmological Considerations

“That’s the ‘New School,’” Ray told Lesa, pointing it out.

“Did you work on that too?”

“Yeah. We built all those houses there, and some closer to the rim that I see they’ve replaced with...”

“Abominations,” Lesa chuckled.

“That’s the word.”

“Where’d your mother live then, Ray?”

“Right where that second abomination sits,” he replied pointing to the particular abomination.

“Do they still use the school?”

“Yeah. They used it for a senior center for a while, I guess, since there were never enough kids to come up here to justify hiring teachers. Everyone got the hell out of the area rather than move into these houses and be forced to remember how they got here. They bussed any kid who was left off to Concrete to attend school. This became a retirement community, I guess, what with the pretty lake and all,” Ray said sarcastically. “Well, at least that’s what Julie told me. Then eventually they turned the school into an old folk’s home. Last time Julie was up, she said Jonesy was in there. I guess he’s got Alzheimers pretty bad.”

“Hmm.” Lesa seemed more interested in that than Ray thought she would or should have been. “Could we go see him?”

“What’s to see? He’s just like Canyon Creek... totally gone. His dad was getting senile dementia at an early age too, I think. He was completely nuts when I lived with them.”

“Let’s go over there, Ray. Okay?”

Ray wrinkled his face. “You know Jonesy and I weren’t really that good of friends. He wasn’t all that smart, and he could be a snake in the grass.”

“I just want to go in there.”

So that’s exactly what they did, Lesa insisting that Ray go in with her. She walked up to the desk asking for a patient by the name of Jones. “‘Jonesy’ is what he was called, I think,” she told the attending nurse.

“Oh, I’m so sorry,” the nurse began, and then looking over at Ray blurted, “Ray Bonn! My mother and grandmother have told me so much about you. Well, I knew about your being a great baseball player and all, of course. But from up here, too.”

Ray did his blank stare at her.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Yes. Mr. Jones, or Jonesy has been here a few years, but I’m so sorry to have to tell you, he died last night. You and he were friends, weren’t you? He used to talk about you once in a while when he made any sense at all. They’re picking him up right now I think.” She hesitated, motioned for the two men who had just come in to go down the hall to where a nurse’s aide waved a hand. Then after a bit she added, “Actually, my grandmother was married to him for a while. He’s not my grandfather though. I don’t think he ever had any children. No one ever came to see him except my grandmother; she came sometimes.”

Cosmological Considerations

Lesa wasn't listening; she had proceeded down the hall with the men who had come for Jonesy. She seemed to be chatting with them. Ray didn't feel like going down to identify one more corpse in his life. Jonesy had been thoroughly identified long ago.

"Who was your grandmother?" Ray asked.

"Her name was Marsha Miller back when you would have known her. Do you remember her? She said she went out with you a time or two."

"Yeah. We dated once. How is she?"

"Oh, she's fine. Well... she has a little arthritis that she complains about sometimes, but pretty well, for her age. Are you and your wife going to be up here long, or just for the day."

"Just for the day."

"I saw on the news that your son is a very amazing athlete just like his father. I'll bet he makes you proud."

"Yes. Regularly," Ray said. He wanted out of there. Where was Lesa? Oh, there she came out of that room that had obviously been Jonesy's. He watched her putting something back in her purse. She must have been talking on the phone. She was walking back swiftly now.

"You all right?" he asked.

"Yes. I guess we can go."

Ray said his thank yous to the nurse. "Tell Marsha hello for me, would you?" And they were out of there.

"That was a coincidence," Lesa said. "You and he weren't friends?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Long story."

"I've got all day and the rest of my life."

"With a lot better things to do."

"Not really. I want to know."

"This is turning into a real bloodletting, isn't it?"

"It is," she acknowledged. "So tell me."

Ray backed the car around. "Where now?"

"There's a cemetery up here isn't there?"

"There is."

"Well, take us there while you tell me the long story of how come you weren't too crazy about Jonesy."

Ray looked at her askance. Why should he do this? He loved her; that was the only reason he could think of.

"Okay," he said. "I'm not too proud of any of this, but you know most of it anyway. That first time Julie came to see us right after we were married, she told me that you knew about us. What there was of an 'us' for anybody to know about, which wasn't much. Mostly what there was Helen's squeal which is what I'm sure Helen explained to you as her prized Pavlovian dog trick, so you'd understand how I had got conditioned to be such a prude."

Cosmological Considerations

“Yes. She did tell me, Ray.” She smiled at him so kindly that he almost had to wonder why. “I loved you both, and Julie, so much for that. It was like the ultimate lesson of youth all rolled so neatly into one little package. That was a youth I never experienced what with everything so different in my life. I felt the first real stirrings of youth with you, Ray.”

“Well, ours was different too.” Ray slowed the car and interrupted his story. “That abomination sits right where Mom, and Helen and I, and the two kids lived during the summers I worked up here.”

“Oh, I see,” she teased. “Unlike these other houses over here on this side of the road, you at least had a view.”

“A rather depressing view for all of us, of course, don’t you think, watching the water rise. I suppose Dad had thought it would be interesting for him and us. But he never lived here.”

“Yes, I can see that might not have been a cheerful view, watching your whole life being flooded over like Noah and his family. Back to what you were saying though: Helen told me that she thought you and Julie would have really hit it off if she hadn’t nipped it in the bud. You were both so ‘beautiful’ is what she said. Would you have?”

“‘Hit it off’? ‘Nipped it in the bud’?” he laughed. “Or would I have said that we ‘were both beautiful’?”

“Hit it off.”

“Probably. She was effing beautiful.” He laughed again.

Lesa blurted out laughing too. “Effing? As in ideal for effing?”

“Ideal, or at least it seemed to me she would have been. Those boobs had already blossomed out, you know.” He smiled at her knowingly. “But her nipples weren’t pink, so that would have been a major drawback. But she was also the closest thing to an intellectual I had met up to that point. She had a profound effect on both Helen and me.”

“How does your being such a prude play into all this?”

“Does it?” Ray asked, perhaps rhetorically. “Yeah, I suppose it does. Well anyway, the next year when Julie came up, besides all the demonstrating, she rubbed her horns off on Jonesy and let Helen and me have her intellectual stimulation.”

“Were you happy with that partition?”

“I guess I have to admit that that sort of galled me. Besides, ostensibly that damned Helen had got me up there with her and Julie in the first place just so a World Class expert could teach us how to make World Class love. Nobody told me that going in, but I know that there was no doubt in Julie’s mind that that was the agreed upon mission. I was then, as I’ve always been, excluded from the decision making by the women in my life. After aborting that mission, Helen promised that she and only she was going to teach me about how to make love.”

“That’s what she said?” Lesa beamed. “This is pretty exciting, Ray.”

“Yeah, isn’t it just. Well, anyway, she didn’t, and she didn’t, and she didn’t, ad infinitum... or nearly ad infinitum.”

Cosmological Considerations

“For too damned long evidently,” Lesa laughed.

“Way too damn long for a red-blooded American boy to watch Julie’s boobs bobbling along beside Jonesy and me thinking about her straddling me to no effect and all that shit.”

“All that shit. What a waste, huh?”

“Yeah, all that. So, it’s our senior year and I think I’m quite the stud and at least a couple of sexy broads in the school happened to agree with me on that, so I decided I’d apply a little pressure on Helen.”

“You’re kidding? Anyway, I’d have thought all of them would have.”

“Kidding? What do you mean? I wouldn’t kid about this.”

“You mean you were trying to intimidate Helen into having sex with you by going out with loose girls.”

“Well, it doesn’t sound like such a good idea in retrospect perhaps, or even very exciting now, maybe. What with the one I chose to go out with being the grandmother of that nurse back there at the old folk’s home, but yeah, her.” He realized that it was rather comical after all these years and grinned sheepishly.

“The one who came to see Jonesy along?”

“Yeah. Married him once.”

“Ray, pull over. I don’t want to miss any of this, and I don’t want you getting all excited and going off the road and on over that cliff.”

Ray pulled over. They were both thinking that this memory was more in the way of a cartoon than something that finds its way into a proper memoir.

“So yeah, I asked Marsha – she was one of the cheerleaders along with Helen – to go to the Prom with me. Helen got mad.”

“Marsha probably had the biggest boobs in school – something like her granddaughter back there – and a reputation to go with them, huh? How’d hers stack stack up with Julie’s?”

“Yeah. Pretty much. Her stack wasn’t as good as Julies, but... she had been Jonesy’s steady ever since Julie left, and what that meant to me was that she was easy. Well, if not easy, at least accessible, if you know what I mean.”

“I think I get it, Ray. Payback time.”

“After the dance we come up here to the ridge and Marsha was ready to meet the expectation. I mean, she laid out the smorgasbord.”

“Of course – all seven courses on one plate. And...”

“And I chickened out.”

Lesa busted out laughing. “You’re kidding!”

“Quit it, Lesa, or I’m not going to tell you any more.”

“Oh, yes, you are,” she laughed. “You tell me the rest or there’s no more smorgasbord for you again, *ever*.”

“I just couldn’t do something like that to Helen.”

“Really. That’s what it felt like even then?”

“Yeah, especially then. That’s what it felt like. What’d you think it felt like? Like I just needed a shot of Viagra or Cialis or something? It wasn’t senile erectile dysfunction for Christ’s sake.”

Cosmological Considerations

Lesa just kept snickering and saying, "I'm sorry, Ray. I'm really sorry, but I don't feel like such an undesirable slut anymore if you acted that way with everyone but Helen."

"Lesa, for God's sake. It was not 'everyone'. And anyway, you were more exciting to me than any woman I have ever known. Ever. Trust me on that. It wasn't erectile dysfunction, and you know that. The erection part worked fine."

"I remember," she said and blurted out laughing again.

Ray started the car. He was peeved. She was the one that had insisted he tell her all this shit.

"No, no, Ray. Turn the car off; I'll be good. I'm sorry. I feel like I'm part of this story too, that's why I can't keep from having it affect me some. What happened then?"

He looked over at her. She seemed penitent even if still on the verge of laughing. He didn't turn the motor off, but he didn't put it in gear either.

"What do you think happened? Helen got even. It's what women do. She made a big show of going to the next dance with Jonesy. That's what happened. And I stayed home, madder'n hell."

"Because that's what men do," she laughed again and checked it. "Payback time for Jonesy too. And then."

"I don't think Helen enjoyed herself any more than I had. We did love each other, you know. She never went out with Jonesy again, but that asshole spread it all over the school that Helen was easy, that she'd been all over him, and what have you." Ray was clearly agitated still.

"What have you'? And Helen, what did she say?"

"Nothing. She wouldn't have said anything if she'd been accused of seducing the Pope. That was how she denied things."

"You?"

"I almost killed Jonesy. I mean, I think it was very close. I could have. He had to miss a couple of games. You could hardly recognize his face for a while. I don't think it ever got completely back to normal. All that time later, when I had to identify my dad, I couldn't stop thinking about Jonesy and what he had looked like when I got done with him. It's weird. Those two images seem to always be superimposed on each other."

"He didn't press charges?"

"No. He probably knew I'd finish the job if he did."

"What did Helen do?"

Ray smiled. "She came up to me the next day and whispered into my ear that she loved me." He paused, seeming pleased still. "And she asked me if I wouldn't please take her to the homecoming dance."

"Wow. Now that's a story," Lesa sighed as Ray put the car in gear and headed on toward the cemetery.

"Not a very pretty one though, is it?"

"No." She thought for a while. "It's not pretty at all. A lot of things are like that though, aren't they?"

#6 Visiting the Dead

Ray turned and drove in through the gate to Canyon Place Catholic Cemetery a couple of miles further on from the main Canyon Place community.

“Helen wasn’t a Catholic, was she?”

“No. Nothing. Neither of our families went to church. Dad was an atheist from the get-go. I don’t know about Mom; she never said. But whatever she was, that would have been exactly what Alice was. They were that close.”

“Did your dad ever resent them being that close?”

“I suppose, if he ever thought about it. Mostly, the difference between he and I as far as how we handled our wives having bonded with a female companion was that I tend to think about that sort of thing more than he ever would have.”

She thought about that for a moment. “Who did Helen bond with?”

“You, I suppose.”

“And me?”

“Oh, Lesa. Who cares? Of course it used to bother me that you and Allie paraded around the house half naked with kids hanging on your tits like chimpanzees. But I survived it.”

“Ours are just ‘tits’ like ‘witches’ tits’, whereas Julie’s and Marsha’s were boobs? Is this a ranking, Ray? Oh, and Sharon, were her’s tits or boobs? Tits or boobs, Ray, which is it?”

Ray ignored the tits versus boobs issue. “The answer is, I don’t know what Dad thought.”

“So none of the people we know here were Catholics. Then why are they all buried in a Catholic cemetery?”

“You seen any Atheist Memorial Cemeteries up the creek here? I guess maybe we just overlooked all of them.” Ray was irritable now.

They were out of the car walking in the graveled car tracks with mown grass between. Lesa carried the roses.

Cosmological Considerations

“They’re up ahead here,” Ray said, leading the way.

They came to a curbed square with circumscribed headstones. They stood outside the barrier looking from one headstone to the next until finally Lesa hesitantly stepped inside and knelt down before Helen’s headstone. She laid the roses in front of it gently.

“It just chokes me up,” she said. “Even after all this time.”

“Yeah. Me too. It just sort of makes your throat hurt, doesn’t it?”

She looked to make sure he wasn’t being cynical. “Yes, that’s it all right. But she was right,” she read from the tombstone, “The tragedy is not in dying, but in never having lived.”

“I would have opted for ‘the first of the only child twins’ myself, but the kids opted for this. It’s what she told us all that day she announced her condition to the family.”

“Yes, Allie told me.”

“You know, right after we got married, and before Jamie and Judy had the twins, they came up here for something, I don’t know what. Respect maybe. Probably Judy thought I might bring you up here and they should make sure the grave site looked presentable, I don’t know.”

“Judy loved Helen and was heartbroken that she hadn’t gotten to know her better.”

“Yeah, maybe. Anyway, Jamie told me that the weather had been hot and the squares of turf laid over the grave had sort of shrunk and left ugly dry dirt and rocks between. Right on top of it all was a big pile of dog shit that had turned white the way it gets when it dries out. Jamie was outraged and grief stricken so he went over to kick the shit off the grave. As it turned out the shit wasn’t dry at all except just on the surface, so he got dog shit all over his shoe. His grief took possession of him then. He stomped off outraged, trying to wipe the shit off his shoe onto the grass. He said his heart was stuck so far up in his throat that it ached. Tears just started streaming down his face. He and Judy stood there holding each other with the twins kicking between them, sobbing for a long while.”

Lesa got up and walked over to where Ray stood. “I can’t think of anything to say, Ray, except that I love you to the end of the universe.” They clung to each other a long while then.

Ray seemed restless. Lesa took his hand and led him inside the carefully demarcated circumscription of the graves. From left to right it was Helen’s father, her mother, Helen, and Ray’s mother.

“Ray,” this is weird.”

“Yeah?”

“Your father and you are missing.”

“Me?”

“Yes. I mean there’s no room for you or your father up here.”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Dad went over the dam, and I will too.”

Cosmological Considerations

“What on earth do you mean, ‘You will too’? You most certainly won’t! Not unless it’s you and me hopping off ‘that edge toward which I’ve been pushing you ever since we met’ as you told me back at the Sheltry Hotel that time before the Yankee game.”

“You still don’t forget anything, do you?”

“Well, I do actually anymore, Ray. I don’t have that eidetic memory the way I used to. I used to think I had a better memory than you, but I’ve come to realize that I just still had some of what you had lost. But I’ve already lost much more than you had back then.”

“I suppose that’s what living with an old man does to a girl,” he smiled.

“No. But what I was referring to was that comment you made before that game in old Yankee Stadium when you were so mad at me for my pushiness. And my comment about you ‘pirouetting’ at the plate when you responded by playing the ‘I’m not Julie-ette’ card, suggesting that maybe we should jump off the Harlem Bridge together. Remember that?”

“Like it was yesterday and I’m still sorry for having said it.”

“But we won’t do that, will we, Ray.”

“Nope, we won’t. That wasn’t what I meant. I just meant that Dad’s ashes got thrown over his dam and that’s what I want you to do with mine.”

“Really? I won’t do it. Not with all of them anyway. Some I guess, if that’s what you really want. But do you know what I am going to do?”

“You mean, do I know just how much you are going to flaunt denying my wishes?” He allowed himself a short chuckle.

“No. I won’t deny your wishes, Ray, but I’m going to take out a couple of teaspoons of your ashes before we send you down the spillway to your good night. It’s what I’m going to do with those small portions that you wouldn’t deny me, that I’m talking about now.”

“Oh, *those* ashes,” he said, teasing.

“Yes. Come here.” She stopped in front of Helen’s grave and knelt down. Poking her index and second finger straight into the soft soaked earth beside the stone, she forced out a finger-depth little hole into the sod. “Into a hole just like this one here by Helen’s side I’m going to pour some of your ashes out of the urn. Then I’ll plant a miniature rose in the hole like this,” she grabbed one of the rose stems from the bunch in front of the headstone and poked it into the hole and squeezed the earth in next to it so that it stood a lone sentinel.

“The other teaspoon?”

“You and I are going to design a heart-shaped locket to wear around my neck for the rest of my life – I’d like it if you wanted to help me with it. I’ll put something of you in it to remember you by until you die, and then I will fill it with your ashes. It will always hang between my breasts – or tits or boobs, or pastel pinks or whatever you decide you want me to call them – until I die. And then Roger and Ellie will be instructed to pour them in on top of my ashes and thoroughly mix them before they throw me over the dam with you.” There were tears in her eyes again as she gave him a long and passionate kiss.

Cosmological Considerations

“Wow,” Ray responded, quite moved by all those histrionics. “You are some kind of romantic, aren’t you? When I first fell in love with you in the Alpha and Omega, I had no idea just how fantastic it could be. Pastel pinks, let’s go with pastel pinks. I like that you know. It’s the highest rank.”

“We’re not just your average everyday lovers, are we?”

“Nope. Never have been, have we. But there are a couple of flaws in your vision.”

“Flaws? What flaws?”

“No urn and a teaspoon of Lesa up here with Ray.”

“Yes, okay you and me. But no urn? There’ll be more than a handful of you, Ray. You’ve always been more than a handful. What do you want me to put you in, a garbage sack?”

“A Folgers coffee container, a can, plastic, cardboard, whatever they sell it in at that time. Just take the last container from which I had coffee to drink.”

“Alrighty then.” She threw her arms around him again. “We have your funeral arrangements pretty well laid out, I think. They’ll play hell trying to find you or Einstein, won’t they?”

“No funeral though.”

She let go of him. “We can at least get together and talk about the inimitable Ray Bonn, can’t we?”

“Could I stop you?”

“No.”

“Well, okay then. I guess you don’t need me for anymore of this funeral planning stuff.”

“Okay, but did Helen, or Allie or anybody else know what happened to your dad?”

“I don’t suppose. Nobody liked him and they all just figured I’d do what I would do with him.”

“Helen didn’t ever ask you?”

“Maybe she did, but I don’t think so. If she did, I don’t remember, but I didn’t tell her.”

“Why?”

“Well, she and Dad were different worlds. And she never told me what happened to her dad.”

“What do you mean she never told you? He’s right here. It says right here when he died. You were kids.”

“Yeah, but how? Did Helen tell you that?”

“I was only with her four days. You were with her her entire life.”

“Exactly.”

“What was she supposed to tell you, ‘My dad died last night at 1:43 AM Pacific Standard Time while you were sleeping’?”

“That might have been nice, but I knew when he died. I just wanted to know why.”

“Why?”

“Yeah, why?”

Cosmological Considerations

“Ray, that makes no sense whatsoever. You never told me ‘why’ Helen died. Why does anybody die? After all, it wasn’t like he was ‘Jesus Christ, who died for our sins,’ or something like that, was it?”

“I don’t think so, but I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? Did he get executed or kill himself or something?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Oh, God, Ray! This is wearing me out. I haven’t cried this much in years. What *is* it with you?”

“With me?”

“Yes, with you! Did he kill himself or not?”

“He got shot, Lesa, in the head. Apparently it was suicide, but I don’t know. Helen never explained anything to me, and we were as close as two kids ever get.”

“Shot?” Lesa seemed faint.

“Are you all right, Lesa? I’m sorry, I know this is really insensitive and too damned close to home, but it’s what happened. I hoped Helen had told you some of this when you said she had told you some secrets I didn’t even know about. It seemed reasonable to me that she might have told you since you had gone through something at least a little similar. Anyway, she knew that I liked him a lot. We got along. So why wouldn’t she tell me?”

“No, she didn’t tell me. Not that. Oh my,” she sighed deep and long. “It’s no wonder she loved me in spite of everything.”

“Yeah. I suppose that was part of it all right.”

“Did they have domestic problems?”

“Alice and him? No, not that I ever saw. He was probably the nicest man I ever knew growing up, except maybe Sy, but I didn’t know Sy as well. He was almost more of a father to me than my own. He taught me how to play the guitar and some musical theory that I was pretty charmed by. He taught me a few songs I liked, like ‘Old Shep’. I fished with him a couple of times, but I don’t think my dad liked that because Dad liked to fish too. But they were friends, best friends.”

“He and Alice loved each other?”

“Oh, I think so. They both doted on each other. They’d kiss each other right out of the blue. Helen and I thought it was kind of funny. My folks never did that.”

“So why’d he kill himself?”

“Exactly. That made no sense to me. It seemed to me that if Helen and I were these two effing twins that suckled at the same breasts as she bragged, and I had adopted her father almost as much as my own, I deserved to know what had happened. Wouldn’t you think she’d have told me? The thing about suicide is that there’s a suicide note. Right?”

“Well... my parents didn’t leave one that I was aware of, but yes. Usually. Yes, I would have told you, Ray, if we had been the twins... unless I lied. I might have lied. I’m sorry again. What else can I say?”

“So... did you really want Pandora’s box opened up like this?”

Cosmological Considerations

Lesa kissed him again. “Oh, yes, I did, Ray. I did. I do. It had to be opened. That night we first met when I spewed all that stuff out about my whole life and what a poor little waif I was, I had no idea to whom I was talking, did I? Or maybe I did. Maybe it came through between all the lines of your writing and that’s how I knew you were the one guy in all the world who could turn my world right side up.”

“So is it right side up now?”

“It is, Ray. But I don’t think I’ve got yours righted for you yet, have I?”

“Questions again. Well, anyway, I guess the box is open.”

“Prometheus’s box.”

“No, Pandora’s. I don’t mess with Prometheus. Crucifixion in whatever form, whether eagles’ talons and beaks, or nails in crosses, just ain’t my thing.”

“So how’d you do the thing with your dad? I mean, get his ashes over the dam – I might need some information on that, don’t you think? The dam evidently wasn’t completed yet when your dad died.”

“No, it wasn’t, so I hid him in my file cabinet in my office at the physics department at the U until they completed the dam. Then I talked to the foreman that I had worked with some and asked him if he’d give me access up on the top when they opened it up. He thought it was the appropriate thing to do. He was a friend of Dad’s. We did it together on the sly. I’m sure we could have gotten authorization and they would have publicized it, but neither of us thought Dad would have liked that. I always thought that what we did was the right thing to have done, don’t you? Helen was up on the ridge with her mother and the two kids at the time. She didn’t know I was doing that.”

“I’m sure it was the right thing, Ray. Thanks for bringing me up here and talking to me. This is more like when we fell in love than I remember in all the years between. Being a good listener isn’t enough. I need you to be a good talker too.”

“There’s only been a few times in my life like this when I couldn’t stop talking. I guess it takes emotional involvement. I’ll never be a ‘good talker’ though.”

They began walking back to the car.

“I guess death is an emotional issue, isn’t it?”

“More questions.”

“More questions.” She laughed and he laughed back. “Remember that question that reporter asked you after your retirement game at SAFECO field?”

“The one you’ve spent almost twenty years ribbing me about?”

“Yes, that one. I don’t think I ever ribbed you about what you said about ‘your Helen being dead’ though, did I? I shouldn’t have. I sure didn’t blame you for that. I figured that was what got you into that petulant frame of mind in bickering with Tim.”

“That was why, I think. Before that reporter came out with that little piece of insanity, I was all steeled for the typical athlete interview, except that I wasn’t going to praise God for having given me and the mighty Mariners the

Cosmological Considerations

victory over the soul defiling Yankees. But then he popped that stupid question. I knew I was off on the wrong foot of being an asshole again like the guy in the Titian painting that you told me about on the way back to Portland from that conference. By the way, it wasn't that Titian in the Smithsonian that I had referred to back at the Met that time; the one I was talking about exuded more power than that guy."

"Well, you did a job on Tim anyway."

"He got off easy."

"What do you mean he got off easy, an intensive exam on astronomical probabilities of life and death right after a baseball game is easy?" she laughed at him again for this old foible of his.

"Listen, Lesa, we're into the-rest-of-the-story stories today, right?"

"Right."

"Well, when I got back into the dugout and was sitting there waiting for fireworks, not knowing you were even there, the probability histrionics just kept going in my mind. I just couldn't stop it. It went on and on. The Helen thing and the probability thing and the looking down the wrong end of telescopes thing, just blab, blab, blab in my mind."

"So what'd you come up with, since I'm probably the only person in the world who would understand your probabilistic thinking."

"Yeah, you are, and since you're being polite on this topic for a change and I'm in the blab, blab, blab mode today, I'm going to tell you what I was thinking in the dugout. I took that probability issue back into the Helen thing. But first I was thinking about how pompous I had been introducing that fair coin paradigm as though it applied to baseballs."

"Well, I could see how it applied, but I don't imagine anyone else could have."

"No. It was illegitimate anyway I decided because there wasn't any fair coin analogy anywhere. You were behind it all. The reason I even got an at bat at Yankee Stadium was because of you. And the reason the *Origins of Irreversibility* ever got written and published was because of you, and in short, you had kept sprinkling your magic fairy dust all over me from the time we first met, and here I had been blabbering away about it just having luckily happened. It overwhelmed me that I hadn't asked you to come to help me get through that whole retirement ordeal. So while I'm sitting there, depressed about so many things, I started thinking about the responses I could have made to the Helen question."

"They had you on the TV screen while you were sitting there all alone and obviously despondent. I imagined that everyone would be thinking that you were sad to be leaving baseball. I knew it had to be something else. Later I figured it was because you were embarrassed about having made a fool out of yourself with Tim."

"I know, you've showed me – how many times. Was it really that bad? I don't even know, and you have me so defensive about it after all these years that I can't think about it objectively."

Cosmological Considerations

“Maybe we need to look at it again.”

“No!”

Lesla laughed, “Okay. I was just teasing you anyway, Ray. It was not that bad. In fact, a lot of people have told me that they watch it every once in a while, just to get a perspective on things.”

“Yeah, well, for perspective, here we go. Okay, I’m mad at the reporter for asking whether I has seen Helen looking down on me and I’m embarrassed and trying to blame my embarrassment on the reporter probably, so I’m thinking about what Helen said, about “The tragedy cannot be in dying then, can it, but in not having lived.” And I’m twisting that into a probability thing.”

“A probability thing?”

“Yeah. See my mom and Alice had done this synchronization thing that I know you and Allie reenacted in another generation-and-a-half of forcing the genetic recombinatorics to meet your perceived needs.”

“Ray...”

“Lesla, I’m not stupid. I know what you did.”

“It just happened, Ray. I mean for Allie and me. I knew she was having a period at the same time as me – big secret that is. You had said you didn’t care if I wanted to get pregnant right away, that we didn’t need to take any more precautions. You remember, don’t you?”

“Yes, yes.”

“Well, Allie asked me one day if we were trying to have a baby or were we taking ‘precautions’. I told her we weren’t going to take any more, so she asked if I cared if she didn’t take any precautions at the same time either so that maybe we’d have two children close together like you and her mom. That was all there was to it.”

“Yeah, like I said. I assume you told her she should ask Tom that.”

“No, I didn’t, but I’ll readily admit that I should have, but you know that Tom wouldn’t have cared if that was what Allie wanted.

“Yeah, I know.”

“Well, that wasn’t what you were thinking about after that game. I had nothing to do with that.”

“Yeah, nothing to do with this particular part maybe. I was just thinking about the probabilities involved in the simple synchronization of Helen’s and my birth.”

“And you got astronomical numbers there too.”

“Yeah. Looking at the numbers of alternative haploids from all four parents to determine just how likely it was that Helen and I would have emerged was pretty unlikely. We were merely one of the ten-to-the-umpteenth-power of possible only-child-twins standing in line to try out for our parts in the production. Then I got thinking of just Helen herself – the odds of her having stepped to the front of the line that night for the right to exist. There were ten-to-the-fifteenth power of possible Helens, and of all those, my Helen actually existed – actually – for fifty years. I compared that with the enormity of the tragedy of not having existed at all? There had been

Cosmological Considerations

overwhelming odds against her ever having lived at all. I mean, really, Lesa. It seemed as though I should have been filled with joy that she had defied such odds to be with me for over fifty years. But I wasn't; I was heart broken instead. We just aren't very objective about such things."

"No, we're not. But that's what you were thinking down there with your face so sad after such an absolutely fabulous career as the greatest slugger of all time? Ray Bonn, you never cease to amaze me."

"Didn't we comment one time on Joseph Conrad having written that, 'Man is amazing, but no masterpiece' line?" I think that's what it comes down to, isn't it? We are all amazing when you consider the odds that we have overcome just to exist, but hardly masterpieces on that account."

"You are," she said. "You definitely are."

"No. Amazingly lucky because of your having handed me that magic coin with no fairness to it at all. You know, it's good to finally have someone to tell all this to. It's like when you're a little kid and you go on a trip. While you're on the trip, you see a moose, and you say, 'Look, over there, it's a moose,' and if someone else sees it before it disappears into the thickets, it suddenly becomes real. It comes into the realm of something that has actually existed, even if only for a fleeting moment. Otherwise, even what we see with our own eyes is just a possibility that never really existed at all. It's Wheeler's prescription for what is real as anything that produces an irreversible effect. Without that interaction of sharing the moment, nothing really happened."

"That's why we have to talk, Ray. That's why you write. It's the only irreversible effect of thought. That's what was good about the physics we shared together. We both existed in the same universe when we did physics together. I'm really looking forward to getting to do it with you again."

"Me too," Ray affirmed, "so we can share mooses."

It was starting to get dark. There were large splashes of raindrops on the windshield. It was a darkness, that would only intensify as the early sunset of a late fall day obscured by clouds and wooded hills, that allowed a curtain to fall on this drama.

"Shall we head back," Ray asked. "I think you've probed the depths Canyon Creek. We can come back another time if you like. Maybe next summer when it isn't so gloomy."

"It's been wonderful, Ray. Gloomy or not. Would you like me to drive for a change?"

"Yeah. Do you mind? The oncoming headlights bother me at night."

So they dashed around the vehicle to change seats in the rain, kissing once and getting wet in the short interval of the exchange. Lesa got the car started and headed back down off the ridge.

As they left the cemetery Ray waved and said, "Goodbye all you lucky people who have shared the honor of existence with us."

Lesa chuckled, enjoying his refreshed frame of mind.

Cosmological Considerations

Then down over the crest, “Watch that first turn, Lesa. It’s a doozie,” Ray cautioned.

“Evidently.”

“You hungry yet?” Ray asked.

“Not yet. I’d like some coffee though. I think there’s some left. Do you mind pouring some?”

“Sure. I mean, no, of course not.”

Crossing the bridge, they both glanced up over the dam. “No more rainbow,” Lesa said.

Ray responded, “No more paradise.”

After they finally got to the end of highway 20 and had turned south onto I-5 at Burlington, Lesa’s cell rang again.

“Oh, hi, Roger. You’re watching us, huh. So much for these spying devices your father purchases to keep track of you,” she was laughing at something Roger had said.

“You tell him to get off my computer,” Ray said loud enough for Roger to hear.

“He says he knows exactly when he has to get off it now by watching where we’re at.”

“Why don’t you take Ellie out to supper somewhere nice,” Lesa said. “We’ll be a while. I think your father wants to stop off and have some supper before long.”

There was a delay for conversation at the other end.

“Wonderful. We had a wonderful time. I didn’t know just how little I really knew about your father. It turns out that there’s a lot more to him than just hitting a baseball. He’s like an iceberg – most of it’s under water.” She smiled looking over at Ray to make sure he was properly disgusted with her pun.

“Yes.” She laughed. “Oh, really. Well, you better talk to your dad about that. Yes. There’ll be plenty of time.”

Ray wondered what she had responded to.

“Okay, Honey. Goodbye.”

“Somebody contact him?” Ray asked.

“Yes. Stanford.”

“They’re interested in him just for football?”

“Football and baseball both, I guess.”

“Hmm. I wonder if Eddie had something to do with this.”

“You know he didn’t.”

#7 Holing Up for the Night

They were hungry so they stopped at the Arlington exit for dinner at O'Brian's and ended up getting home about nine o'clock. They were tired both physically and emotionally. It had been a big day.

There was a note from Roger on the breakfast nook table. "Aunt Allie says I can stay in their spare room again. You can call me when you get home." So Lesa called while Ray got a pot of coffee brewing.

"So, it's going okay? You didn't get too sore from all the hits last night?"

"Sure. We're pretty tired. Big day, yes. You need to have your father take you up there sometime."

Ray thought about her comment to Roger and figured he probably owed all of his kids some kind of a trip up there some day.

"Tomorrow then. I think we'll probably sleep in. We're tired, and probably too keyed up to go to sleep for a while."

That accurately described Ray's state of mind too. He was glad that they had not had to interact with people when they got back home, children or not.

"Good night, Honey."

Then Ray noticed that she was looking at her cell, a little confused.

"Cynthia. She must have called while we ate. I didn't notice when we got back in the car." She put the phone to her ear listening to the message.

"Dad's sick."

She punched in a number.

"Lesa! Do you know what time it is back there?" Too late.

"Hi, what's the deal with Dad?"

It was obvious that Cynthia was doing some lengthy explaining.

"Oh. But they don't think it's serious?"

More explaining that Ray tried to decipher from Lesa's expressions.

"They'll send him home tomorrow then? Is he there?"

Ray watched Lesa as she listened. He got up to get some coffee even before it finished brewing.

"Oh, okay. I won't talk to him long. Then get back on afterward. Okay."

There was a pause. "Daddy. You take care of yourself. You're important to too many of us to take chances like that. We love you."

Cosmological Considerations

As Ray listened and watched Lesa, he sipped at his cup of coffee. He got up and went over to pour another cup for Lesa.

“Okay. I’ll talk to you tomorrow then. I love you so, so much, Daddy. Remember that.”

Then it was obviously Cynthia back on the line. “He sounds good,” Lesa said. A pause. “Yes. We went up The Creek today. It was unbelievable, Cynthia. I saw stuff and heard stories I had had no idea had actually ever happened. You know Ray’s old teammate, Jonesy. You met him at the funeral. Big guy. Yes. We went into this rest home that Ray had built way back when he was in high school, I think, to see if Jonesy was in there as Ray had heard, and guess what? He had just died – last night. He was still in his room and they were picking him up.”

Now why on earth would Cynthia give a damn about that, especially with Fredrik sick. Why was she telling Cynthia that? Ray wondered about Lesa as he watched her listening now.

“Yes. Yes, I did. Uh huh. Yes. We went to the cemetery. We got some roses and put them on Helen’s grave.”

Lesla could go on sometimes. Ray didn’t enjoy talking on phones. It was hard enough talking when you could see faces and guess at people’s interest. Everyone was always interested in what Lesa had to say though. It was the way she said things, Ray thought.

“That dam is something else, Cynthia. You guys have to go up there with us some time. It is really interesting, and it had a double rainbow way up over it when I first saw it. Yes, it was absolutely magnificent. It rained off and on all day, but in the summer some time it would be really nice.”

Cynthia was doing a bit of talking now too evidently. It had been a little while since they had gotten with them. That was something else Ray figured they had to do. Probably Lesa would be wanting to do that very soon if Fredrik was having problems.

“Yes, thank you Cynthia. I will. I’ll leave this phone on. I’ll call you tomorrow. Get some sleep. I love you too. Bye.”

Lesla looked up at Ray. “Thanks for the coffee.” She picked it up and sipped at it. It was obviously still too hot. She put it back down. “Dad’s in the hospital.”

“Is it serious? Well, I guess if he’s in the hospital it must be, but what is it? His heart?”

“They don’t know. Apparently his heart is okay, but it seemed like he was having a heart attack to Cynthia. They’re checking it out and keeping him for observation overnight. They’ll let him out in the morning if they don’t find anything... which apparently they won’t.”

“Did she tell Leonard?”

“No, not yet. They don’t want to disrupt his studies unless it is something. So I guess we just wait.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Would you like to go? Alone, or with me, either one. Clearly Roger has a home away from home at the Wilsons so we’re free to go.” Ray smiled, seeing some humor in his current relaxed attitude on that issue.

“Thanks for thinking of that, Ray. I would like to go there pretty soon anyway. Do you think we could do that before long? Maybe we could spend Christmas there this year.”

“Or Thanksgiving. A twenty-year reunion of that special time.”

“Yes. That’s even sooner. Could we plan on that? Can I set that up tomorrow if Daddy comes home from the hospital?”

They barely had their coats off and already they were knee-deep in the land of the living, or the dying, but at least the not-yet-dead. Ray realized that he had had a major attitude adjustment today. Lesa’s day trip had really made a difference. She was dreamy eyed sipping at her coffee now, deep in thoughts of past or future and he loved her more than ever.

“I wonder what thoughts are worth anymore. It was a penny each when I was a kid, so what’s that make them, a buck twenty-five now?” Ray asked.

“It’s probably wealthy people like you who have driven up the price. You seem always to be in the market no matter what the price.”

“Always willing to pay a high price for yours,” he said as he got up. “I’m going to lay a fire in the fireplace what do you think of that? Too late?”

“No. It’s not too late for me. I think it would be nice. The house is rather chilly, and I’d like to discuss our day today... and Thanksgiving.”

Ray went to get the wood, laid a fire, and got it going. Meanwhile Lesa had gone to get her pajamas and robe on. So while Lesa sat watching the kindling begin to snap and pop, with the fire beginning to catch the larger pieces, Ray also got into his pajamas and robe.

Coming into the living room then, he asked, “Is there a wine you like? Or does coffee do it?”

“Coffee does it, but I would like some more.” She handed the cup up to him. He reached down for it as she laid back on the rug before the hearth. He watched her writhe there like a kitten as he walked off for their coffees.

When he returned, she sat up and took the cup he offered. He sat down beside her with his legs crossed in front of him.

“Growing old is different than I thought it would be,” she said. “It happens all along, but it dawns on you all of a sudden, doesn’t it?”

“You’re not old,” he laughed at her seriousness. “But I guess when you’re married to an old man it has to feel that way sometimes, doesn’t it?”

“That’s not it. It’s children growing up and getting independent, parents becoming infirm. All that.”

Ray allowed as how, “Even though that’s the normal routine, I guess the previous generation of our families haven’t had much of that routine, have they? Nor have we.”

“No. That has obscured the usual realities, I guess. My entire life I remember all the hype about organ transplants and health products that will increase the normal life expectancy by huge amounts. That doesn’t really

Cosmological Considerations

seem to happen though, does it? Life expectancy is going up, of course, but it isn't like we will ever be fit to live forever, is it?"

"No. I don't think it is. It always seemed to me as though there was a certain unrealistic aspect to all the excitement about that kind of research. I seriously doubt whether Pascal, Galois, Maxwell, et al. would have got that much more done if their life spans had been doubled, or tripled, or quadrupled. It really is too bad Pascal wasted so much time gambling and Galois on playing games though."

"Or Maxwell who was so hung up on avoiding both," she laughed.

"If there hadn't been a dam, what do you imagine your parents' lives having become? I suppose they'd have died by now anyway."

"I've imagined Mom and Alice dying in much the same way as Helen did, and that wasn't much fun either. Adam Bonn is hard to imagine as going any other way than how he did. It seems fitting. Maybe a heart attack, I suppose, or a mine collapse. Your mom?"

"It's just hard for me to get a grip on that. She'll forever be young and beautiful. A sickness like Helen's seems almost more unfair than what actually happened to my mother."

"Yeah. Since we have to die one way or another."

Ray and Lesa both sat there staring into the fire.

"Having existed is so much better than the much higher probability alternatives though, isn't it? Helen was right about that," Lesa smiled.

"You know that's not what Helen meant with that statement of hers though, don't you? She just meant it more in the sense of 'It doesn't matter so much that we die as long as we have done something productive and meaningful with our lives first.' I'm not sure that even matters though. Maybe just being born is miracle enough. What we do with it is just up to us."

"Yes, I know how she meant it, and that's a good thing to say and think about. But I really like your twist on it too; it's even better. Who knows, you might have started a cult religion if you had come out with that during that interview with Tim way back then. It's a shame you won't have a tombstone on which to place your twist."

"It would take a pretty big slab of marble to get my twist chiseled in stone and then Tim would probably come along and try to refute it in stone, like Holden Caulfield's tombstone with 'Fuck you' all over it."

They both chuckled a little and continued to drink their coffees as they watched the fire.

Finally Ray said, "I don't think the world needs any more religions though. A few less wouldn't hurt. I can think of three in particular."

As Ray put his free hand on Lesa's thigh, she scooted over closer to him.

"This is nice," she said dreamily. "Remember I told you that you would have to hold me for many days in a row before we could discuss what Helen told me when I was up here before she died... It's weird having lived in this same house with you for nearly twenty years since then, isn't it?"

Cosmological Considerations

“Yeah. It is weird. So can I start holding you now, so we’ll meet your Monday deadline?” he teased.

“I won’t be able to make it to Tuesday without doing the prime-time explanation, will I?”

“Nope. You ready now?”

“I’m not, Ray. It’s just really hard and I still need a day and a couple of nights of you holding me real tight. You can’t imagine how much today helped to get it all in perspective. It’s what I’ve needed.”

“Holding you real tight is not a problem. Monday’s fine.” He sat his emptied cup down on the hearth and she handed him hers. It was nearly empty too, so he drank the rest and sat her cup right next to his, ceremonially. Then he scooted down and drew her to him. Soon he had his hand under her pajama top holding her breast. “I feel the RGB vision coming back.”

“Me too,” she said as she laid her head back to kiss him.

Just so, a love affair that had been interrupted so long ago by exigencies of social constraint, death, and that busy-ness called marriage, and having children, erupted again into that flame that so ennobles the human condition. The days and days of holding each other as the realization of true existence began again for them in the way they each had always known it should have been but wasn’t. All the memories and shadows of a vaguely remembered past, including the ones they each had loved so dearly, disappeared with the unified solipsism of true love into the realm of never having existed at all. Only what was now within them both had ever existed at all or could affect the two of them now interpenetrated so completely.

The next morning they were sleeping soundly in each other’s arms beneath the blanket Ray had at one time or another during the night brought in along with the pillow on which to lay his true loves head.

Roger unlocked the front door. Walking in unannounced, he had seen them there and gone off again, bewildered.

Later in the day, he returned, this time with Ellie. He quietly opened the front door and pointed out to Ellie where they had been lying when he had come before. Then, hearing a sound coming from the kitchen, they sneaked around the corners in the hall to peak in at Ray and Lesa now sitting at the table. Lesa sat with the blanket wrapped around her as she ate some cereal. Ray, right next, his arm around her eating cereal too, was saying silly things to her to which she giggled.

“You two alright?” Roger asked, both he and Ellie looking extremely concerned.

“Oh, you surprised me, Roger. Hi, Ellie,” Lesa said.

Ray turned, “Hi kids. How’re you doing today?”

“I asked if *you* were all right,” Roger repeated somewhat crossly.

“We’re fine,” Lesa replied. “Just a little drunk on happiness. Do you think you two could spend tonight at Wilson’s too? We’re sort of in the middle of something very important.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Very important?” Roger looked at Ray quizzically, then at Lesa. “Aren’t you two a little old for this sort of thing?”

“I am; your mother isn’t, so I’m playing along,” Ray responded cheerily.

Roger looked at Lesa.

“He’s lying,” she said. “Neither one of us is too old. But you kids are too young to understand.” She looked at Ray and they began laughing.

“We’re leaving,” Roger said in disgust as he turned to walk off down the hall, leaving Ellie staring from Lesa to Ray and back.

Lesa winked at Ellie.

Roger yelled from somewhere in the front of the house, “You coming Ellie?”

Ellie stood there a moment longer and smiled broadly at the breakfasting couple. “Cool,” she said, and then yelled to Roger, “Coming!” and ran off after him.

When Ray and Lesa heard the front door slammed, they both burst into peals of laughter. “Cool,” Lesa spluttered between outbursts of laughing.

“Yeah, *way* cool.” Again they busted out laughing.

“You know,” Lesa spoke after she finished her cereal, “I feel like going to bed. It’s been a long day.”

So they put their dishes away and walked toward the bedroom. Ray stopped and said, “Wait.” He went into the living room and picked up Lesa’s pajamas, top and bottom, his bottoms, and some scattered tissues, rejoining Lesa in the hall with all the flotsam wadded in his hands.

“Ohhh,” she exclaimed. “Poor Roger. That must have been a shock to him. Ellie too.”

“That may be enough to keep them off sex for a while, huh?”

When they got to their bedroom Ray tossed the pajamas, flushed the papers, and took the blanket off from around Lesa. “You are so beautiful,” he said.

“You too. You know, back when you were insisting that I would end up marrying someone else and having someone else’s children, it used to make me so mad at you. It made me nauseous to think about it. I wanted you so badly, and then I felt so awful for wanting you in that way what with you being happily married and all.”

Then the phone rang.

“It’s Allie,” Lesa said. “I probably ought to get it. She’ll be worrying after the report the kids have given her.” She picked up the phone. “Hi.”

She began laughing and strolled on out of the room. Ray hopped into bed. It was cold without anything on. He could hear Lesa chatting away cheerily down the hall.

“Yeah, he died,” Ray heard her say and then she must have made the turn into the kitchen.

Why on earth all this pretense at being concerned about someone who had never been of any consequence whatsoever? Oh well. Ray guessed that the death of contemporaries always carries its own special significance. Jonesy

Cosmological Considerations

hadn't had all that great of a life. He had probably caused himself much more trouble than he ever had anyone else. Someone notices that he died, so what? He deserves that much, doesn't he?

Eventually Lesa was back placing the phone back on the bedside table. She hopped into bed shivering. She had goose bumps all over her. Her pastel pink nipples were tight little knots.

"That's crazy walking around in the nude that long. It's cold out there."

"Tell me about it." She laughed. "Allie was just interested in our trip."

"Jonesy?"

"Yes, him too."

"Why?"

"She just is. She's a caring person. Anyway, she's on her way over here to pick up something she thinks she left over here the other night. She'll just be a minute."

"Couldn't it wait?"

"She was already on her way. I didn't feel like worrying her about what secretive thing we have going on mid-morning."

The doorbell rang. Lesa bounded out of bed to get her robe and was gone. Ray heard the far-off mumbles of conversation for a while and must have dosed. He awoke with Lesa crawling in next to him again.

"You can't sleep yet," she said.

Pretty soon they both collapsed back into an exhausted slumber in each other's arms. When Ray awoke again, he could tell by the dull light that seeped through the shades that it was already late afternoon. Wow, were they acting like a couple of stupid newlyweds or what?

"How'd you sleep, Ray?"

The sound seemed to emerge from under the covers right under his chin. He folded the covers back to look into Lesa's face with her hair damp against it.

"I slept great. You must have too."

"Oh, I did. It was truly wonderful. You exhausted?"

"Not anymore."

"Then hold me some more and do it again."

"Aren't you afraid you'll break this thing?" he asked.

"No. That's what it wants."

Ray laughed. "You think? He's not very subtle, is he?"

"How could he be, he's the personality behind the personality of Ray Bonn. The reality under the floorboards of Ray Bonn's reality."

Then time went away again as they enjoyed the more pleasant aspects of the nether world. When he woke up next, it was pitch black in the house. The phone was ringing, with Lesa scurrying to get it.

"Oh, hi, Cynthia. I've been meaning to call but it's just been crazy around here. How is Dad?" There was the delay for Cynthia's response. Then, "Oh, good. So they don't think it's anything then?" After Another appreciable response interval, Lesa asked, "So why did it happen?"

Cosmological Considerations

Ray was watching Lesa's range of expressions, so happy to be with someone so lovely. He closed his eyes, almost dozed with the lull and sway of Lesa's voice, the voice in which all information seemed to come to him. He heard the word "Thanksgiving" and became more focused on what would transpire when that rolled around. It was clear that there was complete agreement on Lesa's suggestion that "we three will go there." The details of conversation were less interesting to Ray than the subtle nuances in the tones on Lesa's body that Ray's having become accustomed to the darkness had allowed him to see. He laid his hand on her hip as it was turned away from him. She placed her free hand on his hand gently, approvingly. He dozed off again, waking this time with her leaning her breasts down into his face.

"I've worn you out, haven't I?"

"Yeah. Just what the doctor ordered."

"Aren't you hungry?"

"Starving."

"Well, let's get something to eat before we shower together."

They did, chatting easily as they each ate a sandwich and sipped glasses of milk. Ray asked about Cynthia and Fredrik's false alarm and the arrangements for Thanksgiving. Would Leonard be there? Was Lesa sure Roger wouldn't have a basketball game he wouldn't want to miss, etc.

Ray noticed that when he asked, "So what was so damned important to Allie?" that Lesa was not as comfortable.

"What is it?" he asked. "Is this part of what I have to wait for prime time to hear about?"

Clearly, it wasn't funny to Lesa. "It is," she said at last. "And after tomorrow, I won't ever act so secretively again. Can we still just go with that subterfuge?"

"Why not?" he said cheerfully. "I guess I've gone along blissfully not knowing what's been going on for a lot of years. Maybe after tomorrow I'll wish I had never complained about that, huh?"

"Oh no, you won't." She paused here. "But you'll understand why I took so long to get up the courage to tell you."

"Well, in that case, maybe we better get back in there and let me finish holding you for the required number of days, so you won't renege."

"I won't renege, but I do want the rest of the holding. Anyway, I'm getting addicted to it. Do you think we can do this sort of thing all along from now on? I have needed a lot more of this."

"I wouldn't quit seeing a doctor whose therapy is working out so well, now, would I? I need it too."

#8 *Good News and Bad News*

Monday morning was Prime Time.

Seven in the morning isn't traditional 'prime time' of course, but she had promised. Ray had awakened with Lesa right up next to him holding his head in her arms and charms. She was kissing him below his receding hairline. This was indeed Prime Time.

"Today's the day, Ray," she said.

"Again?" he laughed.

"Yes, that again too, but I promised to open up to you the way you have been to me these last few days. Then we won't either of us keep anything from the other for as long as we live, okay?"

"My knife's over there if you want me to sign in blood."

"Promise you won't let go of me for a minute." Then she waited, looking at him apprehensively. "Physically or mentally. Please promise me now."

"I do," he said.

"Okay. I don't know where to begin."

"The good news or the bad news first? Is that the question?"

"I guess it is. Do you want the good news or the bad news first? They're both about the same."

"I should probably get the bad news out of the way first, but I might not be able to handle it, huh?"

"Maybe not," Lesa had clearly steeled herself against any exigency.

"Okay, the good news."

"The good news is that if Roger and Ellie ever end up having sex, it won't be incest," she blurted out too loudly, too quickly, too awkwardly.

Ray stared up at her, shocked.

"Hold me, Ray!" Lesa cried. "You have to hold me now."

He scooted up in the bed. He grabbed her in his arms and squeezed her to him, hardly breathing to let no more emotions flow while she cried in his arms. Slowly sanity seemed to gather in his thoughts as the logical implications dawned on him. He could handle it. He had peeked under floorboards before. Of course it was *his* floorboards this time. There was a sense of humiliation that came with the sanity.

Lesa had stopped crying now.

Cosmological Considerations

“So why didn’t you tell me, Lesa. I would have understood. You needed a child. I love him.”

“No, Ray, no!” She fairly screamed it. “This isn’t *my* secret, Ray, it’s Helen’s!”

“Helen’s? It can’t be Helen’s.”

“I am so sorry, Ray. I am so, so sorry.” Lesa bounded up to a sitting position staring down at Ray now. “I’d almost rather it was mine.”

“That just can’t be... You’ve got something wrong.”

“It wasn’t her fault, Ray. I should have started from the beginning. The good news is never the place to start, is it?”

“I guess not. What’s so good about the good news you’ve told me, before I ask for the bad news?”

“Roger and Ellie, Ray. They love each other so much – just as you’ve known. They need to know that it’s legitimate – to be free to love each other. They can know that now, Ray! And Ray,” she sobbed, “please know how good that is.”

Ray still just stared at her, dumbstruck.

“There is more good news, I guess,” she said. Then after a moment’s reflection, “No, maybe not.”

“Try me,” he said very sobered now.

“You beat up the right guy,” she blurted out again and grabbed Ray again. “Oh, Ray. I’m no good at this! None of it is bad Ray and yet I make it all sound terrible.”

“It’s not terrible?” Ray asked, stunned. “How is what you’re telling me not terrible? Jonesy? Helen?”

“No, Ray, it isn’t.” She put his face in her hands and shook it to get his eyes to focus on her. “Helen was raped! She was raped, Ray. Jonesy raped her.”

“Lesa, please stop. Can we just hold each other for a while before you tell me anymore?”

“Oh, yes, Ray. Please hold me.”

She lay up against him kissing his face until he held her so tightly that she desisted to just nestle in next to him. They lay that way for a long time with Ray barely thinking at all. He was aware only of Lesa being pressed tightly against him. Nothing else but that sensation entered his mind for long intervals and then his thoughts would coalesce around some aspect of what she had told him until he could bear it no longer and then he would squeeze her even tighter and then it would just be Lesa again.

He thought that Lesa was almost asleep with her rhythmic breathing, but he knew she wasn’t. She seemed peaceful though. He realized what a terrible burden she had been carrying alone for so long, for twenty years. That became the central fact for him then, the fact that Lesa had borne that terrible unhappy fact until she had absolutely had to tell him. Once again, he realized that he was not the only one who had had to look under the floorboards of other

Cosmological Considerations

peoples' reality to help them get it straight without having any help in doing it. A secret that had kept him out of prison.

"Jonesy raped her that night?"

"Yes."

"She didn't know what to do to keep us together other than to bear the shame all by herself. Is that it?"

"Yes. She wanted to tell you, but she couldn't. She tried."

"She did." Ray stared off into the distant past.

"She did?"

"Yeah. She tried. She told me that she was pregnant that night she made love to me for the first time."

Lesla raised her head to look directly into Ray's eyes. "She told me that she had never told you," she exclaimed.

"She didn't think I understood it and she would have been afraid to clarify what she had said."

"So you knew?"

"No, of course, I didn't know. I'm stupid. She wanted to talk about that night, but I kept bringing up other things instead of talking about it, because it embarrassed me – more than the Julie incident. There had been something wrong about that night. I thought it was just my ineptness."

"But you said she told you."

"Well, before she shipped me off to California so she could get you to come here, she kept hinting about that whole situation. She probably wanted me to talk about having asked Marsha out to that dance and that whole uncomfortable incident. She probably even wanted me to mention Jonesy, and me beating him up. I suppose that would have made it easier for her to explain. But I wasn't about to ruin the fond memories we were re-living with that ball of worms."

"How direct were the hints?"

Ray looked over at Lesla who stared at him now. "Lesla, it's me here, Ray Bonn, the lifelong Aspergers sufferer. She told me flat out."

"Ray, quit it. You read between lines better than anyone I know. You just probably didn't want to read between those particular lines. What exactly did she tell you?"

"She said, 'That first night we made love I was pregnant,' or something like that, but at least she said that she 'was' pregnant, like past tense, not that she 'got' pregnant that night. She was upset about it, but it seemed like it was in the context of having made our university experiences more difficult. I thought you had probably shamed her for my not having achieved more in my chosen field at one time or another."

"Oh, I did, and I felt so awful about it, Ray. That was what that long fight we had was all about. Didn't you know that? When I didn't call you guys to talk personally for months, and you wouldn't call me at all. Remember? You wouldn't call me, and you didn't even know why?"

Cosmological Considerations

“Of course I remember. It was awful. I didn’t know what Helen was so all fired upset about though. She told me you were mad at her because she had hurt your feelings in some way, and she felt bad about it. I told her not to worry about it.” Ray uttered a pitiful laugh thinking about what he had told her. “I said, ‘Lesa doesn’t get mad, she just gets even instead.’”

“You told her that?” Lesa looked hurt. “Well, I guess it’s true, isn’t it? I had already gotten even – more than even – and I didn’t even know I had. I accused her of purposely getting pregnant just to make sure she got her man. Wasn’t that awful? I’m sure that’s the reason she wanted me to come here, to explain to me that, although she had done something like that, that she considered wrong, it had been a really hard situation for her.”

“Yeah. Wow.” Ray thought about it. “My poor Helen.”

“What did you tell her when she said she was already pregnant?”

“I corrected her English for Christ’s sake,” Ray said, feeling foolish and reaffirming his gullibility. “I think I just said, ‘*Became*, Helen, the word is *became*.’” Ray was shaking his head thinking about his arrogance. Had he told her that or just thought it; he couldn’t remember. Of course, she wouldn’t want to puncture his image of himself with all he was going through with her illness right then – or run off and murder Jonesy.

Lesa just looked at Ray as though expecting more.

“I told her not to go on like this, that she should not think that Allie had been a mistake in our lives, that she was one of the wonderful things that had happened to us.”

“What did she say to that?”

“She just looked at me with those dying eyes and drifted off to sleep.”

“Poor Helen,” Lesa exclaimed as she got up and walked over to the safe. She opened it and then opened her jewelry box, reaching down to the bottom of the box.

“What’s coming next?”

“It’s just what we did when I was here. Helen wanted us to help her write you this note.”

Ray watched as she extracted a neatly folded piece of paper that read, “For my Darling Ray” on the outside in a scratchy handwriting he could barely make out as having been Helen’s. But he could tell it was hers. He turned it over and saw that there was a seal in red wax on that side.

“Sealed? Why is it sealed? Is that Helen’s thumb print?”

“Yes. It was all her idea. It was actually a fun part of the activity. It helped us all bond.”

“All? Allie knows about this?”

“Yes. We both found out at the same time and we were both sworn to secrecy unless and until I chose to give you this.”

“So, Allie knows?”

“She knows.”

Cosmological Considerations

Ray was appalled at all this news. How could Allie have kept that from him? He had been with her almost every day for months after Helen died. How could she not have let on?

“It took her a little while after Helen told us.” Lesa seemed to be reliving it in her mind. “She ran off crying and Helen kept me from going to her right off. She wanted to tell me that she had known all along that I would be able to help Allie through this because of what I had been through myself not knowing that the man I thought was my father wasn’t. Helen was sensitive. She said she knew it was totally different as far as my going from a cruel father to a kind one, but I should convince Allie that she would always have her kind one and that you were her real father in every way that mattered.”

“God. How long was Allie alone?”

“Not long at all. As soon as Helen had told me what I just told you, she motioned for me to go to Allie.”

“And...”

“And I talked to Allie for hours with her not hardly saying anything.”

“And then?”

“She bucked up. She stood up and said, ‘Okay, what now?’ I just said, ‘Let’s go ask your mom.’”

“Helen held Allie for a few minutes then, telling her how much she loved her and how much her father (meaning you, of course) loved her too. Then she said, ‘Honey, this is going to be even harder on your father, and you’ll have to help him with it, if it comes to that. I’m leaving that decision up to you two. But keep in mind that your father’s anger knows no bounds.’”

“No decisions left for Ray, huh? There never are. Jonesy is dead.”

“I guess not. Maybe she thought you had already heard the message and decided not to accept it for whatever reason.”

“Why didn’t she just leave it like she had with her own father then? Who needed to know? In this case, who even wanted to know?”

“Roger and Ellie.”

“Oh.” Ray thought about that for a moment, realizing his reservations to that union were what was at issue here, why he was even finding out at all. “And so, you two weren’t worried about it, even helped to make it happen, knowing that at least genetically it was acceptable. Is that it? What about perception? Sometimes that matters too, not just in frivolous ways, but to the person’s psyche itself.”

“I guess that knowing that there was no genetic taboo was why we didn’t have to worry as much as you did, Ray. I’m not proud of waiting so damn long to tell you, and I even thought, what’s wrong with Ray never knowing. Why did Helen ever think Allie had to know... and me.”

“Yeah. Why?”

“Psyche, I guess. Roger’s and Ellie’s psychè.”

“Lesa! Helen wasn’t clairvoyant. She couldn’t see into the future. If you and Allie hadn’t known that those two were not closely related, all your emphases on their development would have been different. They’d have never

Cosmological Considerations

been raised with even the possibility of falling in love with each other. Brothers and sisters don't fall for each other. They have sibling rivalries and spats that avoid that sort of thing. And if they fell for each other thinking that they were siblings – or almost siblings – what would that do to them? Did you two ever think about that?"

"Brothers and sister do sometimes fall in romantic love, Ray, not often, but they do. It's really sad when they do. Of course Helen didn't know about Roger and Ellie, but she knew that everything that happens is unlikely. She had that drilled into her psyche by guess whom. In case the most unlikely of things happened, she wanted truth to be the arbiter rather than ignorance. In fact, she told us almost exactly that.

"Anyway, Ray, you're not looking at this objectively. You're too close to it now – looking down the wrong end of your own damn telescope. What if Stephanie had fallen in love with some guy who it turns out was Jonesy's son or grandson? What then? Helen shouldn't have worried about that?"

"So why did she have to tell *you*?"

"I've thought about that a lot. Believe me, I have. What I've come up with is that Allie had to know to protect her children. I had to know to help Allie get through it and to protect you because she figured Allie just might blow it. And the more brutal aspects of that rape she didn't want to tell Allie because that's her biological father. But she thought that you ought to know that aspect if you had to learn the rest."

It made sense. Ray looked down at the missive he held in his hand.

"Didn't she burn her fingers on this hot wax?"

Lesla laughed. "Yes, she did, and we all laughed about it. Burning her thumb was fun compared to the pain she was in."

Ray broke the seal carefully, pulling it away from one flap, opened the fold and read:

"My dearest Ray,

"I have never loved anyone in the world like I have loved you. You have always been all that really mattered to me personally. No one, not even in fantasy, ever, even momentarily, could approach the love I have always had for you. What I have to tell you here, and only if Lesla thinks you need to know it sometime, does not diminish in any way my love for you."

That was written in the same scratchy handwriting as on the cover. The last line was scratchier and less legible than the first. The next paragraphs were clearly in Allie's handwriting.

"Allie wrote this?"

"Yes. Helen asked her too."

Ray thought about that, and then continued reading:

"I wanted to tell you this the other day when we talked about Julie, but you misunderstood me. I understand that you don't really need to know any

Cosmological Considerations

of this and that it will cause you and Allie pain, and like you said, Allie was never one of our mistakes. I agree, of course, except that who knows what might transpire if one of Allie's children decides to marry one of Jonesy's descendants. So that's why I thought I had to tell Allie. And since I know that you and Lesa will one day be married..."

Ray pointed at that sentence and looked at Lesa. "Allie had to write all that?"

"Somebody did. I think that's why she had Allie do it, so you wouldn't get cynical about me having written it."

"It should not have been written by anyone. Helen should not have come up with that foregone conclusion about you and me."

"No, of course not. But she did and it was valid. Dying people don't lie, Ray. She saw it clearly."

"Clearly?" He read on.

"...it seemed reasonable that she be the one to help you through this."

Ray scowled as he looked up at Lesa. She just shrugged.

"This will all make sense to you when you remember that awful period in our teenage years when you were mad at me for being cool toward you, and when you went to that dance with Marsha. She told me what a prude you were. I was so proud of you and I should have just stopped it there, but I wanted to get even with you for what I thought was a humiliation of me. It was stupid, I know. I told Jonesy I'd like to go to that dance with him.

"He was fine until after the dance he took us up to the point, with me scolding him to take me home. He thought it was funny. When we got up there, I got nasty with him, hitting, and kicking, and even biting him. Then he got mean, really mean, Ray. He hurt me really badly, and all I could think about was that I'd probably get pregnant with that big oaf's baby. I was crying and screaming. He took me home, pretending that it was just having had sex that had hurt me and that it would be better next time. He said that.

"Then I guess you almost killed him, and it felt like things would be better again, but I couldn't come through on my promise to you then. I was a mess – you know what I mean. He hurt me too badly. I had to wait until homecoming, and by then I was pretty sure I was already pregnant. So I lied to you. It didn't seem to me that a cruel thing that happened on one night in my life should ruin what you and I had always had. I know there are more options now, and maybe there were then, but we were naïve, Ray. Both of us. All we ever wanted to do was the right thing. We grew up that way.

"Forgive me – one more time, and even more times in case there are other wrong things I have done to you – and remember always how much I loved you my entire life.

"Your only child twin,

So, teary-eyed, Ray handed the sheet to Lesa who took it and placed it back into her Jewelry box.

"So, who else knows?"

"I have never told anyone and won't tell anyone you don't want to know."

"Allie?"

"I don't think so. Tom, maybe."

"Tom and the kids are too smart not to have been worried sick if they didn't know. We're not the only ones in the family with IQs above zero."

"I know. It's worried me, but I didn't think it was my place to bring it up. Allie and I took the same oath and neither of us was designated as the enforcer for the other."

"Right. Well, it's fair to say Tom knows, and probably the kids must too, wouldn't you say?"

"Yes. I would say that, Ray. They are getting bolder. What are we to do? But first, there's one more secret I need to tell you that you might not like."

"Might not, or won't?"

"Okay, won't. You know the other day when I went into Jonesy's room up on the ridge?"

"Yeah," Ray was apprehensive.

"I took a DNA sample."

"Jesus, Lesa! That's what you were poking back into your purse when you came out? Why?"

"Yes, that's what I was doing. Allie wanted a sample just for proof."

"So you went up there with the explicit intention of getting a DNA sample from Jonesy?"

"If it worked out. Allie got the kit for me."

"From Tom no doubt. So he knows. Right?"

"Probably, yes."

"Definitely. And that's what Allie came by for."

"Yes. I'm sorry, I couldn't tell you. I told you I couldn't. We had to be sure."

"Have Tom and Allie over tonight – no excuses. Tom breaks it off at the hospital and gets his butt over here tonight, okay?"

"I'm sure he would if you asked him. You guys are good friends."

"And both the kids. It's grow-up time for the kids."

"They're grown up, Ray."

"Yeah, I know."

"Shall I call Allie or do you want to?"

"Maybe I should, don't you think? I'm her father – more or less. Time for me to buck up?"

"Yes. Buck up and buckle up but drive carefully this time." She handed him the phone smiling at him reassuringly.

He punched the button.

Cosmological Considerations

Allie answered, "Hi."

"Hi there kiddo," Ray said. Then his humor kind of fell apart on him. "I love you."

"I love you too, Daddy." It was obvious she was crying. "Lesa told you, didn't she?"

"Yeah. You and your mother did too. Lesa gave me the sheet you had to help your mother write. A pretty tough assignment, huh?"

"Oh, it was, Daddy. You can't imagine how awful that was, and then having to act like I didn't know it all these years. Seeing Jonesy at Mom's funeral was awful."

"We have a hard time hiding things, don't we, Honey?"

"We sure do, Daddy. Like when you told us all that you were in love with Lesa. It works so much better that way though, doesn't it? In the long run, I mean."

"It does for me, but I guess I've never really had to deal with something as difficult as your mother."

"Oh, you have, Daddy. I know you have. Lesa told me some more of the awful stuff up there that nobody ever knew about with you and your father and Mom and your mother and my grandmother."

"I guess there's always a certain amount of mess to clean up after our parents, huh? Anyway, Allie, we've got some clean up to work out with the whole family. Don't you think we ought to get this out in the open to air it out a little? Could you guys come over tonight? I think the kids should both be in on it too, don't you?"

"I do, Daddy. But..." she hesitated. "I have a confession to make."

"Yeah, I figured. They already know."

"Yes, I'm so sorry, but Ellie was so upset with what Roger had told her about her feelings being unnatural, that I thought I had to tell her that what she felt wasn't unnatural at all."

"At all? Well, maybe you did have to tell her something, but we need to all get together so we can get back on the same page. Let's do that tonight. Will Tom be able to make it, or do I need to call him?"

"Okay, that's a good idea. Tom will come. He's been more-or-less on call for this emergency. He knew it was going to happen right away. But... could I come over now and talk with you – just you and me?"

"I'd really like that, Allie. You had breakfast?"

To her negative response he said, "Well, neither have we. Why don't you come over and then after breakfast we can kick Lesa out of here for a while."

"I love you, Daddy."

"I love you too. You are my loveliest and my firstborn little Darling."

Lesa smiled at Ray as he hung up the phone. "You do alright for someone with Aspergers."

"Was that okay?"

"Perfect. I have to do some shopping today anyway or we'll be starving to death before long, so sure."

Cosmological Considerations

Allie arrived shortly with hugs, kisses, tears, and “Daddies” galore.

Lesa had some hotcakes ready to put on. The eggs were sizzling.

“Oh, good,” Allie said. “I love hotcakes.”

Lesa said, “Guess what? I knew that.”

“We finally got this awful secret out in the open now, huh Lesa?”

“We do. Now you and Ray have to figure out what you want to do with it.”

“You too. I just wanted to be with Daddy alone a little bit. I don’t know why, but I do.”

“It makes a lot of sense to me,” Lesa said. “Your case and mine are a lot different, I know, but your mom knew there was a lot of similarity. I think that’s a major part of why she told us both, don’t you?”

“Yes, but also because she knew you and Daddy loved each other.”

“That too. But when Ray found my dad, he took me there and then he left. We had to be together alone some to get used to the new situation. I think getting comfortable with every new situation together is important. There isn’t anything that’s actually changed between you two, but there’s the perception. It’s important that you both understand the other’s perception of it, don’t you think?”

Both Ray and Allie sat at the kitchen table staring at Lesa.

“Blab, blab, blab, there I go again.” Lesa laughed awkwardly as she flipped the pancakes.

“No, no, Lesa. You’re right on,” Allie comforted. “That’s why I had to come over, to make sure Daddy understands that he’s the only dad I’ve ever had.” She looked over at Ray hesitatingly, “I want to go to Jonesy’s funeral as his biological daughter just to start getting things right... legally. And I want you all to go with me for support.”

Ray was surprised. “Really? You really want to go to the funeral and be listed as his daughter?”

“I do. Is that all right? Tom wants us to.”

Lesa was bringing the hotcakes over, putting one on each of their plates. “How are you going to do that?” She went back to get the egg platter to put on the table.

Allie and Ray both watched her sit down, both silently, supposing she would answer her own question.

“You’d better get on the phone today to that mortuary and local paper up river then,” she said. “I think those guys that picked Jonesy up were from Thompson’s Funeral Home. That’s what it said on the van. You think they might need help with those funeral expenses, Ray?”

“Okay.” Allie responded. “I will call them, Lesa. Sure. We’ll get it in the paper and give folks upriver something to talk about for a while, huh?”

“It will all right,” Ray said laughing. “That’s for sure.”

“It’s going to break Marsha’s heart,” Lesa contributed to their momentary merriment. “It will seem totally unfair to her, I’ll bet.”

Cosmological Considerations

Ray looked over at Lesa, reading her thoughts and thinking she was not taking this emergency seriously enough.

“Well, it will.”

The chatter continued through a very pleasant breakfast. Allie asking some of the questions she had wanted to know about.

“Were you and Jonesy friends before that incident?”

“Yeah, pretty good friends. Well, I guess in all honesty, he was the only friend I ever had up there. He and I were the athletes; the other kids just filled out the teams for us. But he had this gung-ho attitude about everything that was about as opposite as you can get from me.”

Lesa and Allie shared glances and smiled knowingly.

“Do you want to know about him, or not?” Ray asked.

“Yes, yes. I’m sorry. I do.”

“I actually lived at his place for a while. You knew that didn’t you?”

“No, I didn’t. Why?”

Lesa interrupted at this point. “You two just sit here and keep at it. I have to get going. I have a bunch of shopping to get done for tonight.”

“For tonight?” Allie asked. “We’ll come over after supper.”

“No. You’re coming here. I don’t want to wait until after supper. I haven’t hardly seen my kids for a few days,” Lesa responded.

“Okay, but make it easy, so we can just talk.”

“Sure.” Lesa replied and was gone to get her coat.

“Well, back to Jonesy then,” Ray brought the conversation back to where it had been. “I lived with him for a few months after I left home because Dad called your mom a slut.”

“Mom never told me that.”

“She probably never told you anything that involved Jonesy, did she?”

“No. I guess she didn’t. So how’d that happen.”

“Long story...”

“Yes, I know, all your stories are long stories, so you never tell us.”

“I’ll shorten this one then. My dad was the one most people associated with the coming of that dam. Of course, he was arrogant enough to think that was fair. He thought it was all his thing – whether it was or not.”

“You don’t think it was?”

“Well, let’s just say that I question whether he was as major a part of it as he and everyone else thought. Okay? He was almost more of a mascot – a scape goat, I think. ‘You can’t blame Disney Corporation on Mickey Mouse’ – that sort of thing.”

“Mickey Mouse?” Allie laughed.

“Yeah, Mickey Mouse. When your Mom started organizing the high school kids and early Northwest environmental organizations to hold massive demonstrations against the dam right on the site where Dad and his men were working, he got pretty upset with her.”

“She got all that going herself as a teenager?”

Cosmological Considerations

“I think so. I don’t know, but she had a bunch of paperwork that she always hid when I was around, and she was on the phone an awful lot, usually cutting it short when I’d come around. I never thought it was her doing, but in retrospect it’s pretty clear. Julie more or less confirmed that it was her.”

“Wow. She was some kind of woman, wasn’t she?”

“She was.”

“And she never ever told you about that either?”

“No. That either.”

“Your women are pretty special people, aren’t they?”

“Yeah. Every one of them – not least of all, you.”

“I haven’t ever done anything.”

“Well, don’t you think your mother would have been in seventh heaven seeing what a success you’ve made of that environmental foundation we got going after she died?”

“Yes, but you and Lesa started it.”

“We – well, Lesa – just got the initial people together and you took over from there. You made it fly.”

“Thanks for saying that. I am proud of the success of that. It’s done some good, hasn’t it?”

“Yes, it has. Have you decided yet whether to run for office?”

“I haven’t decided for sure. This whole thing is in the way now.”

“No, Allie. This thing isn’t in the way of anything else. It’s a mere speed bump. And you’ve got a year to get that all in place.”

“It is, isn’t it. I think I will then. Will you help me?”

“Yes. I’m not too good at that sort of thing, but you have whatever support you might think I could give. Lesa too, I’m sure.”

“Good. Now... about Jonesy. Should I call him Jonesy? It seems so... disrespectful, I guess. What was his name? Jonesy is all I’ve ever heard.”

“John. But no one ever called him by that name. When we were just tiny kids playing ball in vacant lots, it was Jonesy. It was the only thing I’ve ever heard him called. The name John Jones showed up on a game program one time and he had a fit. I don’t remember what they called him at graduation, but if it wasn’t Jonesy, he wouldn’t have liked it.”

“Jonesy then,” she said. “My father’s name is Jonesy, but my real Daddy’s name is Ray.” She smiled, liking the sounds of it all.

“And don’t you forget it, Allie. Your *real* Daddy is Ray.”

“I won’t. And your dad called Mom a slut?”

“Yeah.”

“Why? I mean, if it had to do with the demonstrations, she wasn’t being a ‘slut’. That was the wrong word. Or was it about something else?”

“It was the wrong word. Your mother was anything but a slut. She probably had the highest moral standing of anyone in Canyon Creek High School and I’m sure Dad knew it. He was just pissed.”

“So what did you say?”

“Nothing. I just moved out.”

Cosmological Considerations

“You didn’t tell him to take back the statement?”

“No. I guess my mom did, and she booted him out when he wouldn’t.”

“He was that stubborn?”

“He was that stubborn.”

They were both quiet for a time. Ray got up with his dishes and took Allie’s over to the worktable, coming back with the coffeepot to pour them each a full cup.

“So what was it like in the Jones house?”

“It was awful. I don’t mean they were awful to me, but Jonesy’s father was a brute.”

“Like father, like son, huh?”

“Not really. I don’t know what got into Jonesy that night with your mother, but I don’t think that was characteristic of him. He was kind of a goof off, but he wasn’t mean. Not usually at least. He was big – a lot like Cecil – but pretty gentle with smaller guys.”

“I was going to ask you whether Cecil reminded you of him. I know he was big.”

“Yeah, he was big, and a good athlete like Cecil. It never struck me other than to wonder where Cecil had gotten his size, until Lesa broke the news to me this morning.”

“Does Cecil remind you of Jonesy in other ways?”

Ray thought a bit. “No. His mischievous smile a little maybe, but Cecil is much smarter than Jonesy was. He got that from all the other branches in the tree.”

“I was always so proud of getting my brains from you.” She smiled.

“Well, so much for that theory. Your mother was damned brilliant, don’t forget that. She was valedictorian, you know.”

“But I was pretty good at mathematics and I thought I got that from you.”

“Osmosis, I suppose,” Ray laughed. “Environmentalists like you and your mother ought to allow more credit for that.”

“Nurture, huh?”

The phone was ringing. Ray said, “Yep, good old TLC.”

He got the phone. It was Lesa. “Yeah.”

“Can I talk to Allie?”

Ray handed the phone to Allie and very soon Allie was asking for something to write with. Ray handed his pen to her with an envelope. She wrote some numbers down and then some undecipherable descriptions.

When she hung up, she said, “Mom sure hooked us up with a good situation, didn’t she?”

“She did help, but if I hadn’t been in love with Lesa, it never would have happened, you know. I couldn’t live with a woman I didn’t love.”

“I know. Mom knew too and she didn’t care a bit, did she?”

“No. She worked it around to all being under her control eventually.”

Allie looked at Ray seeming to be shocked.

Cosmological Considerations

“Well, she did. She was an organizer. But she never planned anything for me I wouldn’t like. You, Lesa, everything. Leave nothing to chance.”

“That’s the right way to look at it, isn’t it?” Then picking the phone up again, “I have to call the mortuary. Lesa has them already for my call.” She began punching in the numbers.

“Another organizer, huh?”

Allie was laughing when she broke off the conversation to say, “Hello. This is Allie Wilson.” There was some discussion.

“Yes, he was my father,” followed by conversation at the other end.

“Yes, I am Ray Bonn’s daughter, but John Jones was my biological father.” There was an appreciable interlude. “I do have DNA proof of that, yes.” A pause, after which, “Yes, it would be fine for you to verify that. Yes, by all means submit an independent sample of the DNA to be catalogued. It should be, yes. But... since I am, in actual fact, his daughter, I’d like to be listed as a descendent. I think I’m the only one.”

It seemed as though there were some interactions taking place among more than the one person on the phone at the other end. Allie demonstrated her irritation to Ray.

“I have three children, yes. Their names are Stephanie who is married with children, Cecil who is currently studying medicine at the University, and Ellie who is a senior in high school.” There was another lapse for a question at the other end. “No, it’s just Ellie, E, double L, I, E. Yes.” There seemed to be more conversation then at the other end again. Then, “Oh, I wondered whether there were any other descendants? I wasn’t sure.”

Ray watched, remembering the times he had been impressed by Allie’s up-front, go-get-em attitude. He smiled, watching her expressions. Yeah, there was some of the best of Jonesy in her. Just the best.

“Yes, please have it printed in the obituary. When can the service be held?” A considerable length of conversation at the other end, and then, “Yes. I do want there to be a public service.” Another pause, “Yes, I will indeed pay for that. Thursday would be excellent. Eleven o’clock? Good. Thank you very much.”

Allie was about to put the phone down, looked perplexed, and asked, “Did you say Reverend Randolph Etherington?” A pause. “Did Jonesy attend his church? Oh. Interesting. Yes, that’s fine.”

She hung up the phone. “Did you know a Randolph Etherington?”

“Yeah.” Ray smiled remembering. “Randy was a wide receiver for the Golden Devils of Canyon Creek.”

“Well, I guess he’s playing for God now,” Allie laughed. “Apparently he and Jonesy were still on the same team, although I guess Jonesy didn’t make many of the scheduled workouts.”

“No, he wouldn’t have,” Ray said.

“So... the ball’s rolling.”

“All downhill from here?”

“All downhill.”

#9 For the Kids

Roger seemed rather apprehensive as he walked in after practice with the Wilson's already there. Ellie met him as he walked in to tell him that the families were having supper together.

"How come? Is this a meeting about getting Pops into a rest home?" he teased.

"Roger!" she scolded turning serious. "I think it's about us."

"They don't care about us. It's all about them."

Tom overheard them on his way back down the hall from the bathroom. "Don't fool yourself, Kid. Everything's about you two. It always has been."

Lesa yelled, "Roger, go get cleaned up, we're ready to sit down."

Roger looked embarrassed and ran off up the stairs.

"Everything was on the table and everyone was standing around waiting when Roger made it back down. They all took their usual places. Allie and Tom on one side, Lesa and Ray at the ends, Ellie and Roger on the side opposite the older Wilsons.

Roger said, "Oh, you got my favorite stuff tonight. Thanks Mom."

"Sure."

"Well, I guess we should just help ourselves as usual and pass to our left just like in hearts."

"We're talking black queens again, Ray?" Tom asked with a smile.

"Black somethings, I guess. We have to get ready for a funeral on Thursday."

Roger stopped scooping potatoes onto his plate. He was watching Ray now.

Lesa said, "Oh Ray, not so dramatic."

"How else do we break it to Ellie that her grandfather died?"

Ellie and Roger's faces jerked in Ray's direction.

"What?" Roger reacted. Ellie looked confused.

Allie spoke up very calmly to say, "Ellie my father died Saturday and we'll all be going to the funeral Thursday."

The dishes that were being passed around were suddenly all stopped. A couple of them were set back down on the table.

Cosmological Considerations

“What has happened to you people?” Roger appealed as though for some token sanity in this house. “Dad, what on earth is going on with you guys?”

“Roger, I’m trying to be light about a very serious situation that affects everyone at this table very profoundly. Allie, since it affects you more directly than the rest of us, why don’t you give us a little perspective here on how we’re going to deal with this.”

“Just to keep this relevant to you Ellie, and you too Roger, you should know that you two are not genetically related.”

Roger looked at Ray. Ray nodded and noticed Roger seem to sigh deeply.

Roger looked over at Ellie. “I guess you were right.”

Ellie smiled, a little embarrassed.

“This doesn’t give you two any license to steal or anything, but at least you need to know that if you like each other a whole lot more than regular twins, at least it’s not ‘unnatural.’”

“Unnatural?” Roger exclaimed as he leaned over to put an arm around Ellie and kiss her as she blushed up at him. “It ain’t unnatural at all.”

“Okay, okay. You’re ahead of us.”

“Roger and I had a DNA analysis done in September because Roger wouldn’t believe me.”

“How’d you do that?” Tom asked.

“We ordered kits on-line,” Roger said.

“And we mailed them to the address they gave us,” Ellie added.

All the adults looked from one to the other of the younger generation.

Lesla asked, “Don’t your friends think it’s weird that Ray Bonn’s son and his granddaughter are dating?”

“No,” Ellie said. “We told them that it’s none of their business and that we’re not really related anyway. I told them my mom was adopted.”

“Well, she wasn’t adopted,” Ray said.

“Well, maybe she should have been,” Ellie bantered back.

“I don’t think so,” Ray said crossly. He saw across the table Lesla frowning to get him to lay off.

“What did you want her to say?” Roger asked cynically. “That I was like Jesus, and Joseph wasn’t really *my* Dad?”

That comment irritated Ray almost to irrationality. “This Joseph *is* your Dad, Roger, and don’t you dare ever doubt that for a moment. I suppose you’ve already taken a swab to me some night when I was snoring just to verify that?”

“You mean to verify that God really is my father?” Roger laughed.

“Okay, okay!” Lesla held up her hands. “Evidently everyone already knows the essential aspects of this whole situation. We figured you did. But since this has never been generally available information, and your father here has been the last one to be told, when he should probably have been the first, we need to figure out how to get this information out there without anyone being hurt. Jamie and Eddie and their families don’t know, for example, and I don’t suppose Stephanie and Cecil do either, do they Allie?”

Cosmological Considerations

“No, they don’t. I just thought I had to tell Ellie.”

“I know. She has a right to know.”

Roger was scowling at Ray now. It was all so damnably like what had happened to him and Helen and his father. That he couldn’t let that happen again so Ray decided to do what he could to avert it.

“Ellie, I’m sorry if I sounded cross. Roger, please understand that I know how much you love her. I will never stand in the way of you two realizing whatever future you envision. Please believe me on that. Kids, I’ve been down this road before – so close that it hurts. Helen and I were so much like you two that it breaks my heart to think about it. Okay? I’m on your side. My father opted not to be on Helen and my side, and that was awful. I mean *awful!* So I’m just here to help you two, nothing else, absolutely nothing else.”

“If you kids ever want to be more than friends,” Lesa contributed, “which I know you already are, whether we approve of it or not, then we have to get this information out there properly. Allie has a good idea. But meanwhile let’s get passing this food before it’s totally cold. I went to a lot of work preparing it.”

Allie got the dishes moving around the table, and once again there was the clink and clatter of a family meal, everyone ruminating.

“My biological father, whose name is John Jones,” she took some asparagus and passed it to Lesa, “but everyone has always called him Jonesy, well... he died Friday night. The funeral is Thursday.”

The phone began ringing, but Allie continued as Lesa rose to get it.

“Ellie, you and I and Stephanie and Cecil are his only descendants. And at least you and I will be at the funeral as mourners with our entire family as support. It will be in the news shortly. There’s no doubt about that. I had our names put in the obituary and I’m sure that news will spread because your real grandfather here is a celebrity. That’s how it works. We all know that.”

Lesa was motioning for Ray to come take the phone. He took it with Lesa motioning for him to go into another room, so he did. It was Julie.

“Hi, Julie. It’s been a while. How are you doing?”

“Ray, forget the small shit, would you? Marsha called.”

“Oh God, already.”

“Already.”

“You better come up. You can stay here and travel up with us.”

“Yes. I was wondering about that too, but Jesus, Ray. What is this? Clue me in a little. I’m an old friend, aren’t I?”

“Dear as they come,” Ray said, much more seriously and sincerely than the comment sounded after having uttered it. “But Julie, as that close friend, please let’s leave as much of this stuff secret as we can. Sure, Allie is the product of a date rape back in that era when that sort of thing wasn’t supposed ever to have happened. Well, it did. Don’t feel too badly about never having been told by your best friend, or by another one until this afternoon. I found out for the first time this morning.”

“This morning?”

Cosmological Considerations

“Yeah, this morning.”

“Marsha said you and Lesa were up the Creek Saturday when he died. She figured that had something to do with it.”

“Well, Julie, this is too long a story for a phone conversation in the middle of a dinner in which Allie and her family and ours are trying to figure out how to handle this in such a way that we don’t look like hill billies. The short version is that Helen told Allie and Lesa before she died and wrote a letter to me to be given to me if and only if I needed to know. It turns out that I needed to know, so Lesa took me up The Creek to get me prepared. Jonesy dying that day was a coincidence.”

“Is it the kids?”

“Yeah.”

“Good. I’m glad for the kids. I worried about it.”

“That’s nice, Julie. I thought I was going crazy when Allie and Lesa weren’t worrying about it.”

“Makes all kinds of sense now, Ray. Get back to dinner. I still love you.”

“Yeah, me too.” Ray laughed. “Bye Julie.”

When Ray got back to the table the conversation stopped with everyone looking at him.

“What?”

“Does she know already?” Allie asked.

“Yes, of course. That’s what you wanted wasn’t it?”

“I thought it was best, yes.”

“How did she hear already, Ray?” Lesa asked.

“Marsha called her and told her. She told her that we had been snooping around up on the ridge the day Jonesy died and figured that was more than a coincidence.”

“It wasn’t.”

“No, it wasn’t. But that’s okay.”

“Dad, I’m sorry about all that. I had no idea,” Roger said, quite emotionally for him, Ray thought.

“Me too,” Ellie echoed getting up to come over to give Ray a teary kiss. “It won’t be that way again, will it?”

“Nope,” Ray held his arm around her a second or two. “It sure as hell won’t be,” he said as she went back to her chair.

Ray noticed a drumstick on his plate that hadn’t been there. “What’s this?”

Roger said, “I figured now that I’m not a kid anymore that we ought to share.”

“I’ve almost forgotten what dark meat tastes like,” Ray said. “I wonder if I still like it. I used to like it as a kid.” He grabbed it up and took a huge bite of chicken calf muscle. “Mmm, good.”

In his usual manner, Tom calmly stepped in to say, “So... I feel like I’ve been preempted by all this on-line DNA stuff you kids have been up to – sorry Roger, but you’re always going to be ‘the kids’ to us old folks. I ran the tests on the swab you gave Allie, Lesa, and Jonesy’s the culprit all right. So...

Cosmological Considerations

there's that. We won't have to worry about any awkward retractions after all this hullabaloo is over."

"Good," Ray responded, "I still have a little problem with that being 'good' I guess, but good takes on different meanings as we go along, doesn't it? What's the rest of the plan, Allie? Oh, by the way, Julie's coming up to go with us to the funeral."

Allie said, "Well, like Daddy said, we're all here to help these two kids be in control of their own destinies. That's why I wanted to set up that funeral charade to get things started."

"Charade?" Lesa laughed and looked at Ray.

"Well, it is, you know," Allie responded defensively. "I don't care an iota for that bad apple. He isn't my *real* dad."

"Yes, I understand, Allie," Lesa said. "I was thinking back twenty years, I think, to the use of that term 'charade' by Ray here. You cannot believe the gyrations Ray went through about having been made to go up to bat at old Yankee Stadium that time. Whenever he would refer to what I had done to him, he would call it a 'charade'. I got absolutely sick of that word." She laughed. "That's all. It's the correct word."

Allie just looked at her as she and everyone else at the table was laughing. "This is a funeral though. It's not all that funny. Jonesy may have been a dunderhead or whatever, but he was my father in some sense and I'd like to make this occasion respectful and kind of special."

Very seriously Lesa replied, "I'm so sorry, Allie. I'm going to do everything I can to make this work out how you plan."

"Okay, I want us all to go up there dressed in black like we ought to be, and either be sad for real or do a good job pretending... just for me, okay? I'd like to make it like we all knew this fact all along and were just being respectful of the situation. Classy like."

"That sounds classy, Mom," Ellie said. "But shouldn't Stephanie and Cecil be here?"

"Yes. Ellie, even though I want you to let on to your friends that you have always known about this, please don't ever let on to Stephanie that you knew about this before today. Please?" Ray saw Lesa wince thinking of another mother-daughter matter that would have to be resolved by her.

"I understand, Mom."

"I'm going to use your phone, Lesa," Allie said as she rose to call Stephanie.

Tom put his hand on her arm stopping her. "Let me call." Then he got up and left the room dialing on his cell. His first few affectionate words could be heard before he had turned another corner to isolate their conversation.

Allie continued with the dinner table conversation. "Cecil will be okay with it."

"Yeah," Ray said. "Let's get Jamie and Eddie on the squawk box in here on the table to see what they have to say."

Cosmological Considerations

“Jamie, Eddie,” Ray said when they finally had the phone situated and dialed up.

“Hey, Pop, how ya’ doin’?” Eddie responded.

“Hi, Pop,” Jamie said. “What’s up there?”

“Well, I’m sitting at the table here with your sister, Tom, Ellie, Lesa, and Roger. We’re having a rather important family confab. We thought you guys and your families should be involved.”

“Oh God!” Jamie said. Eddie was silent.

“No, nothing like that, Jamie. We’re all fine. You guys and your families?”

“We’re fine,” Eddie said.

“Us too,” Jamie added.

“Good. Well, here’s the deal... well, it’s a hell of a thing really. Well...”

“Jesus, Pop, spit it out while we’re still young,” Eddie said to everyone’s laughter.

“Jonesy is my father,” Allie blurted out.

“What?”

“Daddy isn’t my father.”

“What kind of bullshit is that, Allie? Daddies are always fathers.”

“Not always,” Ray interjected. “Not in this case.”

There was silence all around for too long.

Finally it was Jamie who rose to the occasion, “How long has everyone known?”

“Well, apparently you mother told Allie and Lesa that weekend you kidnapped me to California, Eddie. I just found out this morning. Allie evidently told Tom and Ellie a little while back so Ellie and Roger wouldn’t have to feel awkward about traditional taboos – that sort of thing. So... once again, it’s Ray Bonn as the last to know. Well... except for you two in this case.”

“Whoa!” Eddie said. “How you doin’ there, Pop?”

“Why didn’t Mom tell you,” Jamie asked.

“I’m fine. Turns out your mom tried to tell me, I guess, but I didn’t make it easy, at least easy enough, so she wrote me a sealed note with these two women present and Lesa was instructed to give it to me if I ever needed to know. It seems like I need to know.”

“Wow!”

“Yeah.”

“But I didn’t think Mom even liked Jonesy,” Jamie said. “I thought she hated him.”

“She did,” Ray said. “It’s just one of those things she couldn’t tell me back then and keep me out of prison, I guess.”

“Oh.”

“So, guys. How about faking it with me, okay?” Allie broke in.

“Oh, Allie, I am so sorry,” Jamie said.

“Me too,” Eddie added.

Cosmological Considerations

“Well, me too, but I’m used to it. I’ve known for almost twenty years, you know. Your heart can only break so long, so I’m over it. It doesn’t make any difference. Daddy still loves me more than you too oafs anyway, ‘cause I’m Daddy’s girl,” she laughed. “But how about pretending that the whole family knew this all along?”

“Sure, but why, Allie?”

“The kids, Ellie and Roger.”

“Oh... so that’s the angle,” Jamie said.

“Hi, it’s me, Lisa. I’m on with Eddie. I am so... with you all in my heart.”

“Me too.” It was Judy. “What can we do?”

“Jonesy died Saturday,” Allie began to clarify. “His funeral is Thursday and we’re all going up. I’ll be in the obituary as a descendent along with my kids. We’ll do the whole procedure as though it were just a longstanding private family understanding.”

“And then do all the DNA paperwork so Roger and Ellie are freed up, right?” Judy asked.

“Exactly. You know how to do that?”

“I know someone who went through it. Would that help?”

“It sure would, Auntie,” Ellie broke in.

“Hi, Honey. How are you and Roger doing?”

“We’re doing fine,” Roger said.

“Why don’t you tell the twins yourself, Ellie. They would really appreciate that, I’m sure.”

“I know little Lisa would too,” Lisa intoned. “Maybe you younger set could zoom in or something.”

“Sure, I’ll do that later tonight or tomorrow. It is exciting.”

“Sorry for interrupting, Allie,” Judy said. “You were saying...”

“Yes. We’re going up for the funeral at 10:30 in Concrete. There’s also a burial up on the ridge. I was thinking maybe I could have some sort of luncheon set up for afterward at the old high school.”

Ray and Lesa shared glances.

“I’d like to help you with that,” Judy said. “We’ll be there.”

Eddie said, “We’ll come up too then. Is Wednesday evening all right?”

“Sure. Why don’t you check with Julie? She might like to take the same plane,” Ray said as he watched Tom motion for Lesa to take his phone. She got up and left the table then as he sat back down.

“We’ll see you all Wednesday then Eddie said, with he and Lisa both saying, “Bye” and clicking off.

“We’ll be in touch, I guess,” Jamie said, “if Judy’s going to be helping with stuff.”

“Thank you, Jamie... and you too Judy.”

“Bye, Sis.”

“What did Stephanie want?” Allie asked looking over at Tom with a perplexed look.

“Oh, you know. Usual stuff.”

Cosmological Considerations

Ray noticed that Ellie had her arm through Roger's. What he noticed most about seeing that was that it didn't really bother him anymore. He almost smiled at the very thought of taking pleasure rather than shame at their loving each other. It was how it should be. Love should be that way.

"I didn't get a chance to talk with you about that Stanford offer or whatever it was," Ray said addressing Roger.

Ellie smiled at Ray and let go of Roger's arm to go help her mother with the dishes.

"Oh, yeah. That was kind of fun. They think I'm great. They'd like me to commit to Stanford right away, but I told them I had to decide about a major and a whole lot of stuff before I commit to anyone. But that I like Stanford for obvious reasons, and they acknowledged being aware of several of them. One of the guys actually asked me what it was like being your son. Can you believe it? Like should they be asking those kinds of questions?"

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him the truth."

"Of course. What is the truth?"

Roger blushed a little, Ray thought. "Great, that's what I told him," he paused, "but a little intimidating." He and Ray both laughed.

"He told me he couldn't imagine how intimidating it would be."

"Really?" Ray continued laughing.

"It isn't all that funny you know." Roger looked more serious now, too serious. "Everybody thinks being your son would be intimidating. They think that the reason I do so well in athletics is that you'll beat the shit out of me if I don't."

"Really? The guy who is on record as saying that there's no success as sweet as failure."

"They don't remember what you said, just what you looked like when you said it." He laughed. "They think you're cross and mean."

"Does everyone at school feel sorry for you then?" Ray followed up his inquiries, laughing still.

"No, they envy me; they think I'm mean and ornery just like you."

Ray laughed. "You know, when they took you out of the game the other night and your friends were there on the sideline laughing and you were serious as a judge, it embarrassed me to think how much of that mean look I've stamped on you."

"I know. Isn't it funny? Ellie is always telling me to lighten up just like Mom always tells you."

They were still laughing when Lesa came in. She put her hand on Roger's shoulder as she leaned over to speak to Ray.

"Daddy's worse."

"Oh no, how bad?"

"He's in the hospital and they're planning surgery for the morning."

"Open heart?"

"Yes. Triple by-pass."

Cosmological Considerations

“You better go.”

“I know. Is it okay if I schedule out tonight?”

“Sure. I don’t think I better go right yet though, do you?”

“No. You have to be here with Allie. You’re a major part of making that work for her.”

“Mom, I’m so sorry,” Roger said. “Poor Leonard.”

“Yes. Cynthia’s really upset. I better set up the flight. You’ll take me to the airport, right?”

“Right, of course.” Ray was stunned. He sighed and looked at Roger and what he saw looking back at him was a great friend.

“I’ll come too,” Roger said.

So everyone hustled around and left the house at about the same time. Ellie left with her parents after some discussion. She had to get some homework done and they would miss Thursday, so they had to keep ahead.

Lesla got off in record time. Ray had Roger call Cynthia on the cell when they left the airport to tell her what the flight number was and what time it got in. Lesla would rent a car, but no, Cynthia wanted to meet her. Fredrik would be sleeping. They could be there together when he woke up before his surgery.

Roger clicked the cell shut and said, “Well, it’s just you and me then.”

“Just you and me.”

“You have much homework tonight?”

“No, I don’t. We got off easy today.” Roger squirmed around awkwardly in his seat.

Ray looked over to see what was bothering him. “You all right?”

“Yes. I was just wondering...” He stopped.

“Wondering what?”

“Well... oh, nothing.”

“It doesn’t sound like nothing to me.”

“Well, do you and Mom... well...”

“The answer is, yes, we do.” Ray laughed, adding, “And yes, that’s what we had been doing when you saw us eating breakfast wearing fig leaves.”

Roger laughed. “I thought so. But in the living room on the floor?”

“Yeah, there too.”

They drove for a while silently. Then Roger asked, “Did you and Helen have sex before you got married?”

“Not for very long. She was pregnant.”

“But it wasn’t yours.”

“No. But I didn’t know that.”

“So you’d been having sex all along?”

“No. Roger, I just found this out this morning. That’s why your mother was fucking me senseless for two days. To get my ego up for this I guess, so my feelings are a little raw, okay? Anything I tell you I want to be private. Not between you and Ellie, because if you really do love each other like I think

Cosmological Considerations

you do, you don't ever want to hold back on things. But you know what I mean."

"I do, yeah."

"Okay, well here's the thing. Helen and I were like you and Ellie. So much so that it would nauseate you to know how much." He laughed.

"I don't think it would. I think I would have enjoyed being your father and watching you two in love."

Ray looked over at his amazing son. "Now there's a little perspective," he said.

Roger was laughing, "Yes, it is, isn't it?"

"But no. Helen was not about to have sex before we were married, I suspected. But we got into a spat, partly over that I suppose, and I asked another girl to a dance. We didn't do anything, and Helen evidently verified with the girl that we hadn't, but she was mad at the affront. So, she went out with Jonesy that one time. Once. I guess, he date-raped her, only more brutally than that usually involves. Don't even tell Ellie this; her mother doesn't know. Helen told Lesa more than Allie was told."

"Whoa."

"Yeah. If I had known that I would have killed him. That's not poetic license either. I would literally have killed him if I had known. Luckily, and I suppose because Helen knew me so well, I didn't know. But Jonesy was an idiot. Please don't tell Ellie that, but he was a super dumb shit. He started bragging around school that he had had Helen and that she was easy. I knew it was a lie – I thought all of it was. So I beat the shit out of him. I actually thought I had killed him when I stopped beating him."

"Wow! You really were mean once."

"I think that's the only time I ever totally lost it, and that was just a token of the havoc I would have wrecked on his body if I had known the truth. When I got done with him and came out of the trance-like state I was in, he was unconscious, and his face was a bloody pulp. You couldn't have told who it was. I took him home and drug him up on his front porch and rang the doorbell so his mother could help him and then I disappeared. I've never told anyone all of that. I told your mother part of it Saturday."

"She was really impressed with that trip up there. I'm looking forward to seeing it."

"Yeah. I guess we had a good time. She got me teared up if you can believe that. Anyway, back to Jonesy, word got around that I had beaten him up – he missed a couple of weeks of school, so Helen forgave me for being an asshole earlier."

"That is some kind of story."

"Some kind, yeah. We made out with each other again without going all the way. I didn't know it, but according to her letter she couldn't do anymore because of the injuries she had incurred from Jonesy. By homecoming I guess she was pretty well recovered except that by then she figured she might be pregnant. So, preferring a cuckold to a rapist as a husband to help raise her

Cosmological Considerations

baby, she decided to have sex with me and asked that we not use a condom. Now you know the whole story, so help me God.”

Roger stared at Ray. They were now turning down that serene little street where the cuckolded man and raped woman had created a serene existence.

Once in the garage with the engine off and the garage door now closed behind them, Ray said, “So, yeah. I had sex with Helen before we were married, but not very damned long before and it wasn’t very damned good.”

“Whoa.”

“Yeah.”

They got out and went into a lonely house.

#10 A Floozy Back in Town

Ray decided to sit up waiting to hear from Lesa, after convincing Roger he needed his sleep. It was to the scattering of light by the intergalactic medium that he returned. Scanning through a few pages to get up to speed on where he was currently working more or less as a miner might glance at the rock walls of the tunnel on the way to the face to begin his shift. There were shimmers here and there that appealed to him. He read a few passages like rubbing his hand along the surface of his passage to the face of the mine. He loved this stuff.

He read over his earlier pronouncement that the Big Bang, rather than being false, is a verifiable fact, but not a fact about some primordial distant past before the Garden of Eden, but that it pertains to the present era. *Now*. The features of that perceived catastrophic origin apply to the current intergalactic medium, and it affects the light that passes through it to present the illusion of recession and, therefore also, of a cold temperature blackbody radiation. He was skipping on to his demonstration that although ‘tired light’ theories had been discredited, those arguments did not apply to the convergent coherent scattering that he had discovered to apply to a hot hydrogenous plasma.

He was once again to the absorption phenomena appropriate to such a medium when the doorbell rang. It was almost midnight. Who could that be? He went to the door. A taxi was just pulling away. Julie was standing there, a suitcase beside her, not enough clothes on for this time of year in the Northwest, and a silly grin on her face.

“Julie! That was fast.”

“I know. I was depressed and wanted to see you guys. Brrr. Is it always this cold and wet up here this time of year?”

She threw her arms around Ray and he hugged her back. She had been drinking.

“You are cold,” he said, briskly rubbing her arms. “My goodness, haven’t you ever been up here in the winter? We wear coats.”

“Not really. But would you hold me like that just a little longer?” She leaned into him and he placed his arms around her cold back.

Cosmological Considerations

“Oh, that feels sooo good, Ray. That’s why I came tonight.”

“There are easier ways to get warm.”

There was still a blanket on the back of one of the overstuffed couches in the living room, so Ray said, “Here. Why don’t you just sit here? I’ll put this blanket around you.”

“I’m glad I didn’t get you up. I thought I might, arriving this late.”

“No, I was just looking at some physics, waiting for Lesa to call.”

“Did Allie need some help?”

“Oh, no. Allie’s fine. We just learned that Lesa’s father got rushed to the hospital and is having open heart surgery in the morning.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. Boston, right?”

“Yeah. Roger and I didn’t get back from the airport until just a few minutes ago. She won’t be landing there for a few hours. I’ve got some hot coffee in there; I’ll bring you some.”

He headed for the kitchen. Why would she have come up unannounced – half snookered and half-naked? He poured two cups of the freshly brewed coffee and headed back.

“Here. This’ll warm you up.”

“You already have warmed me up a bunch, Ray.”

“Well, good.” Then broaching the subject of her so early appearance, Ray asked, “Does losing Jonesy affect you a lot?”

“Not him in particular. He never mattered much to anyone. Helen, and you, that’s what brought me. That and all the blood under that bridge up there on The Creek. That’s what affects me.”

“Me too. It’s mounting up, isn’t it.”

“It sure is. Ray, would you sit next to me just to get me warm and... just for old time’s sake?”

Ray got up, taking his mug with him to sit next to her.

“So talk to me, Julie. Each time we’ve seen each other we have wished we had more time to talk. We’ve got some time now. So let’s talk.”

“You know what? I lied all those times. I haven’t ever craved talking to you; you’re too damned smart,” she smiled with a kind of gentle drunken seductiveness. “I’ve just craved being right up next to you, where I could feel you right next to my skin.”

“Well, I’m next to you per your request, so you can talk to me in response to mine. Okay?”

“Sure,” she leaned over against him heavily. “What can I tell you?”

“How’re you doing in saving the last few redwoods?”

“I think we’ve finally put a stop to redwood cutting, but it’s like everything everywhere. Way too little, way too late. At least fifty years too late. Essentially they quit because there’re no more to cut.”

“When was the last foundation meeting in the Bay area?”

“Oh, we had one two weeks ago, but there are too many corporate spies in the organization now, I think. They keep anything meaningful from happening.”

Cosmological Considerations

“You know who they are?”

“We have a good idea, but you can’t have a purge. There’re laws against it, aren’t there?”

“Probably,” he admitted.

He sipped his coffee that was barely cool enough for him to tolerate and noticed that Julie had started right in drinking hers. She had almost finished the whole cup, apparently with no ill effects.

“Is my hair alright?”

“Yeah, it looks good, but I’m no judge. It looks nice to me though, Julie. Yes, it looks really nice.”

“Oh, thank you Ray. So, you want to hear about Jonesy, I’ll bet.”

“Yeah. Tell me about you and Jonesy.”

“Okay, but you scoot over there to the other end of this couch and let me lay my head on your lap, okay.”

“Yeah, fine.” He scooted to the end of the couch.

She lay over on him with her sandaled feet now sticking up over the other end of the short couch. Her toes wiggled. She wedged her damp head into his lap, her cheek up against his paunch. Her eyes closed and she began.

“Jonesy was a bad boy. I felt sorry for him, he was so jealous of you – of everything about you. You couldn’t imagine a thing that was yours that he didn’t want, or a thing of his that he didn’t want you to want. I think that’s why he wanted me.”

“You don’t think he was smart enough to want you because of you?”

“No, he wasn’t, not nearly. You weren’t either. But I think he was smart enough to know that you wanted me. That was good enough.”

“So why did you want him?”

“Because I couldn’t have you. Maybe to make you jealous.”

“A match made in heaven then.”

“Hell is more like it. Both of us made love like demented weasels, for reasons other than what we were actually doing.”

Ray sipped some of his coffee now and noticed her nervously flipping her empty cup on her flat stomach.

“Did you two make regular assessments of your progress in making me jealous?”

“I don’t even know to what degree Jonesy knew what his motivations were, but that’s what they were. He would tell me when you asked him about where to buy rubbers, like he was bringing a shiny apple to the teacher, and he told me when he sold you a couple. That turned him on, and it turned me on too.”

Ray laughed. “A couple of sick people. I remember those times.”

“Why’d you want the rubbers?”

“I suppose I just thought a nice guy like me might get lucky sometime.”

“But you never did?”

“Never did.”

“That’s not what Marsha told me.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Really? What did she tell you?”

“She said you spun up three cherries on her slot machine and wouldn’t even pick ‘em. And you’ve rolled snake eyes tonight, Ray. It’s time for some action.”

She pulled her shirt up and off over her head, her huge breasts, or tits, or boobs, or whatever they should be called – Ray tried to remember what he and Lesa had decided – were bulging upward toward him. Whatever they were, they were not pastel pink; they did not belong where they appeared.

“I suppose you remember me saying there’s no success like failure on national TV. Well, you’re going to have to get used to it, because you’ve hit the brick wall here.”

Placing a hand now up over her head and into his lap, she cooed, “Well, this brick wall has one brick sticking straight out like a handle I bet.”

Ray leapt to his feet. “I’m going to get me another cup of coffee. I’ll get you one too. If your shirt’s back on when I get back here, I won’t call a taxi for you, and you can stay. Otherwise, you’re gone.” He walked off.

Once in the kitchen he took some deep breaths, straightened his pants, poured the coffees, and went back into the living room. Julie had her shirt on and the blanket around her shoulder again. She was sitting in a single overstuffed chair. Ray handed her the mug of coffee.

“Thanks, Julie. I’m just not the kind of guy you’ve ever wanted me to be, but I’m very glad you came up and I definitely want to talk some more.”

“You’re exactly the kind of guy I have always wanted you to be, and thanks for being that guy - again. If it wasn’t for knowing that there’s a you, God knows what I’d have done.”

“Well, you’ve done some good things. But before we get off of Jonesy, I’ve got a question. Was he sexually brutal?”

“Yes, but not always. He took out his frustrations that way sometimes. I could probably take it better than most women, girls especially. Marsha was married to him, and she really loved him. I think she always did, but he got mean so she had to leave him. No one could take it for long.”

“You can imagine a pretty brutal date rape then?”

“Yep. It could have been bad, especially for someone like Helen. She’d never have given in against her will and he would have been way too strong for her.”

“Marsha said you almost killed him. Because he hurt Helen, huh?”

“No. I never knew that, remember. I beat him up because he bragged to the guys about having had Helen, and he did it right in front of me. I was sure it wasn’t even true. If I’d have known it was true and how he hurt her, I am certain there would have been nothing but a lump of hamburger laid on his doorstep that night.”

“Marsha said it was just a lump of meat you left there anyway.”

“Well, the lump of meat was still breathing when I left it and rang the doorbell.”

“You were lucky it was still breathing.”

Cosmological Considerations

“I have always been lucky. It’s my curse. I know there’s no reason for it. Some people just are, the roll of the dice, I guess.”

“Snake eyes, three cherries, or a hundred heads in a row, it’s all the same, right?”

“Yeah, okay. Touché. The hundred heads is my thing, my trademark, I guess, isn’t it? Everything’s unlikely. Sometimes I feel like Job. I get all these lucky breaks just to keep me alive to see how I will handle the next disaster.”

“Maybe if you weren’t so God damned good at handling them, God wouldn’t send you so many.” She laughed. “Wasn’t that Job’s problem?”

“If I’d just flip a tail sometime instead of them always turning up heads, maybe I *could* live like other human beings? Is that what you think?” He laughed.

“I gave you one hell of a tail to flip over there on the couch,” she motioned to where they had been sitting. She still chuckled. “But no, you just wouldn’t flip it. For all your pontificating, you sure ain’t got much of a penchant for failure, Mr. Bonn.”

He just smiled until finally she began again.

“You know Allie is his, huh?”

“DNA proof of it.”

“Fredrik been sick long?” She was searching for topics now. This was one that mattered to him.

“No. He went to the hospital Saturday for something but they gave him a clean bill of health and sent him home. Now today...”

“We’re going pretty soon too, you know.”

“I do know. You worried about it?”

“No. I don’t relish being erased from the scene though. I like it here. Well, here in particular, I guess you’d have to say, what with me coming up here on a moment’s notice and getting lucky in not finding the queen at home. It’s just an exhilaration that delights my whole being.” The jeering laugh had turned into her pleasing honest mischievous laughter again. There seemed to be no more slur in her speech. “Laying there on your lap, and then having my breasts bared and feeling your hard-on thrusting upward with all the possibilities and teeming unlikelihoods is just too wonderful not to want, Ray. No matter how much I fail at it, and no one should ever preach to me about, failure. But, yes, life is just wonderful in spite of all that.”

“It is. Even with the Midas touch, it still is.”

“So, do I get to stay even after those comments?” That laugh again.

“Sure.”

“Upstairs?”

“Take your pick there are a couple of rooms with beds made up there, I think. And a spare room down here.”

“You trust me down here?”

“As much as up there.”

Ray grabbed her bag. “Where’ll it be then?”

Cosmological Considerations

“Down here by the Lord of the Manner.”

He took her bag into the spare room. She followed.

“You said you were doing physics.”

“Yeah.”

“Go ahead then. I’m kind of tired. I think I’ll get ready for bed, comfortable at least. I may lay around for a while, but I’ll keep presentable, if knowing these boobs are handy doesn’t, in itself, distract you too much.”

“I’ll be fine. I hope you sleep fine if I don’t see you until morning.” He disappeared back into his study.

He couldn’t concentrate. That damned Julie. Why on earth would she do that? Half drunk. Lesa wouldn’t land for another hour or two.

He scrolled down to his Scattering file again. It held no interest for him now.

Roger had been asking him all these personal questions about his sex life for obvious comparison with what he was experiencing or wanting to experience in his own life. He hoped he had done the right thing telling him what he had.

That damned Julie – the Venus of Willendorf, he laughed to himself since he hadn’t thought of her that way for years now – shows up to try to seduce me at her age, and mine. But in actual fact, it probably really was more just to assure herself that I am indeed who she thinks I am, he thought. I am, have been. Thank God!

He felt as though he had passed another test. A buxom but old woman, what kind of test was that? Well, for him, probably the ultimate test. Vintage. He almost laughed aloud, thinking about how he would use to have toyed with such a term.

He stared at the screen as he ruminated, not even attempting to read the words. Then he felt Julie leaning over his shoulder. Oh, God.

He turned suddenly; his face encountered a soft breast. “Julie,” he yelled. “Don’t do this.”

“Ray, I can’t help it,” she said, backing away. “I have gigantic boobs, okay.”

“It’s not what you’ve got, it’s how you use them.”

“You mean I should be nursing quintuplets? Is that what you’re saying?” She feigned naivete about her sensuous behavior.

He laughed. How could he help it? “I mean you purposely use them as part of your major sensual arsenal. You use them for assault. Those things are dangerous, Julie, and you know it. Keep ‘em under wraps.”

“I’d like it if they weren’t dangerous.”

“When are they not dangerous anyway?”

“Around you.”

“Like hell they aren’t!”

“Well, I couldn’t see your screen without laying these things on you.”

“Julie, I can tell it’s going to be a tough two days...”

Cosmological Considerations

“And three nights,” she interrupted. “You have to help me through three nights.”

“Would you have acted like this if you had come up here when Helen was still alive?”

“You mean if Helen was alive but just happened to be gone for a couple of days when I got here?”

“Yeah,” Ray paused, “and one of our kids was upstairs. I suppose that’s what I mean.”

“Sure. I don’t understand the ownership thing, Ray.”

“You know, I could almost believe that I’m hallucinating, because I’ve been under a lot of pressure, Lesa is away, and I’m missing her.”

“That works,” Julie smirked. “The cat’s away.”

“No, it doesn’t, Julie. I am a fully owned subsidiary of a family unit. It’s the way I am. And you may not see her, but Lesa is here. Just like Helen was here when she was alive, and she still is. They’re up here,” Ray pointed to his temples. “I have a complete model of them in my head, just like I have a less complete model of you. You live here too. We all interact in each other’s brains. That’s what happens with committed people who are closely associated with each other for years.”

“I am up there too, Ray?”

“You’ve been in here since I was fourteen, Julie. You’ll be in here when I die. That part of you dies when I die.”

“I love you for that, Ray.”

“You know, Lesa told me back before we were married that Helen had told her secrets she could only tell me when we had held each other for days in a row without letting go. Well, years got in the way of those few days, and I would often try to guess what it might be, and not knowing what it was, I had my own favorite candidate for what I hoped Helen had wanted to tell me. Then Friday night Lesa realized that because of a problem we’ve been having – well, honestly it was me worrying about incest between Roger and Ellie – that she had to reveal the secret. So we went into this holding pattern that we hadn’t had, perhaps ever before. We held each other and made love over and over until we were totally comfortable with each other again, and then this morning she told me about Helen and Jonesy. I’ll show you the letter if you like because Helen was your friend too and she would want you to see it now.”

“I do want to see it, Ray. But let’s not do it now. Please just keep talking to me. It’s what I’ve always wanted. Intercourse has two meanings, doesn’t it? This, what we’re having, is just grand.”

“Yeah, it is. It’s comfortable. We’ve got to that place finally, haven’t we?”

“Yes,” she said dreamy-eyed, “and I love it so much.”

“It seems like anything that has to be said takes so long, and we never have time enough to say it, so we talk about stuff that doesn’t even need to be said. It’s like when I studied for a final at the university. If I studied for an hour here and an hour there, it never really soaked in. But if the night before the

Cosmological Considerations

exam I sat down with the books and just scanned through them, after an hour or so the material began soaking in like water on soft soil. I would turn out all the lights in my room except for the one over my desk so there was only the lighted page of text in front of me, and it was like I had connected a fire hose of information right into my frontal lobes. I remember things I learned the night before an exam even today like it was just yesterday. The problem is that we're always dealing with parched soil that won't absorb anything, and we don't give it time enough to soften. Once it gets softened up, the information just streams in."

"That is so beautiful, Ray, and I know it isn't just new age bullshit. It's real. You're getting through to me just that way now, like a fire hose. Intercourse of the mind."

Ray looked at her skeptically, but he could tell she was not making fun. She was serious in needing to converse.

"I think it's beautiful too. Well, this has been a long and preachy way to tell you what I started out to say, but it's the only way I know how to communicate – to really communicate. What I was trying to explain is how these models we have of each other in our brains actually work. When we love someone and we interact with them intimately for a protracted period, the information that is what each of us are, begins to flow between us. Helen and I grew up together, so it never actually worked quite that way I don't think. There were too many areas we didn't share – my interest in science and mathematics, hers in political causes, etc. We seemed to lock each other out of those areas. Helen couldn't have explained my thoughts on relativity after living with me for fifty years. Lesa could explain it better than I could after just having read the text one night. Because in all I write, I lay myself down on the page to the extent that I can, she knew me! I swear she knew the essential Ray Bonn and I couldn't hide anything from her because I had been fully modeled in her brain – overnight."

"Wow. I don't want to ruin that, Ray."

"No, I know you don't, and you don't need to worry about it. My model of Lesa tells me this is a conversation she's glad we're having and wishes she could be a party to it. It's strange in a way that this kind of intercourse – as you observed – can be as intense and gratifying than the other kind in many ways, but it isn't exclusive in the same way as the other; it's open. I think Helen conditioned me to accept that the physical kind must not be. But I no longer hold that fact as merely a conditioned reaction. I think it is an observable fact that it should be exclusive."

"I'm sure you're right, Ray. I have definitely let my boobs get in the way of meaningful relationships."

"I don't know. I can't speak for you. But that's how it is for me. As far as your breasts go, I think my model of Julie was built around those breasts. They are absolutely beautiful, and to object to such beauty is unworthy of a human being. Art from the very earliest artifacts has enshrined that as the epitome of esthetics, beauty personified. I remember Helen commenting on

Cosmological Considerations

your beauty when you were swaying in that pond. She was projecting; it is true; she wanted me to see her in that same sense, and I did. One of the last comments she ever made was exactly the same comment. She made it right after Lesa's Nobel address. I don't think she even knew which one of you two she was referring to, and there was always a certain amount of projecting in her telling me how beautiful you were. But I think the physical beauty and the beauty she perceived in the person herself merged into a picture of one beautiful human being, the beauty of what a person can be.

Ray noticed that Julie had tears in her eyes now. "Thank you, Ray. Thank you, so much. That's why I came up tonight, for that."

"Well then, that's why I'm glad you came up tonight. But none of that is really what I started out trying to tell you, and I want to get it said."

"Me too, Ray. Me too. I want to hear it."

"So here we are, a bunch of intimate friends with models of each other's personalities living inside us. At a certain point this becomes the mental counterpart of the physical situation with pheromones, like when the menstrual periods of the nuns in a convent begin to synchronize and every aspect of their lives begins to overlap into a combined being. Anyway, I had this model of Helen in my head; I felt like I could associate with how she felt about everything in the overlap of our lives. I felt that as a little kid and I know that she did as well. I feel it now."

"I know you did, and I was such a naïve outsider trying to hop into the middle of that."

"Well, you were a little older too, and so the instructor role affected all that and got in the way. I don't mean just, or even in particular, our ineptness in learning about sex from you, but the fact that you were a teacher at all. The literature also that you got us both into. You *taught* us to appreciate it. But that in itself locked you out of our tight little click of enjoying it. The mere fact that we were kids learning from you ruined it to a certain extent for you. You already knew it."

"That was it, wasn't it? I'm glad you both enjoyed the literature I got you into. Your intellectual grasp of it probably quickly exceeded mine, but I do see that I was still the teacher. It helps me appreciate that fact, having taken literature later as a student at Berkeley."

"I'm sure it did. It was a good idea, something for which you obviously had a great aptitude. Anyway... I am going to get this told, Julie."

He laughed and she smiled back tolerantly enjoying the journey.

"So... at long last I was going to learn the secret that Helen had such a hard time telling me all those years, and that Lesa had such a hard time telling me all those subsequent years. From my limited perspective that secret was going to be an explanation of why her father committed suicide."

"Why her father committed suicide? You mean, why he shot himself?"

"Yeah, just why. Do you know why? I think you told me once that you didn't.

"No. I have no idea. Why did he?"

Cosmological Considerations

“I don’t know. That’s the secret I wanted to find out.”

“Why? I mean why was that the biggest secret you wanted to find out about Helen? You think that’s a bigger secret than the rape incident?”

“Yes, of course.”

“I don’t get it, Ray. You know everything about how her father died, and you knew nothing about the rape incident for which your whole life was altered almost inexcusably.”

“Here’s the difference. When I found out the details of the rape incident, it all fit into place with the model of Helen I had in my brain. If I was just told that Jonesy had date raped Helen, you would not have had to tell me one more thing. My model of Helen is sufficient that everything after that, even her not telling me, but telling Allie and Lesa, does not require a single revision to my model of her. Nothing would remain unexplained.

“Of course it added a lot to my model of Roger and Ellie and their ability to know when to defy taboos. They seem to have known that their loving each other was not a bad thing no matter what kind of pressures they felt from the outside. So yeah, I learned a lot that filled in important details on the living that I still had time to have figured out anyway. But...”

But?”

“I have a gap in the model of my own world with Helen, surrounding the suicide of her father. I don’t know how it happened, but more importantly, why, the situations that led up to it. I don’t know what he might have told his immediate family about why continuing his life was not a viable option. I don’t even know whether he left a suicide note. I felt that I too was his immediate family. That information should have been shared with me. I loved him like my own father. He left me as well as them. He would have wanted me to know why. I knew him; I know he would have wanted that. I don’t know what Helen experienced in that regard so I have no idea how she would react to whatever the situation was. I knew more about Lesa’s parents’ deaths in twenty minutes after going back to the hotel than I learned in a lifetime about Helen’s father whom I loved. I know nothing about why she reacted as she did, because I don’t know what it was to which she reacted. She gave me no information whatsoever. I have a hole in my model of Helen that will never be filled in. I just happen to think that’s terrible, Julie. Terrible!”

“You are a strange one, Ray Bonn. And I am absolutely charmed by every aspect of that strangeness.”

“Really Julie, don’t you see how sad it is when people carry secrets to their graves that could have kept them alive in our brains as long as we live?”

“I do,” she said. “I do see that Ray, and I wonder just like you do, why she wouldn’t have shared that with you. It was yours too.”

They sat opposite each other, Julie sitting on the couch in her thin, nearly transparent nightgown just staring those huge loving brown eyes at him, Ray at his computer desk staring back at her.

“Did you ever happen to read a book by a guy... Jaynes? I think it was called “The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of Bicameral Mind” or

Cosmological Considerations

something like that... a strange title. He had this idea that consciousness was not something that evolved over a long period of time but was something that came into existence only a few thousand years ago because the two hemispheres of the human brain had begun to communicate. The right sides of our brains began to communicate by voice with the left hemisphere because of the emergence of language. And we began to hear voices from the dead, not even aware that they were right inside our head.”

“I did read it, Julie. I was still using your reading list when it came out, I think. I kind of enjoyed it as I recall, although his writing style bothered me. He repeated himself a lot more than I was used to with more mathematical scientific writers I had come to enjoy. He sort of *promoted* his ideas rather than fully justifying them. That was what I recall anyway.”

“Yes. I remember that he did that. But the idea that there are others talking in our heads is what made me think about it now.”

“Yeah. I’m with you. It’s like Daniel Dennett’s ‘multiple drafts’ ideas of consciousness as on-going narratives we tell ourselves about our experiences. However, now we are talking of having additional voices so that there are multiple narratives in each of our brains, each associated with a different mind. It’s more like multi-cameralism. I have me, Helen, and Lesa in here chattering away,” he laughed, “telling me what to do and you in there too.”

After a long while of just looking into each other’s eyes, Julie asked, “Ray, have you ever wanted to fill in some holes in your model of Julie Davidson so that she isn’t just a spectator or spectacle and can express herself more coherently in your brain along with the other women you love?”

“I definitely have wanted that; someone who has had such an impact on my life deserves more cortex. I’ve thought about you on so many occasions wondering why this, and why that, without a sufficient model to work from.”

“I think Lesa said one time that when she first met you, she just unloaded her life story and you empathized with the whole thing and figured out everything that needed to be figured out.”

“That’s pretty much it, I suppose, except that finding out information and building models is kind of second nature to me. Therapy is something I know nothing about and don’t really want to.”

“That’s a shame because you’re damn good at it.”

“No. I’m not. Reading the faces of those I don’t know just doesn’t work for me. Lesa ended up seeing a shrink for a while after I left her off in Boston that first time. She didn’t tell me that until she was forced to tell it to me because she felt too frail to discuss anything having to do with the things Helen had told her, and especially the secrets.”

“Oh. Well, if you just listen then, I won’t expect you to fix anything. I’ll get a shrink if I need one to do the clean up chores. Do you mind though?”

“Not at all, I’d really like to know more about your background.”

“Then could you please come and sit by me. I won’t bite or any of those other nasty things I’m noted for. Now I realize that I’ve always wanted you as that dear friend, that confidante with whom to share models of each other,

Cosmological Considerations

no more than that. Well... you know. I don't actually need more than that is what I mean."

"Sure, and yes, I do know," Ray said as he rose, to walk over to sit by her. "Of course, I realize that this is the ultimate intimacy you're asking for."

"I know, pretty exciting, isn't it?" She chuckled a little, but then proceeded immediately to tell one sad story.

Ray had heard a few sad stories in his day, of course, but he thought this one ranked up there a ways.

Julie's mother had loved Helen's father way back when she had been raised with him in that paradise beyond the menhirs, but it turned out that he loved her sister Alice instead or better, one or the other. But Julie's mother had loved him first. That was why Julie's mother Eunice left The Canyon, reaching Seattle within a week or so. She waited tables, swept floors, and finally worked the dying days of burlesque in Seattle, which took her to San Francisco where she was featured for her dimensions. But it turned out she was pregnant, and the sleazy operator of the joint kicked her out. During that period, she survived by waiting tables and help from a couple of prostitutes who, no doubt, thought, "There but for fortune go I."

After Julie arrived Eunice stayed on with the prostitutes for a year or two, joining in on the financial arrangements, first as a prostitute, but soon got into a little better situation with go-go dancing with a little extracurricular moonlighting for moolah. Julie's earliest memories are of smoke and booze, and men and women cavorting. She was taken away by social services at a certain point and placed into a series of foster homes, being back with her mother for short periods before social services took over again. She was twelve or thirteen when her mother died of an overdose. She was told by her foster parents, who were more like perverted wardens than caring parents. She was continually being molested by the man of the house. One night he raped her for fighting back and threatening to tell authorities about being molested by him. She ran away then and found Haight-Ashbury before the 'Summer of Love' in 1967," she said, "when there were a hundred thousand of us bedraggled young hoodlums running the district. Abuse felt like love when it was consensual as a part of those fun rebellious rituals like 'On the Road Again'. Then I did Woodstock with my VW bug buddies, doing all that fun stuff like drugs and communal nude bathing." Her eyes twinkled. "That was just a total exhilaration almost like up at your falls."

"I think I remember something like that." Ray laughed getting into the spirit of the memory as Julie leaned up against his shoulder, smiling back.

"Yes. And then I *did* Canyon Creek. I don't quite remember why. I think that maybe I got a hold of my mother's obituary or something. We were looking for anything we could find on her, probably her death certificate that I still have. I was trying to get government assistance to help us survive. When I saw she was from Canyon Creek up in Washington, we had to go see if I belonged there. To see if that was the place for a commune," she laughed. "Of

Cosmological Considerations

course I didn't belong there either..." After a pause she concluded, "or anywhere else."

"You had traveled down a lot of roads by the time we met you."

"Yes. The way you just said 'we' is the saddest part of my life. I liked you even though I didn't know why I would fall in love with some kid that much younger than me. I had been loved on and trampled over by all kinds of men I never wanted by then. But for some reason I wanted you, just you. You know, Ray, I've thought about that over the years, brooded, I guess you would say. Do you know what I came up with?"

"I have no idea, Julie. What?"

"Well, it's like your explanation to me. It's a very brief concept, but it will take a lot of explanation for you to understand it, I think. You see, my mother was the beauty of her family – maybe that's just my perverted impression because I looked so much like her – but her little sister got the man my mother loved. Thus, she was more or less exiled from paradise; her sister obviously understood that she was a threat to her own happiness, so she conspired to keep her away." Julie put a hand on Ray's. "Sound familiar?"

"I see where you're going with this, if that's what you mean."

"That is what I mean, exactly what I mean."

Ray objected, "But it's an incomplete model, don't you think? That's the trouble with it. It doesn't take into account all the elements of the system."

"Ray, this isn't physics!"

"Physics is the wrong word. I never should have used that word when I got so sanctimonious about everything just being 'physics. What I meant was that everything is natural phenomena with no twilight zone elements."

"So what twilight zone elements have I introduced into this description?"

"None. I didn't mean that you had done that, I was just dispensing with my comment about everything just being physics. I know that isn't precisely true; everything is natural though; there's no supernatural hocus pocus magic – that sort of thing. So, no, you didn't try to introduce any of that into your explanation. You're right about what you've said. I agree. However, you've left out essential parts of the system under analysis."

"Systems analysis'? No, Ray. It isn't physics."

"Yes, Julie, get over the words, would you?" Ray was feeling a little exasperated. "Everything is a system of one sort or another and an analysis is just what you're doing when you try to explain something – anything – or just try to figure it out. It's what Lesa and I did when we addressed irreversibility. It's what one does in figuring out what one needs at a grocery store. One addresses the meals to be cooked, the people who will eat them, how long one has to prepare the meals, how long until you plan to go to the store again, all that sort of thing that pertains to food preparation. In our case, Lesa and I first identified all the elements that could possibly affect the results of a microscopic interaction and then we investigated every aspect of those interactions. What you have done is to leave out some of the most essential

Cosmological Considerations

components of your system under study and that damages your conclusions. Your explanation is incomplete – not wrong, incomplete.”

“Like what did I leave out, Professor?”

“Your father, Helen’s father, and me.”

“How do you mean?”

“You have treated us as mere objects to be won or lost with none of the lower-level elements that you used to model you and your mother, and Helen and her mother. I mean your mother’s problem was probably not with her sister at all. Her problem was with the inner workings of the man she loved. No matter how beautiful she was, Helen’s father liked Alice. Period. It was the same with me and Helen. Sometimes the flat-chested girl wins.”

“Well, those girls weren’t flat-chested exactly, they just weren’t endowed like my mother and I were. And don’t you remember what you told me when we got together up here after you and Lesa were married? You told me that I could have had you for however long I had wanted you if Helen hadn’t screamed. Remember that?”

“Yeah. Sorry, I guess I do remember. It was true too.”

“Right. I think Uncle Tom did like my mom, just like you liked me – maybe too much, just like you and me. I think Alice did a Helen on him. There’s more to it than that, I know, but he liked her a lot. I could tell from what she said about what he had told her. I knew from what my Aunt Alice said. I know. Anyway, Ray, that wasn’t my essential point. The men really are irrelevant to the point in these proceedings. It’s the jealous women, Ray. Okay? And none of that is the point of all this.”

“Okay, I get what you’re saying; proceed. What is the important point?”

Julie gave Ray a sidelong glance. “Anyway, the point of all this is that genetics play out. I mean, look at it for heaven’s sake. My mother falls in love with a man who is committed to her closest sibling friend and rival. She is kept away from any subsequent association with the man she loves because of that jealous rivalry. The sisters were close otherwise. They wrote each other regularly, called each other occasionally. It was the same with Helen and me, don’t you see? More or less déjà vu all over again, Ray. How can I make it clearer than that?”

“It’s very clear.”

“Right, so there are roles that we play because our parents played them before us. We can’t help ourselves.”

“Well, the symmetry breaks down because your mother died before her sister, whereas your analogy to a sister died before you. I understand that every analogy breaks down at a certain point. There’s also the complication of how we have been able to continue improvising so well after we reached the age at which our parents died.”

“You know the answer to that, Ray. It’s all in our heads; they’re still living there in our models of them dead or alive. They live vicariously through us.”

“So how’s your mother enjoying this conversation with my dad?”

Cosmological Considerations

“She’s loving it because someone finally understands her. It’s the most enjoyable conversation she’s ever had with a man or anyone else. She’s learning that there are some good men – at least there is one good man, and she’s glad her daughter got to know him.”

They shared heart-felt laughter. “My father wants your mother to know that he is curious about how her daughter ‘Floozy Julie’ could succeed at Berkeley when she herself hadn’t even gotten a high school diploma.”

“You can tell him she did it the old-fashioned way, Ray; she slept with the professors.” Clearly Julie was bored with the projecting and they were losing track of who was doing the saying.

“Actually, I worked my way through by dancing and stripping and I humped a couple of professors in the more difficult classes along the way. I even married one of them. I thought I had finally found my Ray Bonn, but no. He was one of the worst men I’ve ever known. Turns out that I wasn’t the only student he screwed – I guess I should have thought of that, huh? But little boys? No. He ended up in prison for that and I helped put him there.”

“Sounds like you found him the right home.”

“Yes. I did.”

There was a thoughtful interlude that Julie broke with, “Don’t you ever feel like you’re reliving your dad’s life?”

“I have on occasion. Like I said, the problem with these analogies is that they never work very precisely, but yeah, there are definitely analogies that I’ve been aware of from time to time. I’ve tried to avoid them whenever I’ve sensed one.”

“I think I’m going to try harder to do that from now on, Ray. I really do. Do you have a robe I could put on by the way? I feel pretty ridiculous parading around in front of you like this right now.”

“Really? You don’t need to. I’m used to seeing how beautiful you are, but do you really want me to go get you a robe?”

“Would you mind?”

He was up, “Not at all. I’ll be right back.”

Julie put his robe on when he returned with it and cinched up the sash making her, if anything, even more appealing to him.

“I know I was drunk when I got here, Ray. I am truly sorry. But I’m sober now. I am not an alcoholic by the way. I think I’m going to lay off a little from now on though. Tonight was embarrassing – even to me.”

“I know you’re not an alcoholic; it wouldn’t matter to me if you were. We both just needed to vent a little, huh?”

“I did, yes. When do you expect Lesa to call?”

“I don’t.” He walked back over to his desk. “I was just going to call Cynthia when I thought she’d be on her way to the airport and have her tell Lesa to call. I thought maybe in another fifteen, twenty minutes.”

“I’ll be off to bed then, so I’ll be better company tomorrow. Thanks for letting me stay.” She was up and walking out but she stopped, seemed to think

Cosmological Considerations

for a moment, “Ray, would you mind taking me to a woman’s clothing store where Lesa shops tomorrow. I’m going to do a remake.”

“Sure. Sounds fun.”

She continued standing there silently for a few more seconds before adding, “I’ve never told anyone this before, so let’s leave it our secret.”

“Okay...?”

“I had a DNA analysis done one time and do you know what?” She paused thoughtfully again. “Helen and I were half-sisters – more like three quarters.” She walked off then and closed the door to her room.

Ray’s eyes never left the spot where she had stood. Oh my God... He sat there statuesque for a long time. He was realizing that model building is much more like physical construction than he had ever thought: There is often demolition required before one can rebuild on a lot, particularly when rebuilding a complicated structure.

Eventually, he thought Cynthia would be on her way to the airport.

“Hi, Ray. You’re up early.”

“Yeah. What’s the word?”

“Well, I’m almost at the airport. The flights a little ahead of schedule.”

“Fredrik?”

“Seems to have slept fine. I stopped by. He’s thrilled that his little girl is coming. Leonard will be here too.”

“Oh, good. By the way, Roger expressed sincere concern for Leonard. Tell Leonard that, would you?”

“Yes, and thank him. The doctors don’t seem particularly worried. I guess they do a lot of these anymore, but it’s a worry for the rest of us.”

“Yes, it sure is.”

“I didn’t know whether to be saddened or happy about the shocker there. Fredrik and I had worried a lot about that relationship between Roger and Ellie, and it’s amazing how much the perception changes with just that tidbit of information.”

“Yeah, it is. Allie is paving the way for them in case that’s the path they want to follow. Freedom of choice is a great thing, isn’t it? Well, I should let you go; I hear an airplane in the background. You must be getting close. Give Fredrik my best as I told Lesa and remember that you always have my best wishes too. Well, you’ll have my very best right there with you pretty soon,” he chuckled into the phone. “Roger and I are anxious to see you all Thanksgiving.”

Lesa called then before very long. He was amazed at how wonderful it was just to hear her voice. He told her that. He also explained the broad outline of his night up to the minute.

“That’s great,” she said. “Relax there, would you? I can see that Julie really does need some support. Give it to her. Buy her a wardrobe, Ray. She could be an elegant looking woman in the right clothes. Ask for Maria in the store and mention my name. She’ll do the job up right. Spend some money.”

Cosmological Considerations

With promises of her calling as soon as any news broke on Fredrik's surgery, they signed off."

It was five-thirty. Roger would be up in an hour. Ray picked up Penrose's *Road to Reality* to scan a few of those most enjoyable pages. Time sped by and it was time to brew some coffee and make some toast. Roger came down shortly.

"Your mom arrived safely, and your granddad seems to be fine going in. I told Cynthia to give Leonard your message."

"Somebody come by last night?"

"Yeah. Julie came early."

"How come?"

"Company, I guess."

"You guys stay up long?"

"Quite a while. We have a lot of memories from up the creek to talk about. Did you sleep okay?"

"Yeah. I slept well. Can I have Ellie over tonight to study?"

"Sure. To eat too?"

"That okay?"

"We'll look forward to it. Julie will like seeing her too."

Roger was off. Ray finally went to bed and slept like a proverbial log.

#11 Shopping Spree

It was almost noon when Ray awoke. He showered and dressed, and then met what was left of the morning in the kitchen. Julie was busily putting together a very pleasant brunch.

“Did you sleep as well as I did, Ray?”

“I don’t know, do I? But I sure slept well.” He looked at the clock. “I thought Fredrik would be out of surgery before now.”

“Oh, sorry, Ray, I should have told you right off. I picked up the phone on its first ring so it wouldn’t wake you if it was a spam call. It was Lesa. She said everything had gone just as they planned, and that the prognosis is excellent.”

“Great! What time was that?”

“About 10:30. She said he was in surgery less than the four hours they thought it might be. They’re just waiting for him to wake up now.”

“This omelet smells good, Julie. I remember those dishes you’ve cooked for us on other occasions when you’ve been here. You must enjoy cooking.”

“I do enjoy it. It’s hard with no one to cook for, so let me cook for you guys while I’m here.”

“Yeah. Wow. That sounds good to me. Roger is bringing Ellie over for supper tonight.”

“Oh, good. I’m anxious to see her too.”

So they ate their brunch with light cheery conversation. Then Ray brought up the woman’s store issue that Julie had mentioned to see whether she still wanted to “make herself over”.

“Oh, I do, Ray, I do. Do you think you could find a good place?”

“I asked Lesa this morning and she told me where we should go. She said to ask for Maria and to tell her that you’re a friend of Lesa’s.”

“Do I look okay to go like this, Ray? Should I try to doll up a little?”

“It’s my understanding that it doesn’t matter what you look like going in, it’s what you look like coming out. Also... Lesa said that an entire new wardrobe was to be our present to you to show our appreciation.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Appreciation for what? It’s always the other way around. I’m the one who owes you two.”

“No, it isn’t. Anyway, I used to have a hard time just saying, ‘Thank you,’ too, until Mac Heller drilled it into my head that the words are just the simple dyad of ‘thank’ and ‘you’. Try it, I think you’ll like it.”

“Then I thank you... both.”

By the time Maria let them exit the store, Julie was a new person in a tiptop frame of mind. Ray, for his part, had his arms full of boxes with sacks dragging. Maria had been admirably envious of the body being clothed and chose outfits that showed that body off to its elegant finest. There was a dress, shoes, and a hat for the funeral together with an overcoat. Maria even found a parasol that matched because it would certainly be raining.

Ray had insisted that the “makeover” had to include everyday clothes as well – a week’s worth as part of the “wardrobe”. With Julie trying on one outfit after another, Maria had piled up the boxes and commissions. Julie had come out to ask Ray’s opinion on each outfit and got the opinions of envious patrons of the store as well. Ray could tell that Julie had thrived on the attention.

They had still been working on the funeral attire when Lesa called on his cell. The news was better and better, although clearly Fredrik wasn’t feeling like an exhilarated teenager. Ray talked to Leonard and Cynthia; they both sounded as though a great weight had been lifted from them by the doctor’s report. Then Lesa wanted to talk with Julie, which had helped to keep Julie on her high.

“Oh, Ray,” Julie said, “I haven’t been this happy since Haight-Ashbury – well, except for that day up by your pool until Helen kicked my butt, oh, and that time when the foundation got started. Now, you better take us to a grocer so I can start on a token pay back.”

So they stocked up on groceries for the coming days, knowing Eddie and his family would be coming. Julie wore an extremely charming housedress, Ray thought, as he helped her around the kitchen.

When Roger walked in with Ellie, the dining room table was all set and sparkling. Both the kids addressed Julie as “Auntie”, which she had always seemed to enjoy. Ellie was bubbly about how nice Julie looked and was enthused to see her new wardrobe right after dinner. In total, the kids were in high spirits. Ellie was laughing about telling her friends she was going to her grandfather’s funeral on Thursday.

“Weren’t any of them concerned that I had died?”

“No; they know that you’re not really my grandfather anyway. Maybe some of them thought I had lied, I guess.”

“Yeah, or that if you had really been adopted...”

Ray saw the look Roger shot him and desisted. The adoption option should never be discussed again – by him anyway.

“So,” Ray took the detour, “how’d practice go today.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Good, except that the coach doesn’t like me taking a day off on Thursday. I’m going to have to have a note. Jonesy isn’t my grandfather. Oh, I have to get with the basketball team the weekend.”

Julie tried picking up conversation with Ellie, asking what classes she was taking.

“The usual, math, English, biology, German, history, and Leadership.”

“Leadership?”

“Yes. I’m class President so I have to take that class fourth period.”

“Oh, I didn’t know that. How’s Roger like the idea of you being President?” Ray heard Julie ask.

“He doesn’t mind. He’s President of the Student Body. That’s bigger. He’s in the leadership class too.”

Julie laughed, “Ray, you’ve got some budding politicians here.”

“Yeah. Eddie was always appalled whenever he thought I was getting close to running for something, but he was Student Body President and so was Jamie. Allie was something... what was it Ellie, Vice President? I ought to get to run for something wouldn’t you think?”

“Yes, Mom was a VP and she’s running for the US Representative next year,” Ellie blurted out.

Roger looked at her, “She is? Since when?”

“Since yesterday. She’s got a year to line up the ducks.”

Julie was suddenly fully into the conversation. “Really? That is awesome news, Ellie. I wondered how long until one of Hellen’s children would step up.”

“Step up, like up to the plate?” Roger asked.

“Yes, just like that. Like your dad did in Yankee Stadium. When people have a talent, it’s a shame if they don’t apply it, don’t you think? I wish I had the guts to do what Allie’s doing. There’s a Representative down there I’d just love to oust.”

“Then do it, Auntie!” Ellie was enthused. “Step up to the plate and oust the bugger. You and Mom could give each other moral support.”

“That’s a good idea,” Ray said. “Our foundation would help you out, and we’d help you as much as was legally possible.”

“You know, maybe I will. That’s a good idea. I’ll talk to Allie about how she’s going about it. It’s plenty early. I know you have to start early.”

Lesla called again after supper. She talked to Roger and then Ellie with them both demonstrating a newfound happiness with family. Then she talked for a long time with Julie about her rationale for a makeover, the new wardrobe, and finally her growing enthusiasm with the idea Ellie had planted of running for office. The clothes helped a lot, she had told Lesla. Then Julie found Ray in the study on his computer, gave him the phone, and went off to clean up the kitchen.

“It sounds like things are going really well there.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Yeah, they are,” Ray said. “That wardrobe was a great idea, I think. Maria was in seventh heaven picking up commissions.”

Ray heard the latest of Fredrik’s complaints and that it was all to be expected, but the progress was super according to the doctor. She and Cynthia were at home now, and Leonard and Sharon would be arriving shortly.

“Sharon, huh.”

“Yes. She is something in talking to other doctors. They give her a lot of respect; I’ll tell you what. Cynthia is delighted that she came to ask all the right questions.”

“So has she asked the impertinent ones yet?”

“Oh, Ray. She just has a great sense of humor. Daddy likes her a lot too. Leonard teases her unmercifully, and she loves every minute of it. I am so happy you encouraged me to come.”

So that had been one long call what with all the recipients. Ray drifted into the kitchen to put the phone up. Julie was just finishing up.

“The kids must be upstairs doing homework, huh?” Ray asked.

“Why would they be doing that?”

Ray looked at Julie perplexed.

She laughed at him. “Ray, you may have been the last seventeen-year-old virgin on planet earth. If those kids are as much alive as it seems to me that they are, they’re up there right now doing what evolution adapted them for.”

Ray shook his head, irritated.

“It’s all right, Ray. They are very nice kids and very smart. They will be doing whatever is the right thing to do in the circumstance. You have to trust them. They were both bred for it and raised that way. I got to see some of that background first-hand.”

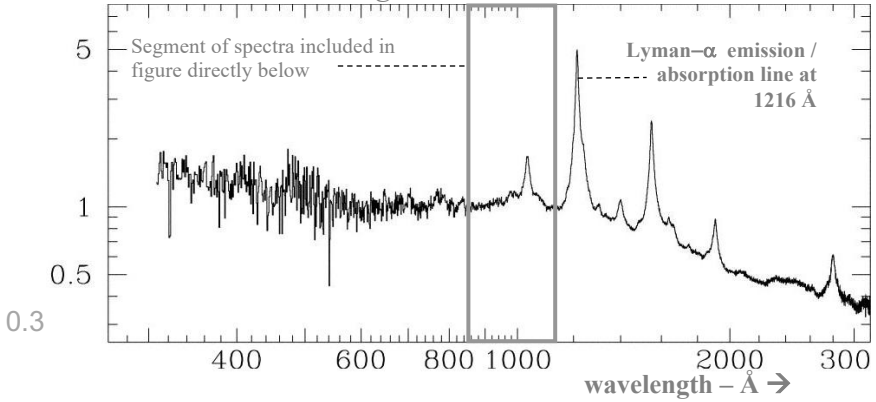
“Yeah.”

“I know I’ve been a real bother and that you want to get into that physics – or naturalism,” she laughed happily, “or whatever you called it. I’m going to call Allie and then I’m going to sneak upstairs real quiet so I don’t disturb whatever is going on, get one of those books up there, come back down, and read it in the living room. If you feel like you want to talk, come on in. Otherwise... I know it may take hours for you to get into the right mental state where you can be productive. That made all kinds of sense to me last night. Go for it.”

So here Ray was, back in the mine heading for the face. Apprehensions had vanished. Julie was all right; it had been the alcohol that had been talking – and performing – last night. The kids, whatever they were doing upstairs, were all right. Fredrik was getting better. Lesa was happy. Everything was fine.

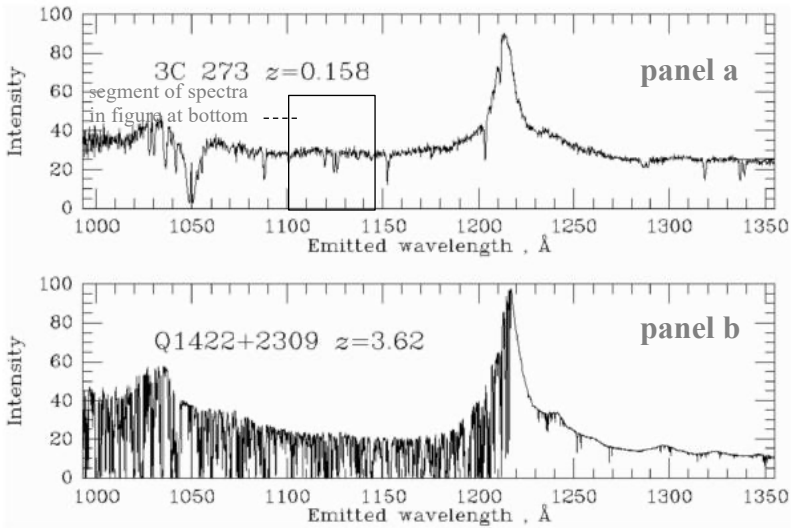
He went directly to the face, Lyman-alpha absorption lines, as cold and dull a topic as he had left it. He could see no sparkle of any colored ores, just thankless work to be done. He needed those papers that Professor Smith had been going to get them last Saturday – the appointment Lesa had cancelled so

Cosmological Considerations

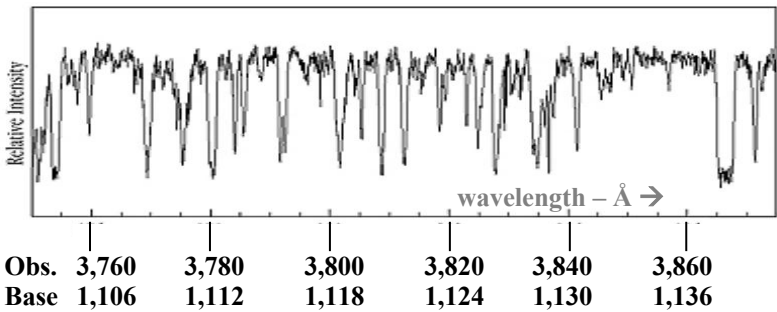


Composite spectra of QSOs in their rest frame

(<http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/ApJ/journal/issues/ApJ/v565n2/54470/54470.html?erFrom=2226131762376180548Guest>)



couple of examples of QSO spectra



Lyman-alpha forest associated with QSO HE 2217-2818 at $z=2.4$

they could make the trip up to the canyon. That had to be done; he could see that, but he was getting tired of picking away at this thankless task. Was the apparent difference in the Lyman-break trough with increasing redshift going to be the death of his approach after all? All the other predictions of his hypotheses worked so well, and it seemed to be exactly – excuse me Albert – ‘the way God would have done it’. The explanation was so subtle, so simple, such an efficient explanation of otherwise quite obtuse cosmogonological arguments. Variants HII and HI in the midst of the hydrogenous plasma could not be so plentiful as to refute his conjecture, could they?

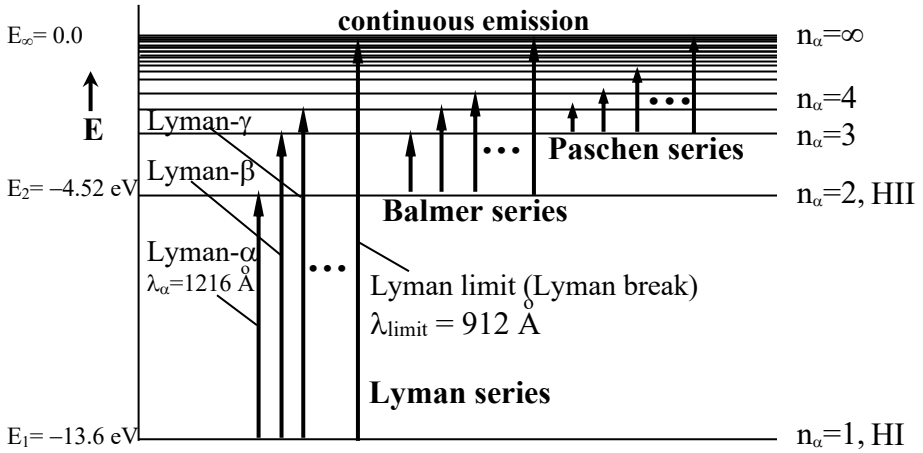
Absorption in a hot plasma is quite different than the attenuation that is experienced in more mundane media, and absorption in a redshifting medium is much different still. So there are plenty of alternative mechanisms at play to accommodate the difference in the effects of absorption in the vast regions between galaxies in deep space. Ray explored the aspect of redshifting that affected the absorption profile. There were limits that pertained. Ray began to explore these, remembering having initiated such attempts before. There must be some angle that he had not explored, some physical option that he had not investigated. He studied the data rigorously, assessing the degree of absorption in these protogalaxies as a function of the redshift-distance to them, the huge range of distances between a redshift of unity and of ten. There was definitely a common feature of the ‘trough’, which characterized all such data, but it manifested itself differently in the closer quasars versus the more remote examples.

It was primarily the ‘line’ in the electromagnetic spectrum associated with the radiation emitted or absorbed by neutral hydrogen atoms (HI) as a part of capturing or releasing an electron in the hydrogen atom that constituted what was referred to as the ‘Lyman alpha forest’. The radiation that is emitted or absorbed at this particular line of the spectrum is always 1216 Angstroms (or 1.216×10^{-5} centimeters). The line tends to be spread because of the velocities of the atoms themselves, caused in turn by the internal heat of the neutral hydrogens in the protogalaxies themselves. Their internal thermal velocities affect the spread of usual Doppler shifts, which changes the frequency of the radiation that is observed from moving objects. He stared at the figures he had included to explain this phenomenon. There was a diagram of the emission/absorption lines of hydrogen and schematic diagram of absorption by hydrogen clouds closer than the emitting quasar or other object that emitted the radiation as a part of its spectrum.

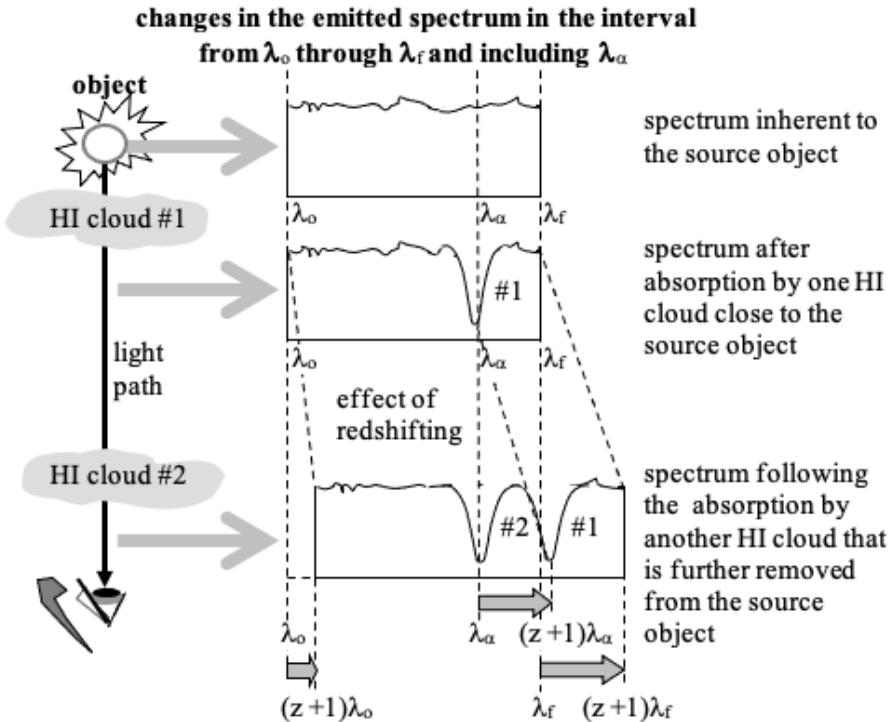
The data itself apparently entails these absorption features being closer together (in redshift) and deeper at large redshifts than they are in intergalactic areas closer to our observation platform here in the Milky Way galaxy. Does that fact of the increased density of such lines as one looks through these clouds to emitting objects further and further away actually imply that the protogalaxies themselves were closer together in earlier epochs of our universe? If so, that would supposedly support the so-called ‘evolution’ of the universe from a hot dense origin, to the cooler neutral hydrogen and the birth

Cosmological Considerations

of galaxies, and then finally, a colder more diffuse intergalactic medium (falsely) envisioned as being the one we inhabit today.



Hydrogen emission/absorption line series



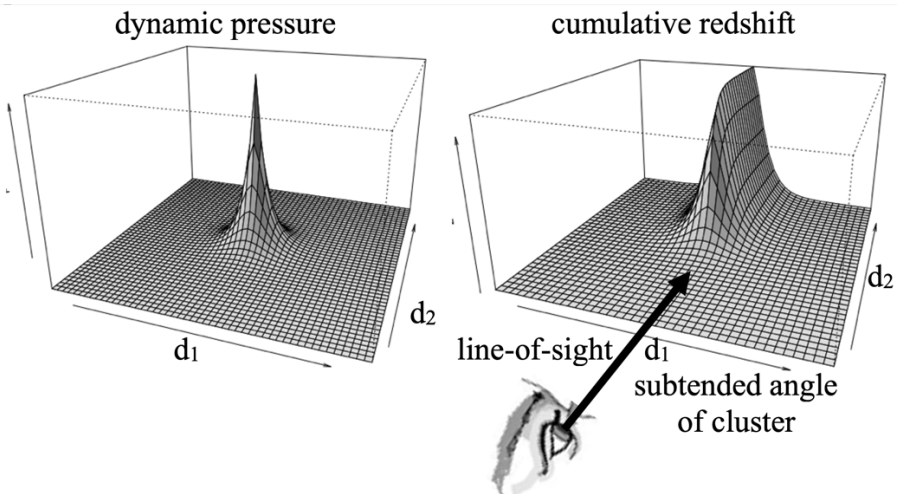
Depiction of operative phenomena of observations over distances for which redshifting is appreciable with intervening neutral hydrogen (HI) clouds

Cosmological Considerations

Years ago when Ray had heard back from *Nature* magazine concerning their having rejected his article, the editor had cited Lyman alpha forest data. Ray had not had the gumption (a lack of self-confidence based in his lack of credentials perhaps) to follow up with interactions with the editor to explore why he had seen that as a disqualifier. In his mind Ray saw it as rejecting the hydrostatic pressure value required for the plasma redshift mechanism Ray had proposed that would account for cosmological redshift. In essence the editor's rejection impugned: "How is it that there are these neutral hydrogen clouds if your required average temperature of the medium is a hundred times hotter than the ionization temperature of neutral hydrogen?"

The answer that Ray had not had at the time is that the electron density and temperature of the plasma medium exhibits extreme variations about the centers of galaxy clusters. Supporting data wasn't available then. Average hydrostatic pressure accommodates an appreciable value of the average of the product $\langle \rho_e | T_e \rangle$ while yet accommodating temperatures lower than the ionization level of hydrogen. Thus, in regions more than about 8 Mpc from the centers of galaxy clusters, neutral hydrogen clouds will form.

The dynamic pressure drops by a factor of a million at less than five Mpc from the center of a cluster. The fingers of God phenomena occur as the result of an accumulation of redshift on light passing through this inner kernel of plasma gas. This leaves vast regions where relatively little redshift occurs, and the temperature drops below ionization levels so that HII and HI regions form in the mid and outer reaches of clusters. So in the vast length of a line-of-sight between these encounters with cluster cores where most of the cosmological redshift accumulates, large numbers of hydrogen clouds will be encountered with relatively little redshift between them. This will become more obvious at greater distances (redshifts).



***Dynamic pressure and accumulating redshift
centered in and around galaxy clusters***

Cosmological Considerations

There was so much of the Standard Model of cosmology that seemed all wrong to Ray, the explanation of Lyman-alpha forests as an instance of 'evolution' in the context of a supposedly continuously changing universe. The success of Darwin's theory has given faux legitimacy to similar claims in scientific disciplines for which the term does not properly apply.

Other aspects that continually irritated him were the usual analyses of cosmological data from a perspective of cosmogony, presuming certainty of a Big Bang. A supposed fact has dictated the interpretation of data in this discipline more than any scientific field of which Ray was aware. A new piece of cosmological data is obtained and used immediately and exclusively to further elaborate the standard model's presumption of a Big Bang. That one conjecture has become the filter through which new observations are seen – the 'rose colored glasses' as it were. The validity of the model depends on two or three pieces of evidence that convention has determined cannot be explained any other way: The redshift of distant cosmological features was first; the microwave background radiation became the ultimate proof. There is also the presumed 'evolution' of major structures in the universe, and still sometimes the elemental abundances of the light elements are accepted as proofs. None of these did Ray feel were legitimately explained in that way.

The unilaterally increasing redshift has been supposed, for example, to only derive from the Doppler redshift associated with the recessional velocities of the various distant objects or a general expansion. It is still supposed that there is no other viable mechanism to account for that phenomenon. Ray and Lesa were both convinced that Ray had found one.

The microwave background blackbody radiation whose temperature is 2.728 Kelvin is assumed to be the remnant of the burst of electromagnetic energy released by the bang itself. To suffice as explanation one part in billions more matter would have had to have been created than antimatter, which when the anti-hadron genocide was over, resulted in billions of times more photons than material particles left in our universe. Ray thought that to be a strange myth indeed. For that theory to even approximately accommodate observations however, it must be presumed that this radiation had bounced around in the dense soup of the early universe until it had cooled to a few thousand degrees Kelvin. At that point stars and galaxies were presumed to have formed clearing an intergalactic medium through which this cooler radiation could begin its trek toward us as though from a receding surface whose temperature had to have been a few thousand degrees. Supposedly cooling continued via this process of 'expansion' away from us, to Doppler shift the radiation all the way to its current microwave wavelengths that is associated with a 2.728 K blackbody temperature.

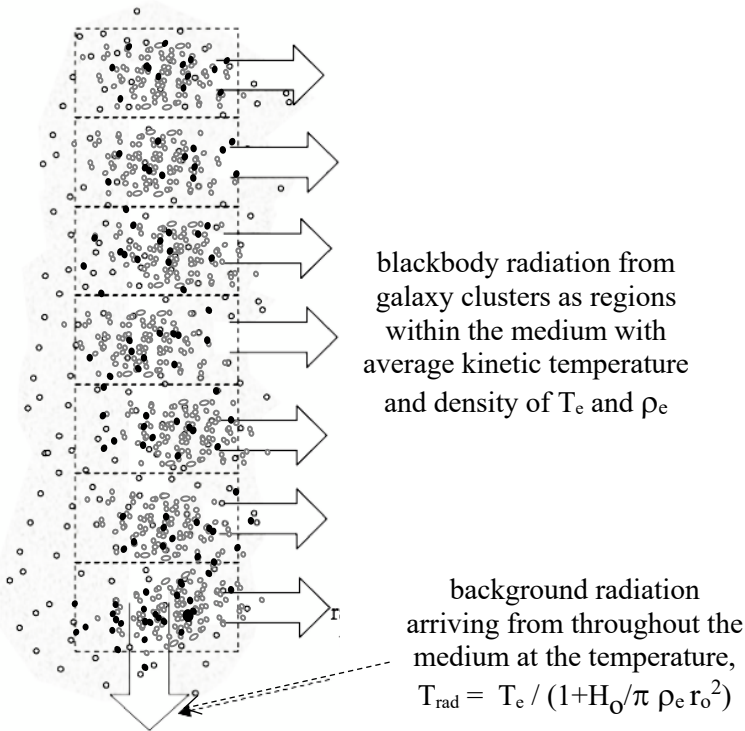
What Penzias and Wilson first thought to be the result of pigeons shitting in their antenna was so greedily adopted by enthusiasts of the Big Bang, providing a rather quaint route to a Nobel Prize, Ray had thought, but no more so than Riess's more recent one. Truly Penzias and Wilson had been lucky, pigeon droppings turning to stardust. There were so many inconsistencies in

Cosmological Considerations

this explanation that Ray would begin stuttering when he attempted to explain it to anyone. For one thing, the universe is *not* cold, he would say. No feature of it is. Stars, galaxies, intragalactic materials, and intergalactic medium are all many orders of magnitude hotter than the characteristic frequency of the microwave background radiation. The explanation of that too is ridiculous.

Ray was certain that his explanation was the only viable explanation. What is the radiation distribution that would be observed if one were in the midst of an extended redshifting medium of a given temperature? That was the proper question. No one had ever seemed to ask that question nor, therefore, attempt a rational answer. It was complicated. Importantly, no one he had ever asked had even had a glimmer of recognition with regard to what Ray was getting at when he asked it. Only Lesa – she got it.

The pertinent question is: “What is the characteristic radiation from an infinitely extended redshifting medium? The basic units of the universe are galaxy clusters that are excessively hot, i.e., well in excess of 10^8 K in many cases, and of relatively high electron density, i.e., on the order of 10^{-2} cm^{-3} or more in the central region. How much this blackbody radiation from the medium itself is redshifted is a function of both the temperature T_e of the medium, the electron density ρ_e , and the cross section of the electron is r_o .



The cooling of continuously redshifted radiation

Cosmological Considerations

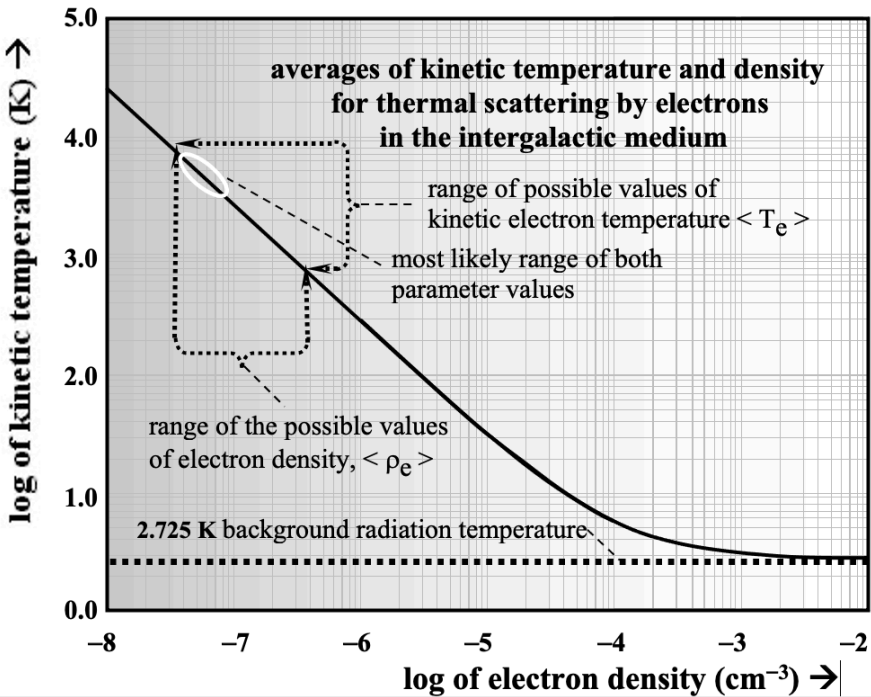
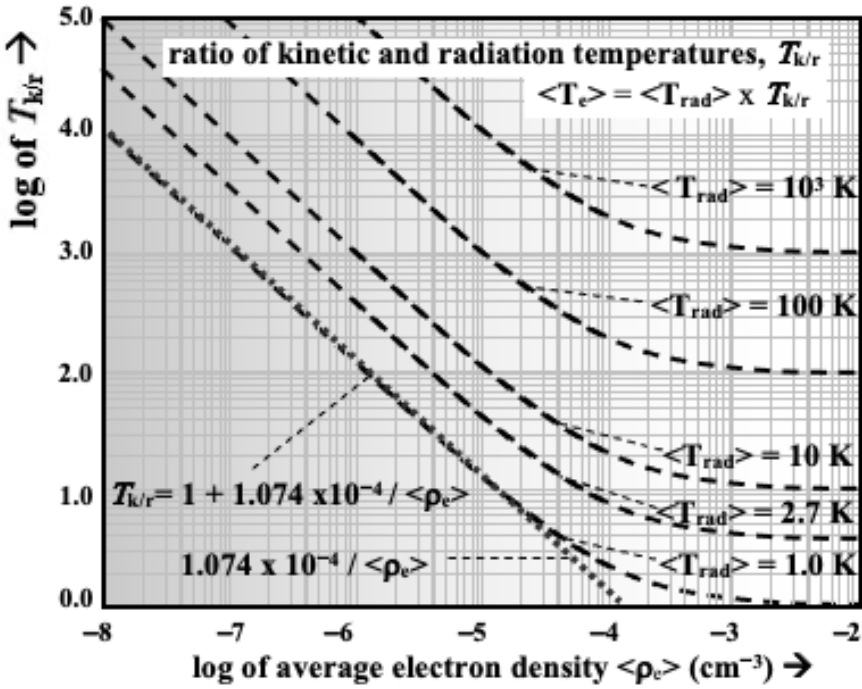
Once we know the temperature of the cosmic background radiation, which we know extremely accurately, then either the average temperature or average density of the intergalactic medium can be determined in terms of the other. That these averages did not agree with values required to produce the cosmological redshift is only because the average of a product of two parameters need not equal the product of their averages. Equality would only apply if there were no variation whatsoever of the two parameters throughout the domain over which the averaging took place. Ray desperately wished Lesa would investigate those statistics to provide him more assurance.

As far as an explanation of the elemental abundances, that was not an exclusive or even necessarily a legitimate claim of the standard model. The originally accepted explanation of that, not Gamow's earlier flawed approach that confused the production of Lithium. Hoyle and his colleagues had disproved that. It was their explanation and later elaborations of it that had been adopted into the standard model. It was all based on equilibrium abundance distributions determined at each individual temperature from the extremes associated with a Big Bang all the way down to the current situation. But at each temperature the analyses assumed thermal equilibrium not the apposed dramatic transitioning.

Ray did not think it an unreasonable stretch to suppose that the intergalactic medium might, in fact, be at that appropriate temperature right now in cluster cores or certainly in gamma ray bursts. It could account for the distribution and it is now and always has been – a cauldron for the perpetuation of the natural processes of the universe. Forever and ever and all that – no more one-time creation myth, but one that is forever going both ways. The universe is the way it is, not because of the whim of an egocentric God, or the whim of a (no better understood) gigantic quantum fluctuation effecting that same presumption but because it can be no other way. It is the logical consequence of being.

The universe is the way it is, not because this is the best of all possible worlds as various ideologies and Voltaire's Professor Pangloss might suppose but because this is the *only* possible way for it *to* be. Different galaxies coalesce and exist for a billion or ten billion years or so, accreting black holes at their centers. That encapsulated matter, far from being sucked into a singularity under that Schwarzschild event horizon beneath which no observation can ever be made and therefore no one should ever presume, beyond which no human presumption could be validated in the sense of attempting to refute it by measurement, would re-emerge.

Ray presumed just as validly as could anyone else concerning the nature of processes beneath such shrouds, that it would eventually be spewed forth. Such eruptions would no doubt be heralded by uniformly distributed isolated gamma ray bursts throughout the universe that would generate energies only conceived in conjunction with the Big Bang of the entire universe itself. Ray's model of the universe involved continual eruptions throughout a much vaster realm than current cosmologists conceived, but to the same effect. So what?



Kinetic temperature versus electron density of the medium as implied by the observed 2.725 K background radiation

Cosmological Considerations

That established cosmological explanation allows the universe itself to expand by some unfathomable explosion out of what can be conceived no other way than as a black hole, for which they such exigencies are denied. Like the Red Queen in *Alice in Wonderland* cosmologists have chosen to believe these two antithetically impossible things before breakfast. The biggest black hole of all has not collapsed into a singularity. Why not? The universe seems according to the standard model to have emerged instead from just such an origin. Matter in even lightweight black holes is conceived as never being able to escape from its much looser confines, so is it reasonable that the largest conceivable black hole would have a lesser grip? Total gibberish, Ray thought and on top of that... inflation!

Those were his comfort zone thoughts. He was reveling in it. But he wasn't pushing that envelope. He needed Lesa more than ever and yearned for her to get back to being a world renowned physicist.

The absorption formulas applicable to his model of forward scattering in a hot plasma medium came to mind again, he tried them using his electronic computation tools. The prediction spread the troughs of the Lyman-alpha forests out a little. So if he assumed a more or less approximately constant coalescing of hydrogen clouds and protogalaxies out of the hydrogenous plasma between cluster centers that would seem to account for the observed absorption patterns. Perhaps. That coalescing would not take place in extremely hot plasma was obvious – the regions between cluster cores is where it happens. The standard model assumed general cooling whereas this model assumed regional cooling. He contemplated other possibilities as he sat motionless before his screen having to do with hydrostatic pressure gradients.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw that Julie had entered the office.

“Oh, hi Julie. Were you there very long?”

“A little while. I enjoyed seeing you in your trance. Don't let me disrupt it. I'm just heading for bed.”

“What time is it?” Ray looked at the time on his screen to answer his rhetorical question. “Oh. Late.”

“Yes. Very late. Good night.”

“Julie?”

“Yes.”

“Are Roger and Ellie still upstairs?”

“Roger is,” she said as she smiled knowingly at Ray's concern. “He took Ellie home a long time ago.”

“Oh. Good.”

“Yes, they were good. Just to ease your mind in case you're back here on planet earth with the rest of us, I don't think there was any hanky panky taking place tonight. They seemed pretty intense about their studies when I went up earlier.”

“Thank you, Julie. It's wonderful having you here watching the store.”

“My extreme pleasure,” she said. “And thank you and Lesa so much for the wonderful gift today. I just love everything we bought, and I loved the

Cosmological Considerations

experience. It was another happy day in my life. She stepped over to give him a kiss before striding away happily.”

“It was a very happy day in mine too.”

After she had gone off and he heard her door shut, he began thinking of all that had transpired again this day. Tomorrow would probably be an even bigger day, and then the next day. He’d better get to bed too.

#12 Preparing for a Funeral

Ray was up and showered by six thirty. As he exited his room, he met Julie in his robe just going to the bathroom in the hall.

“Good morning.” She seemed to emit a happy aura.

“To you too,” Ray smiled. “You look like you slept well.”

“Very well. You didn’t stay up so late last night, did you?”

“No. I figured we had a couple of big days ahead of us and I ought to be available to help with whatever needs doing.”

“Me too. I’ll be done in here in a minute. I’ll make breakfast if you’ll let me.”

“We’re used to cereal most days, so I’ll just put some out for us.”

Ray had just gotten the bread pushed down in the toaster and the cereal boxes on the table and was laying out the silverware when Roger appeared. Julie arrived right behind him.

“So how’d the homework go last night?” Ray asked.

“Good,” he said, “really good. It’s more fun working on it together, even when it’s for different classes.”

“You have some of the same classes though, don’t you? Leadership?”

“Yeah, leadership and a couple others, and the same class but different teacher for another. We have different homework assignments for that one though.”

“Do you guys always work at that table up there?” Julie asked. “It looked like a comfortable place to work.”

“Yeah. It is comfortable.”

“Julie said you were into it deep last night, Dad. She thought we maybe shouldn’t bother you when I took Ellie home. Figuring out the universe again, huh?”

“I was surprised when Julie said you had taken her home and were already upstairs again. Then I looked at the time. My goodness. I haven’t zoned out like that for a while. It was great. I’m kind of getting back to where I was. Maybe I got a little further last night.”

“I wish you’d tell me about it sometime when I don’t have homework and sports going on all the time. I used to love it when you explained your weird-ass theories to me.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Well, you’ve allocated me precisely zero time to explain my ‘weird-ass’ theories. If you ever have time and are interested, just let me know.”

They finished a cheery breakfast and Roger was off to pick up Ellie and get to school. Ray and Julie picked up. She had on another of the dresses they had bought – a brown jumper like thing that emphasized the color of her eyes and her hair that was not yet completely gray. The straps looked quite extended over her huge breasts. It displayed them as they should be displayed, Ray thought, rather than attempting the impossible task of hiding them. It demonstrated that they could not be hidden while yet doing a respectable job of covering them for respectful ogling. That thought amused him.

Allie called shortly to talk to Julie about chores with the luncheon that seemed to require someone local and so Julie called Marsha to figure out a solution. Then Lesa called Ray on his cell phone and they chatted for most of an hour, with her giving him tips for preparing for the Eddie Bonns coming tonight. She could still make it home tonight and go up with them all tomorrow. She would like to if he wanted her to.

“What about your father?”

“Daddy is going to be just fine. He wouldn’t miss me for just a day or two. It might be nice for Allie.”

“Well, you talk to Allie to decide, but I’m fine.”

Then he puttered around with one chore after another, wiring flowers that he had not thought about the previous day. He was glad he had not forgotten. Then in the afternoon he and Julie went for a very pleasant long walk through the park. Afterward while they were in the car again coming back from the park, Ray stopped by the same store where they had bought Julie’s wardrobe.

“Why are we stopping here, Ray?”

“To get you a robe. I don’t mind you using mine, but it’s hardly the right size or shape for you, do you think? And,” he laughed, “who knows, if we have a fire it might get embarrassing for me not having my robe. Isn’t that what those things are supposed to be for?”

So they bought one, as well as a pair of bedroom slippers that she insisted she had no need for whatsoever unless he was trying to hide her pretty toes as well as everything else.

Then they waited. Eddie had said that they would just as soon pick up a car at the airport so they’d have something to drive up north. That way maybe there would be enough cars for everyone.

At about seven thirty they arrived. Julie had prepared a huge meal for everyone. Allie’s family and Eddie and Lisa. Jamie and Judy made it too as a means of last-minute coordination among the major contributors to the occasion. The meal had required a rather large effort, Ray realized more after everyone started eating, than he had had any idea of before. He had helped Julie, but probably not nearly as much as he should have. He had noticed beads of sweat on her forehead before dinner, but as she sat down, her face was as cool and calm as could be. Allie had gotten there very early and so had Judy. Besides, the women seemed at ease doing the helping.

Cosmological Considerations

Julie was an integral part of all the festivities, besides being chief cook and bottle washer, he thought. All the women were enthused about Julie's outfit and wanted to have a demo of the rest of it after dinner.

However, Allie was nervous. Stephanie should have come tonight. She hoped she would wear something presentable to the funeral. Her husband was taking off work. He shouldn't have; he used any excuse not to work. That was probably why he had married Stephanie in the first place. The other women all worked to calm her. They assured her without evidence that Stephanie would be fine, and that Johnny had not just married her for her family's money. He loved her and she loved him. It was easy for all of them to see that, so why not her?

Ellie and Roger were a unit mostly unto themselves other than politely answering whatever they were asked. Roger fielded questions on his athletic prowess, Ellie on her homecoming appearance, sneaking hints about her more significant role as center on the girls' basketball team for the upcoming season. Ray was sure that it must bother them that they were perceived as so one-dimensional and shallow by virtually everyone. He guessed Ellie's having diverted their questions was an attempt to change that perspective as well as indicating a certain amount of jealousy with regard to Roger's fame.

Tom explained to the men exactly how Allie wanted the procession to proceed. "Pallbearers will be Jamie, Eddie, Jimmy Thompson – I think it's Thompson, something like that, Cecil, Ray, and Roger.

"Is that all right with you, Ray? It's already to be printed up that way in the morning, but it's not too late to change if that bothers you."

Ray thought, Whoa! Now my own kids and I have to carry that criminal asshole to his grave. Oh well. Sure, he thought. "Why not?"

"They can print those up the morning of the funeral?" Jamie asked.

"Yes. They're bending over backwards to make this a nice occasion."

Ray responded, "Well, yeah, I guess all those arrangements are fine by me if they are with everyone else. Roger? You okay with it?"

"Yes. It's good. I'd like to be a pallbearer," he said.

The other boys agreed also.

Then Tom interrupted the women's chatter with, "Girls, Allie wanted to know whether Julie knew any of Jonesy's favorite songs or poems. Do you Julie? We need to get that arranged so we can tell them. What about his ex-wife, should she have an input? We can still get them into the brochure."

"I'll call Marsha. We'll have something for you. Can it be corny like, 'Mama's Don't Let Your Babies grow Up to Be Cowboys'?" He loved that one." She laughed.

"Do you sing, Julie?"

"I'd have to have some little accompaniment. Does Stephanie still sing?" Julie asked.

"Yes, she does," Allie said. "Would you ask her, Julie?"

"Sure. We'll make sure we have it covered, and I'll get back with you," she said, clearly delighted to be so integral a part of everything.

Cosmological Considerations

So Julie was on the phone for a long while. It turned out that Marsha would like to be a part of the tacky entertainment too. And as it turned out, Stephanie was glad to be a part of anything.

Later when Ray talked with Lesa again, telling her of all the hullabaloo, she said, “Ray, you wouldn’t care if they used that old cartoon doggerel you and I used to spout off to each other would you. I think it would be really nice if you quoted it.” She laughed then.

“Lesa, be serious.”

“I am,” she said. “Do it. It’s for Allie.”

“No. We’ll get it on the brochure maybe, but I’m not saying it for him,” he whispered into the phone. “He’s still the guy who raped the girl I loved.”

But Ray asked Allie about having the *Out Our Way* cartoon doggerel in the brochure. She liked the idea, and another tack was in place for a very tacky ceremony.

They would all have to get up early to caravan north in the morning. They would meet Jamie and Judy at Northgate and proceed from there. Ray and Julie ended up being the only ones in Ray’s car to lead the caravan to Northgate and then they hopped in with Jamie and Judy. Ray sat in front with Jamie. Stephanie met them there with her two children. Her boy Thomas and little girl, Elizabeth rode on with the Wilsons and Roger. Stephanie wanted to ride with Julie and Judy. The conversations in both the front seat between Jamie and Ray, and that in the back seat were very pleasant all the way up. Ray always enjoyed talking with Jamie. There were a number of phone conversations among the caravaners taking place as well. Lesa phoned once, mostly just missing them. So it was a very pleasant transit other than Allie’s concerns that it all go off to her satisfaction.

They were agreeably early at the funeral home so that Allie and Tom could coordinate with the management there. The brochures looked professional even if just finalized that morning. They all got a sneak preview of the embalmed body. It was Jonesy, no doubt about that, but so old and haggard. No amount of undertaking skill could have changed that and still retained the identity of a hard-living individual.

The minister arrived early also, so Ray re-established connections with another of his old teammates. Reverend Randolph Etherington was the same old Randy, only more gray and more polished like a piece of re-scrubbed silver, Ray thought. He remembered Randy as having had a silver tongue and been super religious even back in high school. He had really gotten into the pregame prayers that had offended Ray no end even then. Where should the separation of church and state begin? Shouldn’t it be in publicly funded educational institutions? What the hell, Randy was a nice guy no matter which way you turned his collar.

Cosmological Considerations

“So, Randy. How many of us Golden Devils are going to show up today?” Ray liked the sound of Golden Devils in contrast to the silver polish of the presiding reverend.

“Jimmy’ll be here. Remember him?”

“Oh yeah. Running back. He could run a little if we faked the pass play well enough.” They both laughed.

Jimmy was right there behind them in a green sweater. “You kidding? If it wasn’t for me plunging into the middle of that line every time and blocking for you when I wasn’t doing that, you’d have never got a pass off.”

After a few laughs around, Randy came back with, “What’s with this anyway, Ray? It just doesn’t compute. I knew Helen went out with Jonesy that one time, but she never liked him. She never really liked anyone but you. She didn’t even look at the rest of us.”

“Yeah, man, how’d that happen to the big man on campus?”

Ray was pissed, but he held his anger in. Jimmy was the right man for pallbearer for Jonesy. They should have gotten five more. Ray had gotten himself ready for this kind of interaction, so he’d better handle it.

“I guess shit just happens,” he said.

“Shit happens! Now that’s a good one,” Jimmy echoed enjoying every bit of this funeral already. “Shit happens. Ha ha ha.”

“But not to Ray Bonn, it doesn’t,” Randy said very soberly.

“So Ray beat the shit out of him, and they were even,” Jimmy added jovially. “Tit for tat or tat for tit.” He laughed almost hysterically.

“We’re at a funeral,” Randy reminded Jimmy.

“Oh, yeah,” Jimmy said more seriously. “Sorry.”

Then Randy was shaking hands with another person that seemed about Ray’s age. “Johnson!” Jimmy exclaimed. “You remember Ray.”

“No one has ever forgotten Ray Bonn,” the person denominated ‘Johnson’ responded.

Jimmy was impatient with Ray’s squint of trying to recognize Johnson and blurted out, “Oh come on, Ray, you had your hand up Johnson’s butt a thousand times. Turn around, George. See if he recognizes you that way.”

“I was the center,” Johnson said. “I’ve lost some weight.”

“And gotten older too, George.” Ray shook his hand. “You look good.”

Randy went off with Allie and the undertaker leaving Ray with his former teammates. Roger came over to ask Ray something about what was expected about the pallbearing procedures.

“Stick with Jamie, Roger. He’ll tell us everything.”

“That’s your kid, ain’t it?” Jimmy asked, “Seen him on television the other night. Hell of a player.”

“He’s a nice-looking boy, Ray,” George amended. “Clearly takes after his old man at being able to chuck a football.”

Ray noticed a media van and cameramen clamoring here and there. One had got Jimmy, George, and Ray, with Roger walking away. Well, that was what Allie wanted. It wouldn’t hurt Roger and Ellie any.

Cosmological Considerations

“Yeah, did you see how far he chucked that thing last Friday? They had that on the news, Ray, so we all got to see it.”

“It reminded me of that pass you through at homecoming, Ray,” George said. “That was one helluva throw. Who caught that? Was that Jonesy?”

“It was I,” Randy said proudly, returning from his chores. “But I think we better get situated now. There’s getting to be quite a crowd. Ray, there’s a mourner’s room in there through that door.”

He knew; he’d been there before.

The facts about one John Jones – known to most as just Jonesy – were read. Julie, Marsha, and Stephanie did an amazing job on the old western song. It seemed fitting. It’s a shame raising a kid to be a cowboy when there just ain’t no more cowboying to be done, Ray thought. But, of course, Jonesy wouldn’t have been any good at that either. Looking at the brochure with a photo of Jonesy on the front and the doggerel on the back, as he sat there Ray knew that Allie was indeed getting her money’s worth on the occasion. There was a cameraman even in the chapel. Never again would anyone worry about incest between Ellie Wilson and Roger Bonn, no matter what else there might ever be to worry about.

Then Randy got up to do the formalities of trying to convince God to take this pitiful glob of human flesh. He understood that all we like sheep have gone astray and only Jesus could possibly have kept any of us from raping a girl who wanted nothing to do with our advances. There is yet forgiveness for any and all our sins, and in that chest beat a heart as big as all outdoors, or whatever could have been said also for poor Judd Frye. Ray noticed that it was Julie who had come in after the singing chore to sit next to him. Evidently it had been arranged that she sit there. However, Ray had noticed only because she had leaned over and whispered into his ear.

“Watch your expressions, Ray.”

Oh, God. Yeah, he had to watch that. And once again some woman had to remind him.

He turned to her to mouth the word, “Thanks.”

She smiled and the service went on... way too damn long. Ray did notice during that interchange that it was Marsha on the other side of Julie. He reached over, even while Randy was still speaking to shake her hand unobtrusively. They were really stretching to find mourners for this reprobate, Ray thought, but maybe ex-wives and the children of his rape victim qualified. Ray couldn’t really get a grip on that, but why not when there is no current wife or legitimate children.

Then those gathered – and there were probably at least a hundred people not counting the press – filed by the casket to see what in the hell ever became of old Jonesy. Ray watched the procession through the shutters that separated the mourners sitting behind the coffin from the rabble that had sat in front. He saw several of his old teammates and their wives. A couple of their wives he recognized, as well as a couple women whose husbands he did not recognize.

Cosmological Considerations

Marsha's granddaughter filed by with a middle-aged woman who must have been her mother (Marsha's daughter) and a child – Marsha's great granddaughter, he presumed but evidently not sired by Jonesy. He must have been absent at rubbers when he wanted to be.

When that file had finally exited the chapel, the mourners were allowed to roam at will to browse the remains. Ray noticed for the first time how beautifully Allie had presented herself to public scrutiny. Now she was congratulating Stephanie on a job well done, and she seemed to have excelled at that too for a change. Ray went over to reinforce that valid assessment. Julie was there then too, and Marsha, both of whom took their legitimate share of the credit.

It was clear that other than the 'charade', there were no actual mourners at this funeral – just on-lookers.

So the pallbearers assembled to take the coffin out to the hearse, and then after too long a time, the procession headed up the creek and on toward Canyon Place up on the ridge. Crossing the bridge Jamie and Judy commented on how beautiful that sight was.

Julie did the reality check. "You cannot imagine how beautiful it was looking up there without that monstrosity of a dam that Adam Bonn built to defile his own nest."

"Julie," Ray interjected. This irritated him. "I haven't heard you use that expression since we were kids up here."

"Back before all the blood had run under that bridge back there, huh?"

"Yeah. Back then."

"I'll bet that valley was beautiful then, wasn't it?" Judy asked.

"It was more beautiful than you could ever even imagine, Judy," Julie said. "There were waterfalls that fell in sheets off of rocks into clear pools with minnows and water skippers. Huge trees were all around and between them these beautiful sword ferns and wildflowers. And sylvan nymphs like you wouldn't believe."

Judy and Stephanie laughed.

Ray thought she probably referred more specifically to a certain sylvan nymphomaniac he remembered.

"It makes me want to cry to think about it," she continued.

Ray looked over at her when her voice stopped. She had tears in her eyes.

Then she began again as though continuing a sentence, "...a huge black horse and two kids I loved more than any other people in the whole world."

"And Jonesy," Ray appended cynically with a chuckle.

"Yes, Jonesy... just to keep it real."

"I guess the waters were already rising by the time I was born, huh?" Jamie asked.

"Well, it was about that time, anyway. I can't remember exactly. I kind of avoided looking down in the valley while the water rose."

"My grandfather died about the time I was born too, didn't he?"

Cosmological Considerations

“A while before you were born. I don’t really know how long it was. You know, there’s a plaque up here – right over there,” Ray said as they passed the spot that Lesa and he had looked at the photo of Canyon Creek. “Anyway, on the information boards there, they give all the pertinent dates and there are photos of Adam Bonn and even one of Ray Bonn.”

“Really Ray?” It was Julie.

“Is that right, Pop?”

“Yeah, and the beautiful black horse is there too, but I don’t think they captured the ‘sylvan nymphs.’” He laughed. “We better all stop there after the luncheon to get the right perspective of what I’m telling you. Lesa and I enjoyed reading the information the other day.”

“What ever happened to Grandpa?”

“What do you mean, what happened?” Ray kind of laughed. “You know what happened to him, don’t you?”

“Yes. Mom told us, but she said she didn’t know what happened to his remains. I know he’s not up here on the ridge. I thought he would be buried up here next to grandma, but he isn’t. They found him, didn’t they?”

“Yeah, they found him. I threw him back over the dam.”

“Back over the dam? That was how he died.”

Ray saw Jamie’s shocked expression and Judy’s as he glanced back over the seat. She seemed to stare at him disapprovingly. He noticed that even Julie was looking at him, appalled at what he had said.

“His remains, for Christ’s sake.”

“But the dam wasn’t finished yet when he died,” Jamie presented as a fact to be clarified.

“No. So I kept him under lock and key in my file cabinet at school until it was finished.”

“You had him cremated, I assume.”

“Oh yeah. It would have smelled too bad otherwise.”

“So where are you going to rest when your time comes?” Julie asked.

“I’m not planning on resting. I’m going over the dam too.”

“You’re kidding,” Jamie exclaimed.

“Evidently Lesa has some separate plans for a couple of teaspoons of my fertilizer, but she says she’ll throw the rest over for me.”

They were passing the school that had long since been turned into a rest home. There was a caterer’s van unloading. The parking lot would probably have more cars in it today than it had ever had.

When they got to the cemetery, Ray got out and got the door for Julie while Jamie did the same for Judy, Stephanie slid out on Julie and Ray’s side. Then Jamie and Ray joined the other pallbearers at the back of the hearse. They got the casket in position under the tent ready for the drop. It was starting to sprinkle. The crowd grouped together with Allie and Tom situated with their three children up front, with Stephanie’s little ones seeming quite sobered by the event. Julie was standing between Marsha and Ray again as they listened to the final send off for John Jones, Esquire of the valley that was no more.

Cosmological Considerations

Randy announced again that there was a luncheon, just as he had after his sermon at the chapel. People began to mill around introducing themselves. Marsha came up to Ray then and spoke. "It is so good to see you again, Ray. It's been so long."

"It's good to see you too, Marsha." They discussed why Lesa wasn't with him, which had already been adequately explained by Julie apparently. But it was pleasant speaking with Marsha anyway.

Ray stepped over to hug Allie who was near Helen's grave then. She threw her arms around him sobbing for real about one of her parents. Then several well-wishers closed in to congratulate her on how she had embraced the event. Ray walked over to where Julie and Marsha were still talking as they came up toward the Bonn plot.

Julie said, "Ray, I told Marsha that I had brought up that old saying about Adam Bonn having fouled his nest. I'm sorry. It just popped into my head."

"Yeah," he looked at Marsha shaking his head. "I'd just as soon not ever hear that line of Helen's again. I will always love her, but that line got old."

"What I was going to tell you, Ray, is that Marsha says she heard it from someone before Helen ever thought of it."

"Oh yeah?" Ray showed some interest, but right then Jamie yelled across to him.

"We're supposed to get back to the center for the luncheon."

"You guys can ride with me," Marsha said. "I came up alone. My daughter and her daughter and my great granddaughter rode separate and went right to the center."

"Sure," Ray said. "Let me tell Jamie." So Ray went over to tell Jamie to go on without them. Julie and he would catch up with them at the center. Then Ray strode back to where Marsha and Julie were now standing in the rain huddled under Julie's flared umbrella.

"Where's your car, Marsha?" It was down the line of cars a way, so Ray got a little wet walking off beside the women.

"This is it," Marsha said finally.

Ray climbed in the back and the two women got in. By then most everyone had abandoned the cemetery, so they just sat in the car, with Marsha looking back over the seat at Ray.

"The first time I ever heard that phrase about your father fouling his nest I was in the hardware store with my father. Your father had come in to buy something or other. He got a lot of stuff from us."

"I know he did. I used to go in with him sometimes and I remember seeing you in there with your folks sometimes."

"Me too," she said, "I remember seeing you. But this time your dad was alone, and he was just about checked out when the mayor came in with Helen. Helen's father was mayor then, you know."

"Yeah. He was – for that one term – wasn't he."

Cosmological Considerations

“Yes, he was. His term was cut short, of course. Well, I noticed Helen right off because we were in the same grade. We were kind of friends then I think. But later we weren't. I don't really know why. I liked her.”

“I know you two had been friends in grade school and then it seemed like you and Helen got into separate groups in junior high and high school.”

“When I saw them walk into the store, it was Helen I was looking at because kids are interested in kids, you know.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, she is pulling her dad, the mayor, by the sleeve on his coat, just kind of tugging him along like and she says something like, ‘He’s over there, Daddy,’ and she’s pointing at your dad, Ray. So the mayor walks up behind your dad and pushes his shoulder. I thought it was friendly at first, but it wasn’t. Your dad turned around all smiles and friendly, and the mayor asked him what he was trying to do ruining our town. I was shocked. It was like a big fight like you saw in Westerns or something. Your dad had turned around real calm and said, ‘Hi, John.’ But the mayor kept screaming at him with Helen still holding his sleeve and looking up at the two men. Your dad said, ‘What is it, John? I thought we were friends,’ or something like that. The mayor screamed back at him, ‘You’re fouling your own nest!’ That’s what he yelled, Ray. He yelled it a couple of times at least. I was real scared at that point, and my dad came around from behind the counter to try to calm Helen’s father down a bit, but Helen wasn’t even scared. I could tell that she wasn’t scared and that is what really amazed me. But your dad was amazing, Ray. He never yelled back or shoved the mayor or anything. He just looked at him real calm and said something like, ‘John, it isn’t me. It’s progress you’re fighting. I know there’s a sense in which it is terrifying, but we might as well work with it as against it.’ I don’t know that I remember exactly what he said, but that was the meaning of it. I thought about it over and over, and I never forgot the meaning – especially after I finally heard about the dam. I knew that was what it had been about.”

Ray hadn’t noticed Julie get out of the front seat. He heard her shut the front door though and saw her open the back door. She got in beside him and put her arm around him.

Marsha just stared seemingly without comprehension at the two of them then. Pretty soon she said, “Ray, I’m sorry to have upset you so. I don’t suppose I should have told you that. I just thought you might want to know why I could never get into all those demonstrations against the dam either. I think that was part of why I always liked you more than you would ever have known. Your dad was such a gentleman that day and he made it so clear that it wasn’t him who was our problem. The end of our paradise was just inevitable.”

After a few seconds Julie responded very softly, still holding him tightly as he stared straight ahead. “He did, Marsha. He did want to know. Trust me on this. I know Ray wanted to know about that more than anything else in the world.”

Cosmological Considerations

Ray turned slowly then to face Julie and look into her huge brown eyes. There was a huge flooding of tears. Then tears began flowing from his own eyes, and Marsha began to sob as well, although she probably didn't know exactly why they cried.

"Thanks, Julie," Ray said finally, freeing himself from her. "I have to process that information."

Julie smiled at him as she got out to return to the front seat. "I thought you might," she said.

So Ray sort of sucked it up. "Okay," he said finally. "We better get to the luncheon."

#13 The Charade Is Over

The luncheon was quite precisely what Allie had wanted it to be. To the old folks who resided there it must have seemed like a national holiday. Marsha introduced Julie and Ray to those old people that they would have known. Most of them couldn't remember Ray or Julie, but a couple remembered that Ray Bonn had hit baseballs. "Hell of a slugger that boy," one of the old men who had been a year or two ahead of Ray in high school told him.

He thought about these old people – these *his* age people – and it occurred to him that as a group they were more advanced in senile dementia than they should have been. It just dawned on him then that the byproducts of that mine up creek where his dad had first worked when he came up the creek probably had something to do with that. Helen wouldn't eat any of the fish from up there for that reason, he knew. She had that right.

Then he hung out with Eddie and Jamie at a table eating some cake and cookies while he drank his coffee. "You're not saying much, Pop," Eddie said. "What's on your mind."

"I couldn't begin to tell you, Eddie. I don't know myself."

"You went out with that Marsha once, didn't you?"

"Yes, he did," Marsha's granddaughter responded from where she was offering more coffee to their table right at that moment. "I think that's the highlight of my family history," she laughed. "I have a grandmother who used to go out with Ray Bonn. Whoo, whoo, whoo," she teased. Everyone at the table was still laughing after the coffeepot and its legs had meandered on to other tables.

Finally after Allie and Tom had taken care of the caterer's bill and some of the grandkids had helped clean up the mess, the Bonn caravan was ready to head back down river. Ray said, "Stop at that observation site there at the top of the dam and I'll show you some family history."

So they did. It was a proud family who read about Adam Bonn, whose descendents looked down at the enlarged photo of the town of Canyon Creek

Cosmological Considerations

– the nest that had been defiled – as though they could see through the water itself. They saw the ball field from whence Ray had launched those baseballs, legends of which are now an integral part of the myth of Ray Bonn. He and Julie showed them the school and the various sites of interest including his and Helen’s homes, and where Jonesy had lived. Finally Ray pointed out Trooper, his “beautiful black horse”, and the little kid there by him who was, he assured them, none other than the inimitable Ray Bonn himself.

After they had surveyed the sights, Eddie insisted that they had to get back to turn in the car so they would make their flight. He had an important meeting the next day. They caravanned as they had on the way up and waved goodbyes as they approached North Seattle.

The rest of them stopped for a few minutes at Northgate to pick up Ray’s car. Roger reluctantly left Ellie to the Wilson car and rode on the rest of the way with Ray and Julie. Roger was enthused about all he had seen and heard and buzzed on about it all the way home, with either Julie or sometimes Ray responding to his questions. Lesa called before they had made it home. Roger did most of the talking to her. Ray noted the cheer in the conversation and that was good enough information to tide him over until Roger handed the phone to him.

“Yeah, it was fine,” he said. “I think it was exactly the way Allie had envisioned it. Yes, there was media there, lots of media. I think all her objectives have been met.” Yes, he knew it was late there. He was sorry, but he was sort of in one of his trances, he guessed. Could she speak to Julie just a moment? Sure.

“Yes, it was a nice occasion, but not one any of us would like to have to do over. You were missed by virtually everyone, but everyone understood.” Everyone, Ray wondered. Had anyone at all asked him about Lesa? He didn’t think they had. “Yes, he did. From Marsha Miller,” Ray heard Julie say. “No, it was fine, a little hard. He did fine. Yes, hard. I did. Yes, I will.” Lesa was asking Julie about him. Damn her. Why did no woman ever assume he could handle things on his own? They had no idea what all he had handled.

Then they were home. Exhausted.

Roger was beat too. He said good night right off and headed up the stairs. Ray walked into the breakfast nook area and sat down at the table. Julie sat down by him.

“Would you like a little sherry or something, Julie?”

“I would,” she said.

So Ray poured them each a little and they sipped at it for a few minutes silently. Finally Ray said, “Well, I guess I’m off to bed then.”

He heard Julie come down the hall after him and close her door behind her. He got ready for bed and was there very soon.

He had fallen right to sleep, he guessed, because he was awakened when the phone rang. He was groggy as he picked it up. It was Lesa.

“Ray, if I was there, I would be holding you right now, so tightly you couldn’t breathe.”

Cosmological Considerations

“I need that, Lesa, I really do. I wish I had had you come. I could have gone back to Boston with you afterward. Roger could have stayed over at Wilsons. I don’t worry about the kids like I did.”

“I know, and I’m glad you don’t, but listen. I asked Julie if you had found out anything about Helen’s father. She told me that you had.”

“Yeah, I gathered that was what she had told you. It was rather awful, Lesa. I don’t know what to think even yet. It changes things somehow. Julie was very kind by the way. I think she sleuthed it out. That’s the reason Marsha told me. Then she was just great at sympathizing. She understood. It’s like Helen and I always said about her – after the Venus of Willendorf comment, that is – ‘She’s a very nice person.’”

“Sometimes the thinking has to wait for something more basic. Ray, I’m sure Julie was very glad to have helped you with it. Even having her next to you had to help. She is a very caring person who really cares for you in particular. You’re the closest thing she has to family. Thank her in the morning and let her know how much you appreciate her having helped you get that information in the first place and talk to her about it since she knows all the principals involved. Let her be your shrink through this, in figuring out how to cope with it, if it’s as devastating to your image of Helen – or your – quote – ‘model’, I think you call it, of Helen. Will you do that? I love you so much, Ray. Do that much for me, okay?”

“I will,” he said.

“Ray?”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t just do it because of me telling you to do it. Okay? Let Julie help you figure out who Helen was and who you are on this issue. Just be the Ray Bonn that Julie Davidson remembers, all alone together, maybe even up there by the waterfall,” she paused, “without me, and for heaven’s sake, Ray, without Helen. Hop into the world without the Midas touch for a change. It’s where all the rest of us live.” She gave a kind of gentle giggle it sounded like to Ray. “People like people who know what that’s like. It’s the ‘success of failure’ you’ve pretended to know all about. I don’t think you ever have. The ‘success of failure’, since I think you might need me to tell you, is allowing other people to show sympathy for you, to empathize with you because you have failed.”

“Yeah. I love you,” Ray said. “And here I thought you wanted me to be was your winner.”

“Win or lose, I love you, Ray Bonn. Good night, Honey.”

Ray worked at subduing thoughts and finally fell asleep again, finishing out the night. When he awoke next, he could tell it was almost time to get up. There was the dullness creeping into the room that heralded the morning this time of year.

As he headed for the kitchen to set out some breakfast for Roger, he met Julie in the hall.

She didn’t seem to intend eye contact until she had gotten ready for the morning, but Ray addressed her anyway.

Cosmological Considerations

“I hope you know how grateful I am to you for having uncovered that information on what might have been involved in Helen’s father’s death.”

“Ray, you’ve given meaning to my life, I hope I can give back a little.”

He looked up into the beautiful darkness and depth of Julie’s eyes that were focused on his now. He put his arms around her involuntarily, hugged her, and then quite self-consciously stepped back. “Well, I just wanted to thank you for the things you’ve already done to help me figure this out. But I still need to talk to you about what Marsha told us. Can we do that after breakfast? Would that be all right?”

She smiled so generously that he just stood there for a moment. Then she put her arms around him and hugged him again. It was a strange sensation. He jerked suddenly then, hearing the shower stop upstairs.

“I have to go,” he said.

“I know. I’ll meet you in the kitchen after my shower. Could I make some hotcakes?”

“That’d be good. Roger likes them. I’ll get stuff ready for you.”

Ray got out the fry pan and proceeded to set the table. Roger was there pretty soon.

“So, how’d you sleep?” Ray asked.

“Like a baby,” Roger teased. “I’m sorry, but I really liked yesterday.”

Julie came into the kitchen right about then. “There were some good things about it, weren’t there?”

“Yes. Seeing Dad there with his horse and knowing that no one who looks at it but us will ever know that that was... the Bambino. It was just... just...” Roger seemed stymied.

“Awesome?” Ray asked grinning at Julie.

“Laugh if you want to, but yes. It was awesome,” Roger admitted to the term. “Don’t you think so, Auntie?”

“I do. It was awesome,” she said. The pancakes were ready to dip onto the pan. “Are you two ready to eat these things after I flip them?”

“Yes, I love them,” Roger said taking his place at the table.

“Me too, Auntie,” Ray said smiling at Julie as he filled up the last juice glass.

“So I’ll bet it’s kind of hard to accept that I’m not actually your auntie, isn’t it, Roger?”

“Oh, that’s right. I guess now you’re just ‘that other woman’ living in our house, aren’t you?”

“I guess I am, all right. But that’s okay, don’t you think?”

“Yes. You’re still Ellie’s aunt, so you’ll be mine too.”

“Will I?”

“Yes, you will because Ellie and I are going to get married sometime.”

“Hmm. Well, now that you have that all settled, you two can maybe concentrate a little harder on what you’re going to do with the other aspects of your lives.” Ray teased, but it was more of a probe than a joke.

Cosmological Considerations

“We’re getting there, don’t you think? Ellie is interested in genetics and I think I’ll become a physicist – it’s sort of a tradition in my family.”

“It is all right.”

“Stanford has excellent departments in both those fields, and Uncle Ed is down there.”

“Uncle Ed?”

“Oh,” he swallowed another bite of pancake and egg. “That’s what Ellie calls him, and it doesn’t seem to me like I should call one of my professors ‘Eddie’, does it?”

“I guess not. But does Uncle Ed sound a lot better to you? You’ve got kind of a screwed-up family, don’t you kid?” Ray said, thinking about all the weird relationships.

“It is, isn’t it? But the thing is that it isn’t the least bit dysfunctional like most of the other kids’ families. We have a great family.” He paused, but without losing eye contact with both Ray and Julie, his gaze vacillating between them indicating that there was more to come. “And the greatest thing is that Ellie isn’t even part of my family yet.”

Julie rose to get the latest pancakes off the griddle and onto their plates. She poured some more onto the pan.

“Now that really is awesome,” Ray teased. “You get to do that yourself.” Ray winked at Julie. Ray realized how much Roger had enjoyed the God-awful fire drill Ray had just survived the last few days and was glad that he had since it had been put on for his benefit.

“I’m full, Auntie – there I go again.” He laughed. “This has been a great carbs meal for my game tonight. It’s our last home game, I think. It’s the first district playoff. You’re coming aren’t you... Julie?”

“I’d sure like to see this emerging star. Do you think it would be all right for me to stay another day or so, Ray?”

“Sure. We’ll be there tonight, Roger, bells tinkling.”

“That’s great. Oh, by the way, Coach Wilkins is having his bonding weekend for the basketball team starting tonight. Did I tell you that? Is that all right? I’ll pack what I need after school before the game.”

“Yeah. I forgot about that. When is your first basketball game?”

“Week after next,” I think.

“That’ll be fun for a change, won’t it, shooting hoops instead of throwing passes?”

Roger was up and heading for the stairs to get his schoolbooks. The phone rang. It was Lesa.

“Hi, Ray. How did you sleep, Honey?”

“Good,” he laughed. “Very well, in fact.”

“Is Roger still there? I’d like to wish him luck for tonight before he takes off for school. I’ve never missed one of his games. I hate to.”

“Oh, that’s right. You’re the great rooter mom.” Roger had just bounded back down the stairs.

“Roger!” Ray yelled.

Cosmological Considerations

“What, Pop?”

Ray just handed Roger the phone.

“Hi. Yes, it was fabulous up there. I saw that picture of Pop that you told me about. Wow. Yeah, okay. I love you, Mom.” He handed Ray the phone and took off running.

“Hi,” Ray said into the phone.

“So far as I can tell with my new tracker the world is right side up there,” she laughed in her easy way.

“Evidently Fredrik is doing great too, the way you sound.”

“He is. They’re walking him so much that he complains about it, but he’s really in good spirits about everything. I think he feels better in a lot of ways than he has for a while. He wants to go home.”

“Good.” Ray was not looking forward to the part of the conversation he knew was coming.

“And... are you ready to figure this thing out with Julie?”

“Yes. We’re going to talk about it now,” Ray answered. “I love you, Lesa.”

“Me too,” she said. “Now have a good time with it, okay. Goodbye.”

Ray sat there with the phone in his hand just looking at it as though he had just found a meteorite. “A good time with it”? As though exploring an awful thing that the one he had loved so long had done might be construed as having a “good time”. Well, getting it done was a *good thing* anyway. He knew that as well as Lesa did.

“Let’s discuss this before we get thinking about it too much,” Julie suggested, having overheard his end of their conversation.

So he did let himself entertain every aspect of the ordeal. There was a warmth and yes, even earthiness, in Julie he had not found in the other women in his life. Of course there was also the ‘vintage’ thing and some ‘cultural background’ from up the canyon that Lesa could not share.

At a certain point in their conversation Julie asked whether they had any old family albums lying around anywhere. Ray thought Helen had had some unless Allie had taken them after Helen died.

“Let’s see, I’ll bet there might be some in that file cabinet upstairs unless Allie took them. Shall we go see?”

“I would love to do that, Ray.”

They were there. Ray did not remember ever having looked through them. He recalled none of the photos, but many of the events they captured. There were even photos of Julie’s mother – ones with and without Helen’s mother, one with Helen’s father between them. That was certainly one marvelously good-looking woman, Ray acknowledged to himself. She looked so much the way Julie had when she had first come up the canyon that it must have been creepy for Helen’s parents, her father especially.

There were pictures of Trooper with and without Ray or Helen or both astride. There was even one of Helen and Julie astride with Ray holding the

Cosmological Considerations

reins. He had a guitar held in front of him awkwardly, and an apple in his mouth.

“Who on earth took that picture? I don’t remember anyone else there.”

“Helen’s mother. She and your mom were out behind the house watching us and laughing.”

Ray assumed there would be no more photos that could have been taken that day and, of course, there weren’t. But there were several photos of the Raven’s Creek dam that he and Helen had worked so hard on. There was one of him working on the cement of the dam itself that Helen must have taken, and one of Helen in her swimsuit with a purposeless top, sitting on one of their boulders facing away from the camera, looking toward the falls. The waterfall wasn’t as high as Ray had remembered, but it was at least five feet that the water dropped straight down.

“Wow, these bring back some memories, huh?”

“Yes. You know,” Julie said, “I never knew that you two had done that much to design it. I must obviously have known that you had placed the concrete parts between the boulders and spillway of the dam. But it all seemed so natural to me, as just this little wonderful world within a world that had been made when the world was made and just not ruined yet, like the rest of the world had been. I don’t know why I never realized that.”

“The Garden of Eden,” Ray said.

“It was,” she said.

There were also photos of Helen’s father (Julie’s father too he knew now), and of his. The photo of his father that they used for the information board at the dam was here. Ray looked over at Julie as she looked at it. Was she thinking how much he looked like his father as he had about the photos of her mother?

“I’ll bet they got a copy of that from Helen don’t you imagine?”

She looked at it more carefully. He thought that maybe he should look at it again to see what else she might have seen in the photo. There was nothing in particular he concluded.

“I think they must have,” she said finally.

“Helen never asked me about it.”

There was a photo of both Helen’s and his fathers standing with hands on each other’s shoulders – obviously they had been best friends. They were both clearly enjoying the occasion for showing off for their wives who probably were laughing as they took the photo. It was fuzzy; probably Alice was laughing so hard the camera bounced. Ray thought his father looked a little more uptown than Helen’s but they both looked like nice people, he thought.

“That must not have been long before John died,” Julie said.

Ray turned it over. There was a date on it – less than two weeks before Helen’s father had shot himself.

Julie leaned over him heavily to look at the date.

“Oh, God,” she said.

“That’s my line,” was all Ray could say.

Cosmological Considerations

He stared at the date a while longer, at the handwriting, wondering if it were Helen's. He didn't know; he couldn't really tell. He turned the photo over again and the two of them looked at it for a long time, still with Julie's weight on Ray's shoulder, the vague awareness of which seemed to keep him in the present as he looked into the past. Ray's father had on the clothes he remembered when they tromped the canyon walls surveying for the dam.

"What does it tell you, Ray?"

"Well, those are the clothes Dad wore when he took me with him surveying for the dam. Together with what Marsha told us, it tells me that between this picture and when her father died, Helen broke her sacred oath to me and told her father what my father was working on."

"Oath?"

"Yeah, we had an oath. Anything we told each other at our 'sacred place' could never be shared with an adult... Now I'm telling you."

"I wasn't an adult back then, Ray. I wanted to be in on all your secrets. I would never have broken that sacred oath."

"I told her about helping my father with his surveying, drilling, and water flow data that he had told me was his and my secret because one day it would be used to build a dam. I had a sense of pride in having been asked to help him. I didn't even think about how awful that was for our town. But one day up at the falls I told Helen and it totally freaked her out. She got it. She understood what it meant – just how awful it was."

"Oh. So you two knew about the dam before anybody else except for your dad."

"Yeah."

"So you think that's why John committed suicide?"

"Yeah. I do."

"Really? Why would that do it?"

"I'm not much into suicidal thinking, but it seems to me that defending one's little girl's sensitivities could get pretty expensive, and that little girl's in particular. That is what I think."

"You think that would do it then?"

"Well, he and Dad were still great friends. He was the mayor of a town that was going to be destroyed by that great friend. He was in some sense responsible for that town. His daughter no doubt thought her daddy was stronger than my daddy and should be able to keep it from happening. His friend probably got across to him that the project was inevitable, that there was nothing either of them could do to stop it. Embrace it and move on, or don't – it wouldn't really matter. It made no difference; it was going to happen."

"It was, wasn't it?"

"Yeah. She had no idea how much stronger my daddy was than hers."

"You must have seen us as a bunch of fools up there demonstrating against the inevitable."

"No, I didn't. My sentiments were on your side. Even now I see nothing wrong with *raging against the coming of the night*. It's a heroic means of

Cosmological Considerations

individual expression, a person's way of being independent of evolutionary trends. I am not at all sure that hunter-gatherers weren't a lot happier than the agrarian societies that ultimately gave rise to civilization as we know it, and I still see it as heroic to fight against the destruction of any institution we particularly value. I guess it's what Lesa has called being truly human, which – to a certain extent – I guess I haven't been. I've always been a rather cold person. You and Helen embraced humanity rather than progress, I think. I've been too afraid to fail."

"That's what we were doing up there that day you used the guitar to hide the real you," Julie looked at him askance from where she still leaned over his shoulder. "You didn't really embrace any of that though, did you? Even if all the instincts were in place. Helen backed out, or you would have."

"Can anyone really back out for anyone else? I have embraced very little in my life but my right to observe and model what's out there, whatever it is. I did observe what was going on that day, and I sure liked what I observed and never got it out of my head." He glanced over at her face, so close to his now, and smiled.

Julie must surely have sensed his vulnerability, but she did not exploit it.

"Helen never slacked off after her father died, did she? She probably saw it as even more relevant then, huh?"

"Yeah. Probably."

"So do you forgive her?"

"I'm not sure that I do. I love her still – the Helen who still lives in the model in my head – but I have to acknowledge that she did a very bad thing. I can't be true to myself without acknowledging that. She put an abstract idea or ideology ahead of real people, good people, and they died as a consequence."

"She couldn't have known."

"No. She was a little kid. But she knew afterward. I'll bet she knew when she heard the gunshot in the night. Then later when she told my dad that he was 'fouling his nest', she knew what she was saying, who she was quoting, how much it would hurt him. She had to have said it vindictively."

"But why?"

"Maybe to convince herself that it had been my father's fault that hers had killed himself. Maybe she thought that it would sting so much that she would get even my dad on her side. Something like that."

"Wow. Does this relate somehow to the Jonesy thing?"

"Probably. It's character – what tragedy is all about. That tiny flaw of a little vanity and vindictiveness seems to have been her undoing in both those cases. In that case she knew that I hadn't done anything with Marsha, and she knew that I hadn't because I loved her. She had to let her vindictiveness play out before she forgave me. It was her flaw. Don't you think so?"

"I guess I see that, Ray. I am so sorry. I know that it happened so long ago that sorrow for the event doesn't hardly even make sense now, so my

Cosmological Considerations

feeling sorry pertains to the way you feel now about the Helen who lives in your head. I am so sorry for what you're feeling right this very minute."

"Thank you," he said, reaching out to her, "for understanding all of this... and all of me, so well."

Again Julie did not exploit his weakness. "You know, you were going to show me that note Helen wrote."

"Oh, yeah."

So they put all the loose photos back into the albums in which they had been bunched and placed the albums back into the file cabinet as they had been. Then they returned downstairs and went into Ray and Lesa's bedroom. Ray opened the safe and pulled the sheet out of Lesa's Jewelry case. Julie stood there watching as he re-enacted the uncovering of 'the secret'. Ray handed it to her as she sat down on the bed. Ray sat next to her, watching her inspect the seal and then open the yellowing sheet.

Julie's tears began at once. The handwriting perhaps, the thought of Allie having to write this. Ray put an arm around her shoulder. When she was done, Julie handed the sheet back to Ray without comment. They sat there together a long while until finally she spoke.

"You told me she had mentioned me in here. Was that discussion about how bad I had been?"

"It takes on a very different meaning in retrospect, Julie. What happened was that Helen was trying to set me up to tell me about our homecoming night. That's how it all started. On that topic, by the way, she told me she had already been pregnant, but she was weak enough by then and her stating it so obscurely, or as was obscure to Ray Bonn, I didn't get it. And she was too weak to force the issue. That's what I think."

Julie did a soft gentle chuckle. Ray looked at her for some meaning behind the sound. There seemed to have been none other than her awareness of him being who he was.

"So in reminiscences I drug her up to the falls as a rather charming growing up experience to remember more cheerfully, I guess. Her disease had progressed so far already that she couldn't concentrate very long though." He paused. "The length of this letter – most of it actually in Allie's handwriting," Julie grabbed the sheet from his hand to verify where the handwriting had changed. "Anyway, the length of it rather amazes me, although apparently the exhilaration of having Lesa and Allie with her gave her a second lease on life – as they say – for a little while. She had seemed to me to have been way too weak to have written this when I left. So anyway, back to what I was saying, she fell to sleep before we discussed much about that day up at the falls, but I relived it all in my mind thinking of how that vision of you had transmogrified into my teenage fantasies."

"What do you mean, Ray?"

"You didn't ever consider yourself a sex goddess?" he laughed.

"No." She seemed embarrassed.

Cosmological Considerations

“Well, that’s what you had become for me. I’m sorry if that offends you. I suppose maybe it should – I know it should probably embarrass me – but you had. I’m sure Helen knew it. The way she looked at me when she awoke made it apparent that she knew.”

“I’d have been thrilled to have known that back then.” Julie laughed a very tender laugh if there is such a thing.

“Anyway. After Helen awoke, I mentioned that day up at Raven’s Creek again. All that Helen added was how beautiful you were that day, and then she went on to ‘smart too – maybe too smart’.”

“She said that?”

“Yeah. And just before she died she made the ‘wasn’t she beautiful’ comment again with just the same phrasing. It wasn’t clear then whether it pertained to Lesa giving her Nobel address that we had just watched or you up at the pond. Her allusion to defying the ‘constraints of civilization’ made me think that maybe it was the pond experience. The words were identical in any case. The insecure ‘wasn’t she beautiful?’ comment is one she made several times in our lives together. Each time I thought it referred to that experience and each time it was in a context that made me think she was afraid that I had thought you much more beautiful than she was. I hadn’t really. Her beauty that day overwhelmed me as well. I always remember her as perhaps the more beautiful in her innocence, but you as more exquisitely personifying a sexual vitality that every young man wants to experience firsthand.”

“But you said, ‘smart too’? That doesn’t sound smart.”

“We both thought that and said it whenever we mentioned you, yeah. You impressed the hell out of us in more ways than one, Julie. You knew so much we wanted to know. It was because of you that we read Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* and Charles Reich; and got into Bob Dylan and that whole quasi-intellectual scene.”

“Quasi?”

“Well, after all that’s happened in fifty years you can’t exactly consider those ideas prescient any longer, can you?”

“I can, yes,” she said almost too defensively. “The fact that the idiots who have run our government don’t get it doesn’t mean it’s not true. You know that.”

“Well, Reich was talking about what would be happening, and now all these many years later we know that it didn’t. He was wrong.”

“Ray, I know all that – probably better than you do, and it has broken my heart. But all through Helen’s life after that second summer we had together, she said that you used to quote passages of *The Greening of America* to her. She told me how much it meant to her. I think she must have even had it all memorized herself after hearing it from you so often, but she still liked hearing it in your voice. Could I hear you quote it?”

“Sure. I like it too.” He smiled. “I always hear it in your voice.”

So he began, like beginning an old familiar hymn:

Cosmological Considerations

"America is dealing in death, not only to people in other lands, but to its own people. So say the most passionate of our youth, from California to Connecticut... We think of ourselves as an incredibly rich country, but we are beginning to realize that we are a desperately poor country – poor in most of the things that throughout the history of mankind have been cherished as riches."

"There is a revolution coming. It will not be like revolutions of the past. It will originate with the individual and with culture, and it will change the political structure only as its final act. It will not require violence to succeed, and it cannot be successfully resisted by violence. It is now spreading with amazing rapidity, and already our laws, institutions and social structure are changing in consequence. It promises a higher reason, a more human community, and a new and liberated individual. Its ultimate creation will be a new and enduring wholeness and beauty – a renewed relationship of man to himself, to other men, to society, to nature, and to the land."

"This is the revolution of the new generation... It is both necessary and inevitable, and in time it will include not only youth, but all people in America."

"Even us," Julie said as though it were 'Amen', "even when we are no longer the optimistic youth of America." She had lain back on the bed as he quoted the passage.

"But it didn't really happen, did it?" Ray sighed and lay back on the bed beside her, his feet hanging over the side.

"Do you think I was ever a part of 'the optimistic youth'?"

His elbows were up with his head resting in his palms. She rolled to face him. He laid his right arm down and as though inadvertently stretching it out on the bed as he looked over at her. She lifted her head as though to straighten her hair and put her head on his arm as he slid it under her neck. Then he rolled back contentedly, his arm still under her head and neck. They both stared at the ceiling for a long while and fell to sleep clutching a reality that maybe could have been, but never was. Afterward Ray couldn't remember if she had fallen to sleep before he had or not, but when they awoke, they were face-to-face, their arms around each other as though clinging to safety. Her face was to his face as they clung to each other.

They disengaged awkwardly and sat up on the side of the bed again.

Sitting there for a moment looking into each other's faces with surprised expressions then, Julie asked, "Will you please remember me this kindly always, Ray?"

"I could never forget that beautifully intelligent, lovely woman who was the fantasy of my youth and the even lovelier woman whose empathetic care has meant so much to me these last few days. How could I not remember you kindly? I'm a pretty faithful kind of person, don't you think?" The audacity of having lain here with her on his and Lesa's bed, *his and Helen's bed*, struck him as he punctuated the statement turning it into its interrogative form as more of a rhetorical questioning of himself.

Cosmological Considerations

They stood up and Ray put the sheet with Helen's statement back into the safe. Julie had gone into her room when he turned around.

It was early afternoon when Ray went into his office to look at his opus again. Compared to life – life, as he had come to experience it both as it had happened and as it was remembered and reconstructed in this last week – those pages paled into insignificance. He struggled with it for an hour or so, but he never arrived at his trance-like concentration state that accounted for so much of what he had been able to achieve in discovering the nature of things, but which had never contributed to any understanding of people and human relationships.

So he wandered out to the kitchen where Julie was working at preparing supper. He had thought, 'supper already?' even though it had now been many hours since they had eaten, and they had foregone lunch. She had already made a salad and laid out the makings for a high carbohydrate supper in accordance with Roger's suggestion that carbs would be what he needed today.

Ray said, "Pasta, huh? Roger will like that, especially on game day."

"This morning it sounded like pasta might just fill that carbohydrates menu requirement of his."

She continued working around the kitchen as Ray just sat there watching.

"You all right?" She looked at him intently for a moment seeming to assure herself that indeed he was okay.

"I am so looking forward to watching him play, Ray. I only got to watch you play football one time, and I found it to be just an amazing exhilaration. I remember that much about it all those years ago. Jonesy had wanted me to stay up north long enough to see him play one game. He thought he was such a star – wanted *me* to think he was such a star is probably more like it." She laughed. "You gave him a touchdown pass that he barely caught, but I knew what I was watching. It was the Ray Bonn show."

"Me, huh. You'd have made one hell of a mom."

"You." She paused again. "You'd have made one hell of a father for my baby, Ray." There was something uncomfortable between them that this digression didn't help. "But I am very content to be the maiden aunt housekeeper, nothing more. Sorry about in there earlier, but you have to know that it was all right."

"Neither of us need apologize for that, do you think?" Ray asked. "We've been through a lot together, even if not as much as either one of us might have liked at one time or another. Haven't we?"

"Yes, we sure have. Anyway, I figured Lesa might like me to cook for her men. She understands all that other kind of stuff too, doesn't she?"

"Yeah. As you said once, 'She's a pretty amazing woman.' When we were back in New York – which is many years ago now too – we slept together a couple of times about like you and I did today. She said something like, 'Ray, we just slept together, there was no Biblical way about it.' She's got perspective."

Cosmological Considerations

“I remember telling you that down by the pond there that year you got married. She was pregnant with Roger then I think. I do love her too, Ray. I’ve loved both your women more than any other people in the world but you.”

“That doesn’t sound too awfully unhealthy then, does it? I guess you’re third to those same two women,” he echoed.

“No, not at all unhealthy. You know, although I’ve loved them both, I think I *like* Lesa a lot better than I did Helen actually.”

Roger came crashing through the front door right then. He was laughing and talking with someone – Ellie no doubt.

“Oh, hi, Auntie Julie!” It was Ellie all right, big as life. “I am sooo happy you’re still here Auntie. You’ll get to see me tonight too, you know. Roger’s not the only star.”

“I am really looking forward to it, Ellie. Gosh, you do look like your grandmother sometimes.”

Grandfather too, Ray couldn’t help but think now that he knew that that was not him. How tall she had become – so much like Cecil that way. She would be center on her basketball team just like her grandfather.

“That’s what everyone says.”

Ellie helped set the food on the table and then shortly Roger was down. He hugged and kissed Ellie, and then sat down to eat.

“Grandpa – can I still call you grandpa? It is so fantastic to be able to kiss Roger right in front of you without you thinking something weird.”

“Yeah, well. Grandpa, maybe. Kissing in front of me, I don’t know. I’m an old man; my ticker may not be able to handle all that excitement.”

“Are you kidding? I saw you two last Saturday.”

Allie called then. After a moment on the phone with Ellie, it was handed to Julie.

“So I won’t see you until Sunday night then,” Roger told Ray. “I’m really going to miss seeing Ellie too.”

“Too?”

“Well, you know.”

“Yes, I do know. Roger, have a great game tonight. I know you will. I’m going to have the most fun I’ve had in a long time watching you. I won’t be worrying about impending incest at least.” Ray laughed, “but that doesn’t mean there isn’t still a lot to worry about, does it?”

“You really worried about that Gramps?” Ellie interrupted as she returned from the kitchen.

“Duh.”

She ran over to kiss him. “Well, don’t you worry about that anymore then – or anything else. And remember now, this is the last game I’ll ever be cheerleader, so yell your heart out with me, would you? From now on you’ll have to come just to yell for me to score. Rumor has it that our girls’ basketball team is going to start out the year already ranked in state.”

Cosmological Considerations

“I will be your vocal local supporter tonight and always, and I will even hope like hell that you become my daughter-in-law someday. Is that good enough? I really am tired of Gramps though.” He laughed.

“Okay, Dad,” she responded immediately. “I like that better too.”

They left right away then. Julie waved at them both, telling Allie who was still on the phone with her when the two kids had gone. Then shortly she hung up, came over, and put an arm on Ray’s shoulder all quite naturally and without flirtation. I love your family, Ray. I never really had any you know.”

Ray thought about Lesa and her family that she had never had until Ray had helped her find them. He took the phone from Julie to phone Lesa. No one answered. Where was she? He thought about calling Cynthia but decided not to. Lesa knew they would be leaving for the game and he probably shouldn’t get into a protracted conversation anyway.

Julie had left the room when he took the phone. Now she was back.

“Oh. Are you ready to go all ready? We don’t have to go for a while yet. The kids have to get suited up and prayed for,” he appraised Julie of the current status of the relationship between church and state at Roger’s high school cynically.

She was indeed ready and appreciative of his cynicism but said she would look at the book she had started the other day if he wanted to get some more done.

He went into the bedroom to put on some warmer clothes. He looked down at the bed where he and Julie had sat thinking and then lain, wondering about that minor indiscretion. His and Julie’s relationship had seemed to evolve into a very comfortable one so different from what one might have expected of the floozy who had come up Canyon Creek so long ago and down this serene little street just the few short days ago. He guessed that floozy had characterized two women in his life that he had cared a lot about.

After he thought he was dressed appropriate for the game, he stepped into the living room where Julie was reading. He looked at what she had on and told her that she really should have something warmer on for the game. It probably wouldn’t rain tonight but, “It gets cold riding those benches, I’ll tell you that much. Allie will have blankets and coffee, but you better dress warmer than that. Didn’t you get some slacks the other day? I think I’d wear ‘em if I were you. I’ll get you one of my rain jackets – women wear ‘em too at these games.”

She put her book down and went to change. Ray went on into the office area, checked his e-mail, answered a couple, and closed out all his windows. He went to get his coat and very soon he and Julie were headed for the game.

#14 How Long Do Birds Grieve

Roger was spectacular again, touchdown after touchdown, with a mix of passes, laterals, and quarterback runs. There were long passes, quarterback options and sneaks, and the occasional hand off. It was almost embarrassing for Ray to watch as his son engineered one drive after another. On defense Roger was uncanny in reading plays and being there at or before the critical moment. His interceptions and tackles were spectacular – yeah, that was the word, spectacular. This was Midas stuff. And the press was there to catch it.

Julie insisted that it was “an experience beyond her wildest dreams of what one person could accomplish on a field with twenty-one other players looking on. I saw his father in how he played. I’ll bet I was rooting for Ray Bonn part of the time.” It was clear that for Julie it was one more fabulous reason for loving life as she perceived it.

Allie seemed so excited about everything in her newly exposed life. Probably the weight of having to keep secrets, which was so against her nature and had now been lifted, was exhilaration in itself. Her friends, mothers and even fathers of others of the kids in Ellie’s and Roger’s class had seen the news and seemed to feel a new willingness to take pleasure in the joint accomplishments of their children’s’ illustrious classmates, Roger and Ellie. Of course they congratulated Ray on his participation in hiding Allie’s parentage until – and he was sure they knew all the whys of when – it had become essential to reveal what the family must have always known. They were so sorry about Lesa’s father and happy he was coming along fine.

During halftime festivities Julie was introduced to each of these many well-wishers as Ellie’s Auntie and Julie made converts of each to the growing list of women who would like to look like her at that age. But Julie wanted to watch the game and watch Ellie doing her thing. The cheerleader toss was higher into the air this time and came off as planned again.

It wasn’t raining or as cold tonight, but a cup of coffee was kept filled from Allie’s large thermos and passed repeatedly as a libation from one to the other. Allie chatted with Julie even as she tried to maintain concentration on the

game. Did Julie know how to play bridge? Sometimes Ray and Lesa and them played after games, etc. Julie knew pinochle, not bridge. That was good enough.

“How about it, Daddy? Should we play pinochle tonight then? Tom wants to.”

Julie looked at Ray. “I’m just a guest, Ray, what would you like to do?”

“Well, maybe we need a little fun for a change. I’m sure it’s been kind of morbid for you up here so far.”

“Ray, it’s not been morbid, and certainly not dull,” she flashed a smile. “But having a little fun with family tonight sounds wonderful to me. Ray and I went through your mom’s albums today,” she directed toward Allie. “It sure brought back a lot of memories. Evidently Ray hadn’t seen some of those photos either. There were even a couple of good photos of my mother.”

After the game as they headed for the Wilsons’, Julie fairly bubbled in her smooth flowing way, Ray thought.

“Those kids are both something very *extra* special. They are going to be the leaders of the future, Ray.”

“I’m glad you think so too, Julie. You know all of their parents think so. So, how are you at pinochle?”

“Probably not very good. I think I can remember the rules though. One of my worthless husbands had me play two or three times a week while it lasted. I was better than he was, but that isn’t saying much. I do get confused on how much a marriage should be worth sometimes though, but you knew that.” She flashed a smile. “Passing jacks of diamonds on a spade call confuses me sometimes too, and I never seem to be able to decide the value of an extra queen in trump. Is it two points?”

“Yes, two points for an extra king or queen.”

“But it always seems to be an extra queen, doesn’t it?”

They both saw the humor in her comments and were laughing when Allie came to the door. “You two sure seem to hit it off,” she commented. “Last week Daddy was a pain in the butt, Julie, let me tell you. Now he’s happy. It must be getting the blotch off his sire record.” And so she was still going on and on about how different Ray was this week compared to last as they headed into the kitchen together to get the goodies.

“How’d you survive the funeral,” Tom asked, ignoring Allie’s prattle.

“Good. Luckily I didn’t have a starring role in that performance.”

“No.” Tom got it. “But the star looked comfortable enough with all of us aliens looking down at him didn’t you think.”

“That’s just how he would have looked in that situation if he were alive.”

“It was even more interesting finding out more about your early life up there though, Ray. You and Mom had a very unique situation growing up. I guess our wives have connived a little in giving our kids some of that experience, wouldn’t you say?”

“Yeah, I would say exactly that,” Ray laughed as the women brought in the candies and nuts with a filled thermos of coffee.

Cosmological Considerations

They drew for partners with Ray and Julie each drawing one of the nines of hearts. “What’re the odds of that, Daddy?” Allie teased.

“You know, I could get tired of always being teased about probabilities,” Ray teased right back. “What do you think, Julie? Do two nines seem like a miracle to you?”

“Actually drawing two of the lowest denomination of hearts does seem that way to me, Ray. It’s an omen. We’re losers,” she beamed. “Well, you’re not, but I certainly am.”

As the game progressed it was apparent that Julie was no loser at pinochle – unlucky at love and all the luck at cards that goes with it, Ray thought. Quickly they had one game with Allie and Tom demanding a rematch. The conversation was low key and very pleasant what with all of them knowing each other so extremely well.

Ellie came in later for a few minutes before going on up to bed. She too had a basketball practice early the next day. She was missing Roger already, she said, and didn’t care who knew it. If they had had any doubt about that, they could no longer.

“I’ll bet Aunt Lesa is missing you big time right now too, Dad.”

Tom looked at Ellie with an awkward jerk. “What did you say, Ellie?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, Daddy. You see, since Ray isn’t my grandfather anymore, and since I don’t want to call him Ray, I’ve decided I might just as well get used to calling him Dad.”

Tom laughed then, what had seemed like an insidious innuendo had clearly been nothing but a harmless thoughtlessness. “Oh, okay. But he’s not ‘Dad’ to you just yet. You have to get an education. Go to bed.”

“Pretty soon.” She demonstrated her independence. “But not just yet.” She copied his phrase. “I know Lesa’s missing him and I feel bad for her because they still love each other – a *lot*,” she emphasized.

Oh, God, Ray thought.

“Ellie, of course they do, we all know that. Now go to bed, will you? You have a big day tomorrow,” Allie said.

“But you all don’t know it quite as well as I know it,” Ellie fairly jeered the insinuations, bouncing as if to get up to go. “Do they, Dad?”

“Nope, they certainly don’t, do they?” Ray played along without looking up from his hand.

Julie watched him, glancing also at Tom and then Allie, Ray noticed.

Ellie was watching all this too. Then she popped up suddenly with a springy youthful hop and was off to bed.

“What was that all about, Ray? Roger and Ellie were all secretive about what they had seen over there the day after you and Lesa came back from the Canyon. Roger seemed disgusted, in fact. So what was it?”

“They thought we were a little too chummy for such old people, I suppose, and I had to remind them that Roger’s mother isn’t all that old. What have you been teaching your kid anyway, Allie? That if they don’t hurry and do it by

Cosmological Considerations

the time they're eighteen, it'll be too late? Good heavens, former daughter of mine."

"Daddy, there's no 'former' about it. I will always to be your daughter."

"Yeah, fine. Forty-two." Ray brought the conversation right back to the bidding in the game.

"Forty-two? I just said thirty-nine," Tom said. "Are you trying to intimidate me?"

"I just feel lucky, that's all."

"Evidently," Tom said, still pondering his hand.

"Didn't you ever read Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy? Forty-two is the answer to any really important question."

"Okay, it's yours." Tom ignored Ray's rhetoric.

So Ray named spades and Julie passed him three quarters of the double pinochle. Ray ended up with a hundred aces, an outside marriage, and a double pinochle. Ray casually laid down his meld which, came out neatly to forty-two. Tom was amazed. Ray was too actually, but he refused to show it, saying, "Voila, forty-two."

Julie laid down some marriages and nines in trump. They made seventy-five points on that hand and were out again to win the second game.

"I told you, Tom. It's just like flipping a hundred heads in a row – easy."

"I'm a little tired, Ray," Julie said. "I'm not used to all the excitement we've had today."

"Me either," he replied. "I guess we better get going. It has been a lot of fun though. Thanks for having us over. Whenever you guys feel like letting me win like this, don't hesitate to get me involved," he laughed.

"You have been pretty lucky at our games lately," Tom acknowledged. "It was a lot of fun, anyway."

Julie did all the discrete niceties to help get them out of there in a hurry. Yes, she definitely wanted to talk with Allie about her run for Congress. And, yes, Ellie had told her correctly that Julie was entertaining the idea of running for Congress as well.

"Tomorrow," Julie said. "I'll call you tomorrow, but I may sleep in for a while." Then she skillfully worked at their exit, all the hugs, waves, and gestures.

"Whew!" she exclaimed once they were in the car driving away. "Sometimes it's hard to break away, isn't it?"

"Yeah. You have some polish though, Girl. I'll tell you that much. You'd make one hell of a Representative. I'd sure be happy to have you represent me."

"Well, you did a pretty good job just to avoid either Ellie or you telling everybody about the rest of what went on last weekend. I'd kind of like to have heard more."

"Well, you did a good job not telling everyone about our napping together today," Ray teased.

Cosmological Considerations

Within minutes they were at the house situated down that private drive of such acclaimed serenity. Ray noticed that something was different though. Something was amiss. Their return was with a certain amount of temerity then, with Ray wondering what in the hell might be going on with lights lighted that hadn't been lit. Had Roger had to return for something he had forgotten? But Roger wouldn't turn lights on in the living room. Could someone have broken in? No one who broke in would do that. As they entered the hallway from the garage then, Ray could tell that Julie had sensed his concern. She seemed frightened.

"Is everything okay, Ray?"

He was starting to answer her as they turned in toward the living room where Ray had noticed the additional lights. She was following close behind.

"Everything's fine. It's just..."

There was a sound behind them. They turned around, and there was Lesa beaming at them as she approached from the kitchen.

"You guys looking for me?" she asked.

"I love you," was Ray's immediate, although certainly nervous and somewhat startled, response as he threw his arms around her.

Julie heaved a sigh of relief. "Oh, you scared me, Lesa," Julie said, exhaling deeply but laughing now.

"Sorry," Lesa laughed. "I felt like I was breaking and entering too."

"I'm so glad you're home, but you missed another great game."

"Roger was spectacular," Julie intoned. "I've so enjoyed getting to be with him and Ellie some. They are such amazing young people."

"I know; I hated missing it. Daddy is doing so well that I decided I might just as well get home to see it. So I tried to get a ticket that would get me here on time, but they were all booked. Then I realized that it wasn't just the game. I wanted to get home to. I *belong* here, period. So I got the earliest flight I could find. The taxi just dropped me off twenty minutes ago. I figured you guys were over at Tom and Allie's having a good time, and I didn't want to call and ruin it. I heard the score by the way. I had a good time hanging out with the familiar sights and aromas of home." She paused a moment looking at Julie. "My goodness. I love that outfit, Julie. It goes so well with your marvelous physique. You just look grand."

"Oh, thanks," Julie replied, actually blushing a little. Julie blushing was something new to the world, Ray thought, especially the *new* – well, older but new – Julie. That flush of color had its own uniquely amazing charm, he thought. "Thank you both in all the ways that have made it possible for you to make that comment."

They proceeded on into the living room that Lesa had evidently fully lighted before opting for a kitchen inspection.

"I noticed that Roger got his carbs tonight."

"Yeah. Julie took care of us in great fashion while you were gone."

"It was fun," Julie insisted. "I don't get an opportunity like this very often anymore. It's been really nice being here, Lesa. I had a very good time today

Cosmological Considerations

with Ray, looking through those old albums of Helen's. I didn't realize how much of my past is buried up there – I guess Jonesy is part of what's buried up there at the canyon any more now too."

"I really had a good time today too – even shopping the other day, watching you strut out with different looks, was fun," Ray responded to Julie.

"I owe you guys both so much."

"Poppycock," Ray said. "I know that if you hadn't come up here and heard my lament about not having ever known why Helen's father died, I'd have never been able to figure it out. You got right to the bottom of that for me and I'm really grateful to you. It probably doesn't seem like it should, but it matters a lot. It's important to me – maybe more so than learning about the Jonesy incident."

"I knew you would want that more than anything else I could do, so I did do some probing around in Marsha's memory. Then boom, there it was."

Lesa had just watched the two of them interact and finally entered the conversation. "That's the secret you hoped Helen would have told you?" she asked.

"Yeah."

Julie said, "It was different than you had anticipated though, wasn't it?"

"It was. I don't know exactly what I had expected, but not that. I always thought that Helen had been totally innocent in her sassy disagreement with my dad, but she wasn't. She had to have been the one who more or less caused it all. She was the reason our fathers fell out. She's probably the reason her father felt he had to kill himself and why mine became alienated from the family. I think she probably even had a good idea of all those consequences and did it anyway." Ray's eyes were moist now. "That's why she couldn't tell me, and why she should have."

"Oh, surely not," Lesa exclaimed. "She wouldn't have done things like that on purpose. Helen was a caring person. But what exactly had she done to make you think that way, Ray?" Lesa's eyes sought answers.

"Have you looked at those photos in her albums upstairs?" he asked Lesa. Ray then proceeded to explain to Lesa what Julie and he had found both up the canyon and upstairs in the photos.

"No, I have never looked in those albums, but should I? I always treated what was in that file cabinet as none of my business."

"Well, don't look at them unless you want to see something sinister sometime. Julie and I did it today."

"Oh, Ray. It wasn't sinister. There were some lovely moments captured there. Helen was just so intense," Julie said. "She probably couldn't help herself. Anyway, she couldn't have known what would happen."

"Yeah. I know, but she should have told me what she'd done, afterward at least. Don't you think she should have? Wouldn't you two have? I mean, really? It affected my life too. I was very involved with it all."

They both expressed that they would have. Julie asked, "How old were you two then though, Ray? You were both just kids – little kids. Uncle John

Cosmological Considerations

had been dead a few years when I came up that first summer. It wasn't that long after my mother died. You two weren't even in your teens yet."

Lesa stared at Julie. "Your mother died when you were young too?"

"Yes. We're all pitiful little orphans, aren't we? And you wondered how we got into this club?" Julie gave an ironic smile, dismissing that tangent quickly then.

"I'm not an orphan," Lesa objected.

"No. I know you're not. I'm sorry," Julie apologized for whatever insensitivity was involved with Fredrik's current situation.

"Yeah, I know we were young." Ray ignored the side issue. "Marsha said she and Helen were 'little' when that incident at the hardware store occurred." He sighed. "Helen's father and my dad had been great friends just days before that incident according to that photo in Helen's album," Ray explained for Lesa's benefit. "It's clear that I shouldn't have told Helen anything about what my father was up to. She used the information unethically. She couldn't keep a personal secret that could be used to benefit a cause she thought worthwhile. Never could. That's what it came down to, isn't it? She didn't evaluate personal consequences as of sufficient importance in comparison to her own causes, did she?"

"I think that's probably it all right," Julie said. "That's what tragedy is made of, isn't it? The little faults that bring us down."

"But she was so young, Ray. You have to forgive her." Lesa interceded for her friend. "She put your and my happiness ahead of her causes."

"Yeah. Oh, I have forgiven her – long ago. I knew it had to have traced back to her or she would have told me, like the Jonesy thing, I guess."

All three of them were silent, touching the evidence in the case very carefully, when finally Julie whispered an irrelevant fact.

"I don't think I have ever been this happy."

Ray and Lesa both looked at her in amazement.

"I'm happy too, happy for so many things," Lesa said.

Ray thought for a little. "Me too, I guess," he said then.

"We better get to bed though." Lesa, the lady of the house, was back getting things on an even keel. "It's late – at least back where I woke up this morning."

So the three wandered off to bed. Lesa and Ray turned off lights and then strolled arm in arm down the hall. They heard Julie ducking into the hall bathroom behind them as they closed their bedroom door.

Ray stopped by the bed. "See this," he pointed at the mild disarray of the spread. "Julie and I slept here today." He paused. "I just thought you ought to know."

"Napped?"

"Yeah. Slept together, but not in the Biblical sense. Remember you saying that back at the Sheltry?"

"So why are you telling me? Should I ask what you two were doing in here together before you passed out?"

Cosmological Considerations

“Yeah. After looking at the albums upstairs, Julie asked if she could see Helen’s note to me, so I came in here to get it. She followed me.”

“Oh, okay. So you sat here while she read it no doubt.”

“Yeah. We just sat here for I don’t know how long and finally I just lay back on the bed with my arms out, I guess, and she lay back too then right on my arm.”

“And you fell to sleep that way?”

“Yeah.”

“So?”

“So when I woke up, we were embracing each other very tightly. It was really awkward for us both and we sprang up and went about our separate business until supper time.”

“Ray! You didn’t have to tell me that.”

“I know, but it bothers me. I remember it feeling so good. It shouldn’t have felt so good, but it did.”

“Why shouldn’t it have felt good? You and Julie are very close, and she helped you with something very important to you.”

“Well, in fact, ever since we were here on this bed, I’ve been trying to figure out how I seem to settle in so easily and comfortably with strange women when I’m so in love with my wife just because I’m not right next to her at the moment.

“Strange women?”

“Well, you know what I mean – a woman that isn’t my wife. It’s like I have the emotions of a bird or something.”

“A bird?” Lesa laughed.

Ray wasn’t laughing. “Yeah, a bird.”

“Ray. Napping with Julie in that situation today seems very, very human to me. Anyway, birds often mate for life.”

“I know, years ago I read this piece about an experiment where they took a sparrow’s mate and killed it just to determine what grief was like for birds.”

“So what is grief like for a sparrow, Ray?” Lesa asked, obviously getting weary with the discussion.

“Just like it is for human’s apparently.”

“For heaven’s sake, Ray! If the emotional response of birds is just like that of humans, then naturally you would exhibit the emotions of a bird. What’s so wrong with that? And what’s wrong with you? Are you offended by being just another one of us humans?” The way she looked at him now bothered him; it seemed to deny his sensitivities, as though he had been being facetious.

“No, no, that’s not it, Lesa. The thing is that the experiment involved determining how long it would take a grieving bird to accept another mate.”

“Sounds familiar,” Lesa responded cheerily.

“Yeah, but then they did it again.”

Cosmological Considerations

Lesa laughed in her natural manner now as though she was not a principal involved in this analogy. “That’s what I can’t get over about you scientists,” she laughed. “How could *anyone* perform such an awful experiment?”

“Yeah, but how could God? That’s the real question, isn’t it?” Ray laughed too now, “especially when his ‘eye is’ famously ‘on the sparrow’.”

“Was this sparrow named Job by any chance?” Lesa continued laughing at this irreverence. “You’re not turning to Holy Scripture because of all the trauma that’s happened in your life, are you?” She seemed to think about that a moment and let it go. “But back to the experiment, Ray. What happened then?”

“Oh, the bird grieved just like it had the first time, bending low over its deceased mate as though it were sobbing, chirping a mournful song.”

“Yes, so…”

“So the bastards did it again – the same day. Three times in one day. Total emotional collapse, total recovery, and acceptance of another mate. Three times in one day.”

“A healthy-minded bird,” Lesa chirped perhaps too cheerfully.

“Is that what it is? I suppose getting over grief is the evolutionarily favored approach, but aren’t we beyond that?”

“So my healthy minded little bird, how far exactly are we beyond that now? How’d we ever get this far with evolution being the driving force?”

“I’ve been wondering what would have happened, if just when this poor bird was accepting another mate, the previous one popped in by surprise?”

“Oh!” Lesa exclaimed. “That’s how we got here? My god, Ray, are my woman’s instincts good or what?” She laughed at him again. “Would you have been setting yourself up to let Helen squeal at you again tonight if I hadn’t just ‘popped in by surprise’? Or would you have rejected her control over you this time just because of what you and Julie figured out about her today? To get even with the bitch,” Lesa teased. “I don’t think it would have worked, Ray. I think Helen would have squealed louder than ever – louder than such a sensitive little bird could have tolerated.”

“Probably. But still, it worries me a little that Julie and I seemed to sort of bond.” He mused a moment. “You know William James – the great psychologist – not the hapless namesake prodigy we used to talk about – had a hard time with minds being allocated one-to-one with human brains. I can see where he was coming from on what initially seems like a truly hair-brained idea, can’t you?”

Lesa could only stare at him questioningly. She looked weary to Ray, but he went on.

“I mean, all these models of peoples’ minds in my brain, like you always smiling and the squealing Helen model.”

“You think we’ve stolen brain-space from you?”

“Yes, of course, you have. Part of your thinking happens here.” He pointed to his head.

“Am I aware of it over here when that happens?”

Cosmological Considerations

“Are you aware of it when most of your thoughts happen?”

Seeing his question as adequate response to her skeptical question, he hesitated in order to get back to what it was that he had wanted to say to her in the first place.

“But love? I have a hard time with that not always being exclusively one-to-one like the presumptions we make about it?”

“Ray, we’ve already met. I am aware of your problems with it.”

“I know there are lots of cases of unrequited love,” he went on. “I get that, the one-to-zero relationship, and the notorious ‘eternal triangles’ that are probably usually just a squabble between a wife and a secretary. But what kind of person is it who could actually love more than one person at once – who stacks them up so to speak. I don’t mean bed hopping or cheap thrills or anything, I mean actual love, like in your heart.”

“I think what really bothers you is that you can’t figure out how on earth you ever got Helen and I to accept each other without any clawing or scratching. That’s what you can’t understand, isn’t it? Maybe you need to watch that video again of you explaining how the odds don’t matter. You pretended that the mere fact that you hit ten grand slams in a row at one point in your life was *just what happens, so let it go already*, and all that bullshit you spewed on national TV. You’re lucky, Ray, let’s face it. That’s all there is to it. Just accept ‘lucky at love’ as just being the same kind of luck you had with the home runs.”

“Lesa, sometimes I don’t think you listen to me,” he countered.

“You listen. You retired rather than presume you could keep hitting home runs indefinitely, right? Later you proved you couldn’t, even if you *almost* could. Well, this stacking of love affairs thing defied the odds in the same way. In this case you’d better retire after just two. One hundred heads in a row, ten grand slams, and two true loves, okay. Those are about the same amount beyond par for their respective courses, don’t you think? You try three love affairs, and a telescope will be looking down the wrong end of you, Ray.” She laughed, clearly enjoying this too much, Ray thought, but she wasn’t done even if she was tired. “I think I’m starting to understand why Helen never let you and Julie see each other.”

“It was nine – grand slams – and don’t bring that up again, Lesa. Okay? I’m tired of it already after just twenty years. Twenty – that’s another number – that’s enough. But no, you and Helen were two ends of just one more incomprehensible fact in my life. If either of you had been human enough to share the emotions of birds like I do, there would have been feathers all over until there was only one of you.”

Ray thought about his last statement and didn’t like where it got him as far as Helen was concerned, but he didn’t correct it.

“Anyway, I guess, what I was trying to figure out was why I’m so primitive in my emotions and my women evidently have much more advanced emotional systems?”

Cosmological Considerations

“We aren’t fighting cocks, Ray, we’re just little red hens. Get it? My God, Ray, I am so glad I came home to rescue you from your damn thoughts. Those things are lethal. You are seriously on the verge of insanity. Anyway, I agree with Julie about being happy right now. Don’t ruin it. I’m not sure I have ever been so happy either – in spite of your foolish prattle. Can we leave it there? Daddy’s going to be fine. You’ve figured out secrets you needed to resolve with regard to incest and patricide that will add immeasurably to the happiness and well-being of our family once you get it all modeled – or whatever in hell you do with it.”

Ray didn’t really like the short shrift she was giving his *modus operandi*.

“I have the weight of that awful secret off my shoulders,” Lesa continued. “Do you have any idea what a relief that is? And now you’ve completely justified my otherwise-foolish whim of coming home tonight. I’m back in the arms of the one I love, and I have a wonderful surprise to share with him – tomorrow. It just doesn’t get any better than that. Now take me to bed.”

“Surprise? I’m not actually sure how many more surprises I can take in my life, Lesa.”

“It’s a very good one – well, I think it’s very good. You may have to like it mostly because I do, I suppose, I don’t know. Sometimes you’re weird. But let’s get some sleep first or we’ll be up all night talking about it.”

“You can just do that?” Ray asked.

“Yes, let’s do that.”

“Prime time again, huh?” Ray taunted.

“No. It’ll be first thing in the morning, but there is some serious holding of each other to be done. I have been aching for it ever since last weekend when I found out again how wonderful it is. Can we do that again tonight? You can pretend I’m July at seventeen if you must,” she taunted.

They did, but only after Ray had responded reproachfully about her comment. Ray was still holding her tightly, thinking about the fullness of life and how little control he had over any of it, and whose head was just on the other side of the wall from his, sleeping in a different bed. Lesa was sleeping soundly long before Ray finally dozed off.

He couldn’t let go of this idea of the joint occupancy of three women in his brain. The gentle snoring sounds Lesa made harmonized with his thoughts. Love. It was a disease of the mind – no, of the brain itself, well beneath our very thoughts. They were all integral aspects of his brain.

Long ago now he had read in Jeff Hawkins’ *On Intelligence* that there is a place in every American’s brain that is electronically triggered with any mention or visual stimulation of anything the least bit reminiscent of Bill Clinton. Few could ever occupy a spot in the brain of *all* American’s, but he does – did, anyway. As Ray contemplated this different aspect of multiple cranial occupancy, he wondered to what extent the slugger Ray Bonn, like maybe Babe Ruth or even Albert Einstein, had his own spot in the brains of average Americans. He let that tangent go, after wandering off briefly on the related path of the Lesa Sorensen brain spot brought about by her many

Cosmological Considerations

spectacular escapades and Nobel acceptance speech heard by so many. Certainly the associated neural activities caused by activation of that spot would be of more inherent value than those synaptic firings brought about by the slugger Ray Bonn spot, he thought.

But he was thinking of love and fondness for an individual one knows intimately, not the mere recognition of a public figure. And it wasn't just a mere 'spot' in the brain that he was thinking about now; it was the joint use of the whole cortical domain of an individual brain. It was the William James spot in his brain that was stimulating these neural firings perhaps, and it was probably evolution that had spawned such phenomena in the first place, but so what? It was Ray Bonn right now, here holding a gently snoring Lesa Sorensen on his arm who thought these thoughts and who exhibited some, at least minimal, control over where all this was going.

Love is a disease of the brain.

So Helen's life in his brain differed considerably from Bill Clinton's more limited existence there. And although Bill Clinton's existence differed considerably from the blotch on everyone's brain that is called Trump, George Bush, or even Obama, it was not a difference of kind with regard to brain occupancy. It was more like a difference in location and color perhaps, of blue versus red balls, something like that. No. That was not the same kind of thing at all. None of them live here, Ray thought, they're just buttons that get pushed. These three women do; they live right here – same address.

So it is the way in which another person can take up residence in one's brain as against just leaving a calling card on the table in the entryway that we think of when their name is called. Helen did not wait for her name to be called. Lesa doesn't. There was a period of blankness in his thoughts. A lapse, a hiatus. And then... Julie doesn't either.

Julie doesn't either?

Julie, on the other side of this wall, her head nearly as close to his as Lesa's, probably sleeping as soundly as Lesa now, lived in his brain now too. She was no longer just a spot or blotch or whatever she had been. She had moved in now as a permanent resident too. The three women each one going about her own business, thinking her own thoughts – inside *his* brain.

Helen had been born there. His brain had always been hers. She would always be there. Jealous of anyone else cohabiting there, she had excluded Julie. She had seen the danger – not just in Julie's conduct but somehow in his reactions to it. Very effectively then she had obviated any possibility of a relationship between he and Julie. But she had been fooled by Lesa's claim, that she had seen first on national TV, of *not* being another Julie. How strange in retrospect from a woman Ray had not typically thought of as jealous at all. How disastrously jealous she had been. But she had overcome that jealousy in the end. Her love for him had conquered that. That is how Ray had it figured using his model of her. She had known Ray in a more or less statistical sense his whole life, he thought now. She had been the quality control of his machine. Having grown up managing him, she knew his reactions on sight;

Cosmological Considerations

she could read him oh so well. But he had to be there for her to figure it out. She read him. He didn't think she had had a model.

He wondered now the extent to which he had actually resided in her brain as a living breathing soul. Had he thought thoughts in there that she could read like she thought thoughts in his brain even now that he could read more clearly than many of his own? He doubted it. She had been too controlling for loops like that to close. It was, he thought now, her thoughts *about* him that provided the impetus of her control, not *his* thoughts.

With Lesa it had been so different than that. Right from the start, her thoughts had blended with his to such an extent that he doubted whether either of them knew exactly which thoughts they each owned. Lesa was very different than Ray in so many ways, her maternal attitudes, her women's ways that allowed her to bond with children and other women, her pleasing personality to which others were drawn, in contrast to his Sir Isaac Newton scowl.

They were soul mates, nonetheless. She understood him; he lived and thought at will, right inside her brain, and she lived and breathed – even snored gently now, right inside his. She was not jealous – at least in any traditional sense. It was not just because Julie was wrinkled with age, but that Lesa saw her differently than Helen had ever seen her. For Lesa, Julie was first and foremost the nice person, the smart person. Only secondarily did she acknowledge that other aspect of Julie's being, her illicit sexuality. That fault, if it could be considered a fault, she had modeled as a part of Ray, and maybe that was, after all, all it was, where it properly resided. He wondered.

But Julie – pushing seventy now, from one side or the other – exhibited a different kind of difference yet again in her occupancy of Ray's brain space. From the very beginning it had been an exhibition, a bold display of the sensuous aspects of life itself. Images. It had been with these sensuous images that Julie had tattooed his brain initially. So intensely had those images affected Ray that he had seen her in his dreams, both hot and humid, moist – yes, wet, especially wet – during those years throughout which Helen had withdrawn herself from him through their puberty. The images of Julie had been indelibly installed. By Helen's manipulations he had construed them as deformed clay amulets of the Venus of Willendorf. To Helen, he was well aware, these were worthy only of derision. However, to him the images had always been something totally other than that, something one could ridicule and make fun of if one wanted to, sure, with other people, but in the private recesses of his own mind, the very goddess personified. That was the spot, or area he supposed most properly described it, that she had securely staked out in the brain of a teenage Ray Bonn.

But like any disease or parasite that is nurtured rather than treated with an antidote, it had grown, taking over more and more of his neural cortex. What he had told Julie had been quasi-intellectualism, he had not considered as being that at all back in those formative years. It had been knowledge itself that she purveyed to Helen and him from her wanderings among men throughout the

Cosmological Considerations

world. She had brought insight just as in the classical images of a slithering snake, a tree, and Eve reaching for the apple from that tree of knowledge, licking it, biting it, and handing it to Adam – in this case his son, Ray – auguring a farewell to Eden. In all those years without seeing Julie, whenever he had recited that initial passage of *The Greening of America* at Helen's request, he had visualized Julie first reading it to them both, and whereas Helen heard it thereafter in his voice, he had always heard it in Julie's.

So Julie had lived within Ray's brain, and no doubt within her own, amid distorted and self-destructive images. It had affected even, or especially, her own self-worth. She had sensed the unfairness, no doubt, in the assignment of the blame for defiling paradise. She had come up to the Northwest once again grieving, not for Jonesy to be sure, but to relive the memories of paradise lost that his death conjured. She came up the canyon as she had so many years before, a temptress, the familiar role she knew so well, reinforcing all the images she was sure she had portended for Ray back then.

She had narrowly averted eviction from her perception of paradise once again. Was it Helen again this time or Lesa to whom his revulsion could be attributed; he wondered? It had been neither he decided. It was from those margins of his brain in which he still thought his own thoughts that that sense of inappropriateness had arisen. A drunken tryst was not what he, or she for that matter, had ever really wanted. But all their various yearnings had until then taken that form of expression for all the wrong reasons.

It had turned out very differently this time but more naturally than it had also up the canyon. Intercourse – what a strange term indeed – intellectual intercourse, with nothing quasi about it, that was what they had had this time, with a depth of understanding of those forbidden fruits of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that had arisen from those well watered roots that Julie had planted so long ago. The knowing of each other in perhaps a less twisted biblical sense that arose from that knowledge of good and evil, not from the lust of the bed and the euphemistic 'sleeping together'. But would they have done that too – this very night – had Lesa not surprised them? Would that sense of "an old married couple" that had felt so comfortable to them both have given rise to license? And if it had, would Helen have been able to squeal at all after all the revelations, or would her voice have finally been quieted for good and shown to result from nothing but jealousy?

Those were questions not to be answered theoretically. And since the situation had not arisen, it would indeed be looking down the wrong end of a telescope to surmise, but just as he had in his youth, he did surmise. But his body and now his mind had both been surfeited.

Exhausted, he joined Lesa and Julie in their snoring.

#15 The Good News

Ray awoke wondering about “the surprise”. It wasn’t like a child’s Christmas morning though. Adult surprises – particularly those that the elderly so often have no recourse but to accept graciously – are not always what one would have dreamed of in one’s youth. It was nearing six thirty. Lesa still snored easily on his arm. He smiled at her as he placed his hand on the bulge of her hip. When he looked back into her face, she was looking into his eyes. He focused on her smile.

“Oh, good,” she said. “I was afraid it was just a dream. What time is it, Ray?”

He relayed the information concerning it being six thirty that he had sensed before Lesa had awakened.

“Good.”

“The big secret?” Ray probed.

“Yes, the biggest and best of all secrets.” She jumped up. “First let me go to the bathroom.” She was off, almost running.

Ray’s thoughts somehow reverted to Helen. It was like Helen spoke in his head, “I’ll bet she’s pregnant,” the voice whispered.

Ray was shaking his head and almost laughed out loud, considering his own and then Lesa’s ages. The toilet flushed; Lesa was returning.

“I’ll bet your father gets out of the hospital today,” Ray guessed.

“He does, yes, but that’s not the secret.”

Ray just watched his beautiful wife perched there on the edge of his bed almost like a bird, watching him, and him moved by the emotions of a bird. It was as though it were Helen in there behind his eyes watching too.

“I’m pregnant!”

“Oh, God!” His model of Helen had got that right.

“Yes, Ray. I thought you’d be back to your old expletive. But please be happy for you and me?”

Ray pulled Lesa down to him. “How pregnant?”

“Just a week, Ray. Remember? You were there,” she laughed. “They can tell in just a couple of days anymore. Sharon did the test for me. I knew I had to get back here immediately to give you the news first.”

Cosmological Considerations

Ray just stared at her. He could think of nothing to say.

“I know I’ll get crotchety when I get much further along and we’ll need some help, both emotionally and physically in order to make it, perhaps. I know you’re not happy when I’m not working with you, and I want to, Honey? So we’ll need some help around the house here, and we may need more after the baby comes, but we can afford it, so why not? You and I need to work together and exercise together in order to keep our perspective.”

Ray had thought his way through the worst of the trauma now and he could see where Lesa was going with this. “Why not?”

“Yes,” Lesa ignored the innuendoes. “We have to get that scattering theory of yours put to bed before the baby comes – and afterward, whatever comes next. I want to work right beside you on the physics from now on – except for right before and after the baby comes. I’ll have to be nursing and stuff.”

“What’s the probability of the fetus even being viable? I mean what’re the odds of whatever it is you have in you now actually going full term and being born?” Ray reversed the trend of Lesa’s thoughts by introducing such probability-based arguments.

“‘Very good,’ Sharon thought. She checked it out very carefully. She had all her tools and everything with her and said it seemed to be attaching to the uterine wall properly already. Let’s not tell anyone else ‘til Thanksgiving though, okay?” She thought a moment. “Except Julie, I would like to tell Julie. Sharon will check me again at Thanksgiving and then we can spring the news on everyone else.”

“Cynthia doesn’t know? Sharon won’t tell her?”

“No, she doesn’t and Sharon won’t. Sharon is a good friend, Ray. She’s staying on with Daddy until Thanksgiving just to give them all the assurances they want. She’s good at what she does. I will have her here a month or so, but we won’t let it go on so long this time. I know Sharon isn’t your favorite person, but she’s a good doctor and I don’t want to spread my legs for any other man besides you for any reason. Not Tom. Sorry, but you know.”

Ray squeezed Lesa, feeling her gentle curves that he knew would very soon not be such gentle curves. Then there would be the horrible collapse of her stomach back in upon itself. Recovery wouldn’t be as easy for a woman her age.

“So, are you okay with it? Care if I go in to tell Julie? I heard her come back from the bathroom.”

Ray didn’t know whether it was he or Helen who wondered why she was so anxious to tell Julie. He showered. As he headed into the closet to get a clean set of clothes, he heard the women in the hall chatting happily. Lesa had not shut their bedroom door.

“I’ll get coffee brewing,” he said as he left the room after he had dressed. They were sitting on the edge of Julie’s bed by then with that door open now.

Cosmological Considerations

“Oh, I am so happy for you too, Ray,” Julie said as he passed the doorway. “Can’t you just imagine how Ellie is going to take this?” She laughed and began to tell Lesa about Ellie’s behavior the previous evening.

The coffee was about done when the phone rang. Apparently, it was Allie who would be over after lunch to discuss political options with Julie and Lesa. Then shortly the happy women joined him with Julie asking to be able to do breakfast one more time.

She did her delicious thing with eggs and ham. Lesa cut up some fruit and Ray set the instruments on the table. Their conversation over breakfast was fine, talking about the new arrival and how Lesa planned to integrate it into the working life of physicists this time. After breakfast Ray disappeared into the office where Lesa joined him very shortly.

“Would you send me your latest scattering document, Ray?” she asked as though it were a regular request. “I’ll get up to speed as soon as I can, and then I have to call Professor Smith. I haven’t forgotten; it has just been one hectic week.”

So Ray sent the document as an attachment to a one liner that read, “I love both of you.”

When Lesa got his message, she looked over at him to say, “We love you too, and I need to talk to you about this locket thing we were going to design.”

Ray thought about it a moment. “Yeah?”

“Ray, tell me, do you love me as much as it seems like you do?”

“I would guess that what it seems like to Lesa Sorensen is exactly what it’s like. You’d be impossible for me to fool. Just tell me how you think I feel though, would you? I mean, this whole thing of having a baby at my age – and yours too for that matter – sounds a bit fantastic. I’m ancient and you’re not as young as you should be to go through with this thing, but I am completely in agreement with what you come up with as long as you tell me that you have thought of all the complications. I almost certainly won’t be alive when this one gets to be Roger’s age. Have you thought about nursing this thing with a locket full of my ashes hanging there between your breasts? That’s sick.”

“You feel okay, don’t you?”

“I feel fine – for an old man! But think about it.”

“Okay. I have thought about it; you’re going to be alive when this one reaches Roger’s age, and it will bring you a lot of pleasure. If you’re not, you’re not. Why don’t you think I could raise a baby on my own? I’ve talked about all my health issues with Sharon. She really is an expert; give her a medical problem and she’ll get to the very bottom of it.”

“Your health issues? Is there something you haven’t told me?”

“No, for Christ’s sake, Ray, just listen, would you? Sharon says that there are nowhere near as many problems for pregnancies in women my age any more compared to what there once was. Lots of career women opt to have a first child at my age. She sees no danger whatsoever – for the baby or me.

Cosmological Considerations

We'll have the fetus checked regularly to make sure it's developing fine, and we'll have me checked regularly too."

Ray just sat there watching her.

Julie evidently wanted something, and having heard them talking, she knocked on the door before coming in. "Hi," she said. "I don't want to interrupt you guys when you're in here trying to get some research under way, but I do have a couple of things I need to discuss."

"Yeah, well... we had already interrupted our research before you knocked, Julie," Ray said.

She pushed up against him affectionately. "Can I lean these heavy things against you while we're talking?" Julie teased, leaning against his shoulders without waiting for a response or worrying about Lesa having concern.

"Of course, as long as there's no extra guilt to carry with them."

"They're not that heavy; they're not plated in gold, Ray," she laughed

"I don't know, they're pretty heavy."

"Funny thing, Julie," Lesa interjected. "Ray and I just mentioned that we have to begin designing the gold locket for carrying Ray's ashes between my breasts after he dies. When Ray and I were up on the ridge last week we discussed having a locket designed for me to wear between my breasts with special significance to us. That locket will contain a teaspoon or so of Ray's ashes if he dies before I do. Then when I die the locket gets emptied into my coffee can of ashes and goes over the dam with me just the way I will have sent Ray's over the dam after he died. Is that gross or what?"

"What a wonderful idea. I want my ashes to go over the dam with you guys. I decided that when I heard Ray tell Jamie those arrangements the other day. Could I burden you guys with that request?"

"You told them, Ray?" Lesa asked. "Well, good. Sure – yours go too."

"The reason I came in," Julie changed the subject, "is because I have to go back to my life. I'll run for Congress. With you guys helping me, and Allie and I helping each other, I am fairly certain that I can win."

"Yes, of course you can. You'll come up here to see us any time, just on a whim, though, won't you?" Lesa seemed almost to plead. Ray wondered.

"I would sure like to be able to do that. I called Allie and asked her to come at two. My taxi will get here at seven. We should be through with supper by then, won't we? And..." she halted. The saccades of her eyes projected a unique uncertainty – unless she was looking deep into his very soul, Ray thought. Tears began trickling down her cheeks. "I have had such a wonderful time. I'll really miss you both when I leave."

Lesa hopped up to share the intimacy, assuring her of how much she would like her to stay longer, and pleading that she come whenever she might want to. The women went off together then talking about one thing or another and Ray sat there rattled again by the ups and downs – and sideways lurches – of his life. Julie in the middle of it again.

Cosmological Considerations

It was the untimely smell of bacon frying that aroused him finally. He met Lesa and Julie in the kitchen both still smiling and chatting happily. Lesa was just cutting the bread for BLT sandwiches. Oh, so that was it.

Later Allie came. After fibs had straightened out why Lesa had come home unannounced and missed the games anyway, Allie teased about Julie and Ray seeming to hit it off like a long-time married couple last night. “Maybe it was a good thing you got home when you did,” she pestered.

“The Canyon Creek gang hangs together, don’t they?” Lesa responded.

“What was that Ellie was teasing you about, Ray? Did you and Lesa have a whoopee weekend last week?”

“We had a wonderful ‘woopee weekend’,” Lesa admitted. “Did we freak Ellie out with our eating breakfast half naked in mid afternoon? Roger seems to have new reasons to doubt the sanity of his parents. But Ray got to relax this week with Julie here.”

Ray thought about that relaxation that he and Julie had had – it came down to that one nap together. Yes, he guessed he had relaxed until the awkwardness of waking from it and during all the rest of the time she had been there except those first few awkward minutes. Yes. It was indeed relaxing for him to be around Julie without constraints.

“Tom and I had so much fun last night. Julie is one excellent pinochle player; that’s for sure.”

Then conversations became quite intense on how to go about setting up a campaign. Allie was going to be getting a committee together, would Lesa please consider being her chairperson, no she had committed to working with Ray on his research. They had a book that had been pending publication for a couple of decades now and it needed to get out there.

“It really is important, Allie.”

“Oh, I know that. But this is important too, and you would be so good at it. Julie, you would be great at it too if you were to stay up here, but I know you have your own campaign to run. Do you know how to file and get the preliminaries out of the way? Mom’s friends are helping me; one of them may know how. I guess I’ll get one of them to be chairperson.”

There was hardly any room between Allie’s exuberances for other voices to contribute. Julie did seem to be getting some information transferred both ways on how a campaign is to be run. Like Helen, she had managed successful campaigns before, and she admitted that it would be hard for her not to over-manage her own.

Ray excused himself and went to the study to sit down at his computer and stare into his screen saver of Bessel functions and Legendre polynomials bouncing around. He seemed almost overwhelmed with sadness at all that had transpired and was still ‘in the mill’. His thoughts took him back twenty years to those intense days he and Lesa had spent at the Sheltry hotel.

One might calculate, or otherwise assess, what to expect will be observed in a given upcoming situation, but you can’t calculate with any certainty what one’s life experiences will bring. You just have to observe it – to sense it. One

Cosmological Considerations

must be sensually prescient, and having sensed an aspect of reality, one cannot thereafter deny it. That *is* reality, more real than theoretical prognostications could ever suggest. What is, in simple fact, *is*. You have to be there when *it* is. Lesa was the consummate teacher of all that – the ultimate believer in it. In him as the one she claimed had advocated it. But had he really? He didn't know where if anywhere he was going with that, but it was on his mind.

He opened his scattering file and headed for the face of the 'mine' once more. But he wasn't dressed for the mine. He was like a miner sneaking down the mineshaft and into his old familiar tunnel after church with his Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes on. It just doesn't work – on Sunday, or on this particular Saturday afternoon either, after sacred rites of the morning, the previous week. Having faced the ultimate reality, was he now trying to nullify or even appease it with theory? It didn't work. He closed the file. Life over theory.

Far away he heard the intermittent sound of Julie's voice intertwined with that of Lesa and Allie. It was like sitting alone up by the pool in those years when Helen no longer came, alone listening to the far-off songs of birds through the trees with the sounds of the fluttering leaves in the breezes that caused them to sway to and fro. The aspects of reality one loves without ever actually seeing the sources of the sensations or understanding the emotions they arouse.

He didn't know how long he had sat there transfixed. Lesa had his damp face pressed to her breasts when he became aware of that reality outside his encapsulated models of it. His head in her hands was like a crystal ball in the hands of a fortuneteller.

"It'll be all right, Ray. You and I, we'll be all right."

"I know," he said into her blouse. "I was lost in the past again, in the Sheltry, and then up at the pool on Raven's Creek."

"Was Julie there?"

"No. I was alone like in the times I'd go there during those years when Helen no longer came – after Julie and she had danced around naked and closed down what we had had going up there. I was listening to the birds far away in through the trees with the sound of the leaves and the white noise of the falls, wondering why the girls had never come again."

Evidently Julie had seen Allie out because Ray saw her now standing there watching them with so much sadness in her eyes. Ray sucked it up and sat back, still with an arm around Lesa.

"You guys have restored my faith in humanity, you know," Julie said. "You two are like I always thought people should be, but they never were. I read Reich again just last weekend for some reason or other. I guess I had become disillusioned again."

Lesa extended her arm to her and she came over to where they were. Ray rose and they all hugged each other. After a moment they unraveled like a ball of worms having seemed to already have done whatever it is such balls of worms do.

Cosmological Considerations

Then they worked together to make a quick supper, ate it, and cleaned up the kitchen.

Lesla said, "Let us help you pack your things. It'll be fun. I'd like to see all those other outfits"

They went into Julie's bedroom where Ray and Lesla sat on the bed watching Julie. She demonstrated each outfit by laying it across her and then she put the clothes either into her suitcase or the appropriate box in which it would travel, cheerfully acknowledging her thankfulness for each item. Pretty soon there was the doorbell.

"He's early," Lesla said.

"That's good," Julie said getting her bags to the door with Ray and Lesla's help. "I get all blubbery saying goodbyes if there's too much time."

The driver took the bags and went back to the taxi with them.

Julie incongruently got down on her knees, right in front of them then, putting her arms around Lesla's buttocks. She squeezed tightly and kissed the still tiny stomach. "I love you too you lucky little Bonn," she said. "I will, so help me God, be up here getting to know you. I would like to be right in there nursing you and finally put these boobs of mine to good use. But I suppose I'm just too old now," she laughed even as tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Don't you dare drown my baby," Ray teased.

She rose then, they all hugged, and when Julie kissed Ray, he noticed it. There was a signature to it. He realized that she had never kissed him in the mouth before – especially like that. Then silently Ray and Lesla watched as Julie got into the cab. They continued watching as the cab egressed down the long, lonely street of such serenity and now of a new quiet desperation.

Ray and Lesla remained there at their front door holding each other for some time. It was Ray who spoke first.

"What was that all about?"

"You mean the way she kissed you?"

"No. I understood that. What's not to understand about that?" He feigned a cocksuredness he did not feel. "I mean what was she talking about with regard to the 'nursing our baby' bit. How absurd was that? Why would she have said it? Is that because I have teased her too much about those things and about you and Allie with Roger and Ellie?"

"I suspect she likes the way you've teased her – and everything else you've ever done." She looked over at him coyly. "Anyway, it's not really all that absurd. I think a lot of women fantasize about that, at least until they've done it and realized that it hurts."

"You mean like Sharon?"

"Well, yeah. She wasn't very serious about it though. If she had been she could have got the job done."

"Could have? Actually got milk out of those jugs of hers?"

"Yes, of course. Jugs? Now they're jugs? You have problems with the nomenclature, don't you? You really should quit talking about them until you get that down." She laughed at his awkwardness. "Anyway, it's called

Cosmological Considerations

‘induced lactation’, Ray. It’s not even that rare. Women who have never been pregnant can induce sufficient lactation to begin breast-feeding. That’s why it’s called *induced*. If their nipples are consistently stimulated and they use a breast pump or have somebody suckling, they eventually produce enough milk to feed a baby, and once it starts, the flow adjusts to fill the demand. So, sure, if she were younger, she could breast feed if she really wanted too. Apparently, it’s crossed her mind. Maybe she could anyway.” Lesa laughed at Ray’s expression. “Supposedly there isn’t any difference in the composition of the milk whether it’s induced or a normal result of pregnancy. Maybe you could help her with it.” She laughed at his expression. “Sometimes men can even do it.” She laughed at him again, even harder now, this time at his total revulsion. “There are drugs that cause lactation to begin in women, or even in men. Want to try ‘em – when the time comes?”

“Not on your life.” He was disgusted now. “So why do you know all that? Sharon?”

“Yes,” Lesa laughed. “The other night after we did the pregnancy test, we were laughing about when Roger was a little guy and Sharon went into your office with the two kids trying to nurse off her and you flying off the handle. She told me that she could have nursed them if she had really wanted to, and she told me all that about induced lactation. I knew most of it anyway. Do you know that in some cultures, grandmothers induce lactation routinely in case the mother experiences problems? Julie probably knows all that. She’d be a super grandmother, don’t you think?”

“Women.”

“Well, you only have to worry about one right now.” Lesa took his hand and lead him back into the house, closing the door and locking it without letting go of him. Then she led him down the hall to their bed. She undressed him. He stood there like a manikin not knowing for sure what she was about. Then, leaving him standing there, she undressed in front of him, enjoying the effect it had on him. When she was completely nude too, she pulled him next to her as they fell into the bed. They laid there holding each other all through the long night.

Sunday began with sunshine. They had not actually pulled the shades the night before and the interminable misty rain had somehow been replaced by a cold but sparkling clear day. When Ray awoke, he noticed that Lesa was watching him. Her face was bright and beautiful as she beamed back at him after she noticed that he too was awake.

“Life is so wonderful, Ray.”

“A notch above that, I think,” he replied happily now.

“Roger comes back tonight, right?”

“Yeah. Later in the afternoon, I think. I wonder if he’ll stop off at Wilson’s first? Probably. He doesn’t know that his mother is home and has brought him a present all wrapped up in the most beautiful package in the world.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Our baby! His new brother or sister. But we won’t tell him now.”

“So, what do you think he’ll think of that when he finds out? It’ll probably be a good lesson for him and Ellie. They’ll think that these old people hadn’t had sex for eighteen years until last Saturday night and then, the first time they do, bam! Just like that, pregnant. That should scare the hell out of them.”

Lesa was laughing happily as she threw her arms around him, but then she stopped abruptly. “How long had it been, Ray? We do it fairly often, don’t we? It doesn’t ever go a complete week, does it?”

“The inimitable ‘It’? Sometimes *it* has,” he emphasized.

“Oh, you poor man,” she joshed. “Well, you’ve done double duty this past week, haven’t you?”

“Quadruple duty I’d say, except for too many days off between,” he laughed.

Still perplexed, Lesa asked him, “How long had it been before last Saturday, Ray? I mean, was it an extra long time so that your sperm had more vitality than usual or something last weekend? What do you think?”

Ray just looked at her quizzically. “Lesa, for heaven’s sake, do you really think I have an Excel file where I keep track of all that sort of thing?”

She ignored his comment. “This is Sunday. It should be a day of rest for you, shouldn’t it? Even God could only create for a week without a rest.”

“Your call. You’re the one who schedules acts of creation around here. That’s a woman thing.”

“It is, isn’t it. That’s awful. You know, Ray, that reminds me of what Eddie’s Lisa told me once about what you told Eddie with regard to him not having been planned. She said that you told him among other things including that Helen did the planning, that ‘It isn’t whether you were planned or not, it’s whether you were loved,’ and that Eddie had been loved from the start. Lisa said that what you told him really made a difference to Eddie.”

“I kind of remember that. I was still recovering from Helen’s death.”

“Do you think that you and Helen, and Roger and Ellie were maybe a little over-planned? I guess Allie was actually conspired after the fact, wasn’t she? Well we’ve done this one Ray Bonn’s way, haven’t we? I mean, we’ve just let it happen and it did, huh?”

“That sounds like Ray Bonn’s haphazard way to me.”

“I wonder how Julie is?”

Ray looked at his incomprehensible wife, awestruck at how she flitted about sometimes like a little forest creature, as if at random, but then later the purpose would become clear – even to him.

“What?” Lesa responded to another of his quizzical expressions. “I’m supposed to forget about the boobs that were offered up to help me nurse this thing?” She was clearly teasing about her perception of Ray’s perception of Julie’s epiphany, the other mirror in this two-way mirrored hallway through their lives.

Cosmological Considerations

“Those boobs will be braziered up tighter than they’ve ever been, right smack dab in the middle of a tight race for the US Congress by the time this baby arrives, assuming she wins the primary.”

“Maybe she won’t win it. Anyway, right smack dab in the middle of *my* enlarging boobs will hang a pendant, and on that pendant will hang a locket that will have a tiny photo of you until there are ashes to replace it. I think Julie might like one too. Shall we have one made for her too. It could have a longer chain.” She laughed.

“For God’s sake, Lesa. Isn’t this just a little perverted? And a little morbid as aberrations go, don’t you think? Waiting for ashes? Is this going to be a black heart by the way?”

“No it’s not, and no, it isn’t morbid, either. I think gold, diamonds, and rubies. It would keep you right in style right where you’ve always wanted to be, right there between your favorite objects in each of two universes.”

“Two universes again? You fought the odds once and won. Maybe you should retire that concept. Like you told me to do last night.”

“Ray, it would only acknowledge what you two have known for over fifty years. You really do love each other. And hanging between those beautiful boobs. Hey, it don’t get no better than that.” Again she was laughing at him. “Anyway,” she continued, “she and I love each other too. She wants her ashes to go with you too, so why not?”

“My old familiar weakness? It reminds me of what my old friend Sy told me he had heard from an old-time cowpoke he had used to know long before I was born. It goes something like this here,” Ray drawled.

“When I die, I hope they tan this old hide of mine and turn it into a woman’s riding saddle so I can rest between the two things I like best, horses and pretty women.”

“Gross!” Lesa exclaimed. “Maybe you should have put that on Jonesy’s brochure,” she laughed. “Ray Bonn will just be ridin’ a little higher in the saddle, and with a little more style, as he rides off into that sunset painted by the master of ‘em all, won’t he, Ray?”

“I kind of liked the idea of the saddle horn though,” Ray teased as Lesa rolled her eyes.

Roger was exuberant when he walked in. Ray and Lesa heard him in the entry hall going on about how they were going to take State in basketball this year.

“We are too,” they heard Ellie counter.

Clearly Roger had picked her up after his weekend ‘team bonding session’ had let out and had brought her home for supper, thinking that Julie would love having her. Evidently the two of them had had much more to do than talk about parents and home life when they got together, because Roger was

Cosmological Considerations

clueless about the fact that Julie had been replaced by his mother in the Bonn household even though Ellie must certainly have been told.

“Mom! What are you doing here?” Roger fairly yelled as he came into the kitchen. “I was thinking Julie would... well...”

“Would what?” Lesa pouted as she hugged him to her, “cook you a delicious meal? All your favorite stuff?”

He just laughed at her phony neuroticism. “You’ve never been jealous or intimidated by anybody in your life. Definitely not by Aunt Julie.”

“No, I’m not intimidated – a little jealous maybe. But I love her just like your Daddy do.”

“Where is she?”

“I caught her cheating with your father so I banished her,” Lesa teased with a twist that Ray didn’t really like.

“The bitch!” Roger laughed bringing back memories to Ray.

“Roger!”

“I know; sorry,” he said between chuckling fits. “But if she and Dad were doing what you and he did last weekend, well... that would be totally disgusting. Anyway, it just sounded right, and no worse than what you said, Mom.”

“You’re right it was no worse and it was funnier. What I said was intended to be funny too. Nothing disgusting,” she laughed. “We tried to get Julie to stay a while, but she wants to get into Congress. She and your mom can spend time together back in Washington if they both get in. We’ll have to help them, won’t we, Ellie?”

“Yes, you better. Mom thought you might not want to be chairperson for her, because Grandpa here – oh, excuse me, Dad, here – doesn’t want you to. Is that it, Dadio?”

“What ‘Dadio here won’t have’ has nothing to do with anything that has ever kept anyone from doing anything they wanted to do – you have to know that better than anyone. Anyway, enough of that. So your coach really thinks this is the year for Lakeside High in basketball, huh?”

“Yes, of course,” Roger defended his position, “don’t you?”

“I’m not ever expecting a competitor of my son’s team to win a damn thing, if that’s what you’re wondering. I’ve seen you play. I suppose you’re expecting to win that next playoff game and go on to take State in football too, aren’t you?”

“Oh yeah. Coach Wilkins told me he doesn’t expect me to show up for basketball practice until State is over in football. But we might have one of our games before State is finished. If we do, he said I can play without having practiced.”

“I’m going to be center this year,” Ellie interjected.

“You are?”

She stood up and reached the ceiling easily, “Yep.”

“You’ll be good at it,” Ray said. “Are you and I going to get any shooting practice in while Roger’s still doing football?”

Cosmological Considerations

“Yes, I’d like that. You’re the one that taught me that outside jump shot that worked so well last year, but now I need to learn blocking out and rebounding and those close in shots like your hook shot, Gramps.”

Ray could tell that she hadn’t even realized that she had reverted to “Gramps” again, remembering earlier times. He actually liked that she had and enjoyed thinking back himself; those had been fun times.

Through all this banter, Lesa was smiling and interjecting comments as she got supper on the table. Then she busily chatted with Roger and Ellie.

Ray liked watching her when she felt good about herself and life – pretty much the way she always was, although now he sensed that he was a more integral part of that feeling. He knew that before long now she would not be feeling so well. He dreaded that, except for knowing that it was exactly what she wanted – this unplanned baby the way Ray would have done it. He almost laughed thinking about that. As if having a baby was anything he would ever have had anything to do with – whoa! What was he thinking? Unplanned, sure, but having *nothing* to do with it? That was bad thinking there. He had had plenty to do with it. Jonesy be damned.

“What’re you thinking, Pop?”

“Oh, Roger, I couldn’t explain it to you if I had to... and thank God, I don’t.” He gave Roger a whimsical smile.

“Well, you know what, I’ve been reading that old book you wrote, and I have some questions. I took it with me.”

“Which old book?” He really couldn’t remember. What was Roger talking about?

“Aberrations.”

“Relativity?” It was coming back.

“Yeah, that one. Aberrations of Relativity.”

“You trying...” he was confused. Then, taking way too long, “are you trying to...” what was the word? Again it was way too long, “impress...” another delay. “Yeah, impress... your friends?”

Ray saw Lesa looking across at him with the strangest look that he tried to figure out but couldn’t. Just strange, like he was about to do or say something that she had programmed a long time ago and he wouldn’t be able to resist doing or saying it just like those old hypnotism shows at the county fairs upriver where a person would be told that after they went back and sat down in the audience, the first time they heard the word “fantastic” or some other word, that they would stand up and scream “Hallaluya! or some other ridiculous thing and then they would just stand there fully awake, now staring around with their moist eyes staring at everyone who was laughing at them. Ray and Helen would be laughing at them too. Helen. The memory was more of a feeling than the usual more explicit ones.

Then her look changed; it was sympathy now, compassion, love. It was like when he looked up out of his nausea to behold this beautiful woman of dreams who stood by the river to watch as she herself floated by. It was she who had the most gorgeous pastel pink nipples and the blue eyes that would

Cosmological Considerations

never let him go 'til the sun shone hot upon his face. Not 'til yesterdays had lighted other fools their various ways to dusty deaths, and Ozymandias had admitted that he hadn't really been all that he had touted himself as having been. He had lied but was forgiven. Forgotten.

"Ray, smile at me."

"Smile at you?" He fumbled for the words awkwardly. "What... on earth... for?"

"Hold you fingers up like this?"

Ray saw Roger and Ellie look at Lesa like she had gone off a rail.

"Like this," she said again.

He had already done that, hadn't he? She looked at him now with the deep interest she had shown for the boy with the horse so far under the heavy waters at Canyon Creek.

"Ray, Honey." Lesa was right beside him. "Why don't you come with me and lie down for a little while?"

Ellie was looking at Roger with distress apparent in her expression. "Why?"

Lesa laid Ray back on their bed and covered him with the spread. She gave him an aspirin and waited until he seemed to drift off to sleep. Then immediately she called Sharon.

"So how's the proud mama to be?"

"Sharon, Hi. Listen. Just listen. You know that time I called you from the Sheltry when Ray was so sick?"

"Like I'm about to forget the most important phone call in my life? You made my career Little Sister."

"Well, Ray's sick like that. Well, I think he is."

"Nauseous?"

"No, no. And no fever. I don't think he has a fever. Maybe he does. I'll check. But he was out of it, I think. He's sleeping now. He always spaces out, but this time he didn't come back like usual."

"Always spaces out?"

"Well, you know, just sort of concentrates himself into a stupor or something, a little like that maybe, and gets in sort of a trance like. Maybe like what they say about Abraham Lincoln, so not weird or unusual like – usually."

"That's not unusual usually? It sounds unusually unusual to me, Lesa, but I'm guessing that there must be something now that even you think is unusual."

"You're not near Cynthia or Daddy, where they can hear are you?"

"No, I'm not. They've just gone to bed actually. Your dad's doing great by the way."

"Oh, good. Well, we were eating supper and Ray seemed so abstracted like he does sometimes. Then he slurred his words and paused too long between words. When I spoke to him it didn't bring him right back to reality. I mean..."

"Yes, I understand. You mean to *my* kind of reality, don't you?"

Cosmological Considerations

“Well, yes. God damn it, Sharon, I’m worried. I need him.”

“I know, I know. Did you do the obvious tests for stroke?”

“Yes, of course. The responses seemed almost normal – maybe – for Ray. He probably wouldn’t do them right away.”

“But he did give you the right responses.”

“I don’t think so, but maybe for Ray. He’s a little different, you know.”

“Duh. Did you just tell him about the baby?”

“Last night; no, it was this morning. He was fine with it – I think...”

“Did you fuck the hell out of him to celebrate the occasion or something?”

“Well, something a little like that, I guess.”

“I won’t ask. But do you think it might have been a bit too much – for a man his age, I mean. You know he isn’t twenty-three anymore.” Sharon laughed her irritating laugh.

“Maybe it was. He isn’t forty-seven anymore either.”

“Well, like so many other of the things you’ve done that I would not have believed when you were my little kid sister at Harvard, you may have just fucked a man to death.”

“That happens?”

“Not often, but I’m guessing you could maybe do it if you tried. Usually it’s the dialysis that gets them.” She gave her guffaw then.

“Sharon, quit it. I’m worried.”

“I know you are. You put him to bed, and he fell right to sleep, right?”

“Yes. Keep him there ‘til tomorrow. Check his pulse now and then. If there’s the slightest change from the mere total-exhaustion to something a little more critical, call me immediately. I’ll hop a plane and get out there in no time, and if it seems like that might not be fast enough, then call Dr. Tom or the medics, and I’ll go in and rescue him when I get there. Otherwise give him an aspirin and call me in the morning.”

“Oh yeah. I forgot that... no, I did do that.”

“Well, wake him up and give him one if you’re not sure. He’ll be fine, Lesa. Any man would welcome whatever danger you’ve put him through for the wonderful experience of having done it.” She was laughing again. “He always was a sucker for those pastel pink nipples of yours, wasn’t he? Keep an eye on him and take care of his next offspring.”

She had just hung up and was sitting there thinking of her conversation with Sharon when the phone rang. It was Julie.

“Hello Julie. How was the flight?”

But then without hearing anything about Julie’s flight or why she had called, Lesa just blurted out, “Oh, Julie. I have been so worried about Ray.”

“What on earth has happened?”

“I just got off the phone with Sharon because I was so worried. But evidently he’s just exhausted. Sharon thought it was funny. She thought I had probably made love to him until I had him fighting for his life.”

“Well, had you?”

Cosmological Considerations

“Julie could you just hang on a minute. I just remembered that Sharon told me to give him an aspirin. I’ll do that and get right back on, okay? Please hang on.”

So she did that. She held his head up to sip the water for the aspirin, kissed him, and laid his head back on the pillow. He went back to sleep. Then she picked up the phone again.

“Hi. You there?”

“Yes. Is he okay?”

“Yes. I just wanted to do that so I wouldn’t forget. To answer your question about whether I had endangered his life by making love to him too much, the answer is, *probably*.” She laughed.

“I’m sure he considers himself a lucky man,” Julie teased.

“Yes, well. I admitted to Sharon that there was no probably about it actually. I just wanted to hold him and hold him like we did last weekend.” Lesa gave a little chuckle that was barely audible.

“Oh Lesa, I am so sorry he isn’t feeling well, but he is going to be okay, isn’t he? He’s had some pretty brutal shocks to the mind the last few days besides whatever physical violence you might have done to him, you know.” She did her version of an audible smile.

“Yes. I guess I sort of underestimated what all he’s been through lately. Those were two major shocks from his perspective, huh? He isn’t getting any younger and I promised him that I would not ever keep any more secrets from him. I planned to unload a last one, but things happened, and I just couldn’t, and now I don’t think I should for a while. I hope you’ll come up when I do. You really do put him at ease, do you know that?”

“I was awful when I first showed up, but he straightened me out it was definitely relaxed and wonderful after that, and thank you again allowing us Creek rats to get together. I know he isn’t getting any younger even though he’s still younger than I am. But I was watching his expression when you were talking about Sharon being there for a couple of months. I could tell that he doesn’t look forward to that. I think he likes her fine as your friend and I’m sure he respects her as a doctor, but she just has a personality that doesn’t work perfectly with his. That’s worth thinking about too maybe.”

“You’re right. I’ve been insensitive about those sorts of things. You rest much easier on his mind. You two really do hit it off, so maybe we can do without Sharon being here that long. Maybe you’d help us out some if we need it. If your campaign is not needing you at that moment.”

“Lesa, I’m a little embarrassed about how I left, making that scene about your baby. Well, actually I feel a whole lot embarrassed if the truth were told.” She laughed awkwardly. “That was very crude of me. I called to apologize. You two must think I’m off my rocker. I know Ray does.”

“Not at all. I didn’t. It took some convincing to get Ray to understand it though. He said something about ‘women’.” Lesa laughed. “But is that really something you would like to do if it were possible? It’s okay with me if you do.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Oh, it is, although I don’t actually think it’s feasible – at my age it probably isn’t.” She laughed a bit shyly with the admission. “Ray has teased me about these things so much for so long that I’m a little self-conscious about them being perceived as mere sexual stimulants rather than having any legitimate function. I know it’s silly. Maybe I would just like to prove to myself that my body has some value. I know there’s also the aspect of proving it to Ray, if that’s not too perverse. That really wasn’t why I did that though. I don’t actually know why I did it. It was just a spur of the moment type thing. Do you know what I mean? It was how I felt, and it just happened.”

“I think I do. Why wouldn’t you want to? I convinced Ray, I think. I didn’t actually like nursing all that much myself. It hurts – well, it hurt me. I think Roger got more nourishment from Allie than he did from me.” Lesa laughed in sharing this tidbit of information. “Anyway, if you’d like to and it works out, don’t be embarrassed? It would be nice to have someone who is such a loving person help with the baby. It was fun with the two of us last time. Don’t you think it would be? Other than Sharon’s charade I don’t think Ray really cared about Allie and I doing it together. He’s a bit of a prude, but he’d be all right with it – if it were you.”

“Yes, I would like to try it to see if it works out; I’ll check it out to see if it’s even possible at my age, and if it is, I may go through the procedures when the time comes just to see, if you still think it would be all right. I might even ask Ray sometime when I’m up there if he’d be okay with it. I think he’d tell me what he really thought, don’t you?”

“Sure he would,” Lesa responded, but thought that she should probably prepare him for her question beforehand.

“When Allie teased about Ray and I being just like an old married couple over at their place Friday night, it felt just like that was what we were, Lesa, and it felt wonderful. It may be wrong telling you this,” she paused. “But you know how I have always liked Ray so much and I really like being able to imagine what it would have been like. And I have this better model of you and him in my mind like he has of all of us. To get in on your pregnancy secret just after it all happened before anyone else knows, being there then, and you being so open to telling me before anyone else... well, you can not imagine how much all that means to me.”

“Ray is comfortable with you, much more than merely ‘comfortable’, you know. And he has seemed more comfortable with himself now. Julie, you would not have known the man I lived with up to a week ago Friday night. He was an uptight angry individual – a bitter old curmudgeon. I think I had been so insensitive to the incest issue with Roger and Ellie that it nearly drove him insane. Letting him know what Allie and I already knew made all the difference in the world even if it was hard on him in other ways. His attitude is totally different now.”

“Allie told me that Friday night. His attitude is great. It’s more like when you first got married; it was wonderful for me to get some time with him finally, and wonderful of you to have allowed it so graciously.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Your coming up and helping to draw him completely out of his shell was absolutely marvelous. Don’t ever stay away from here very long, Julie. I don’t know how you’re fixed for travel funds, but if you ever need a penny for travel or anything else, we’ll give you a million dollars. It sounds so condescending to say that kind of thing, Julie, but I’d really like you to have access to whatever you need. The money that sits there brings us no pleasure at all. Having you here brings us a lot and you’re family.”

“Lesa that wardrobe you bought me is so grand. It just makes me smile to feel so well dressed. That Maria you put us onto is so enjoyable to work with. Maybe you and she could line up my campaign look for me. I have enough to travel – especially if I don’t have to worry about what happens when I get down to that last penny in my travel budget. But I’ve been thinking about this campaign down here. I think I know someone who is more electable than I am for this office, and we need to get rid of the incumbent. I’m a little old for that and I’d like to be able to get involved with your family more, especially when the baby comes.”

“It would be so much fun to do that shopping with you though, Julie. So let’s do it in any case. You’ll want them even if you’re heading the committee to get someone else elected – like Allie maybe. She needs somebody. Ray will be thrilled to have you come up here to visit or to stay no matter what the ostensible reason as long he gets some Canyon Creek soul time with you.”

When they hung up, Lesa continued sitting there on the edge of the bed watching Ray as he slept. He must have been exhausted to sleep through that conversation. She got up then to go upstairs where Roger and Ellie were doing homework together. She told them that the situation seemed to be fine – just exhaustion – that she had been worried about a stroke, and what Sharon had advised.

With that done she returned to Ray’s side. He was sleeping peacefully. She decided she might as well go to bed too. After her ablutions she crawled into bed next to Ray hoping he would feel better in the morning as Sharon had assured her.

But she couldn’t sleep. Ray was uneasy on her mind. From their very first conversation after that first Larry King Live show, he had emphasized their difference in the age. It became almost an obsession with him – telomeres, senescence, alzheimers, senile dementia, the list went on. He had tried to dissuade her from attaching herself to him emotionally using all those terms repeatedly. He had kept insisting on the significance of contemporaneity, like he and Helen had had, like he and Julie still have. But she had accepted the risks he had identified, had forced him to accept them too. You’re older than me, so what? Looking over at him now in failing light, snoring peacefully, it finally dawned on her what it might be like – and there was an aspect of finality – that he had lived with her, accepting the extreme difference, honoring her peacefully sleeping through their life.

It was physics that had united them despite the difference, what he had loved about her from the start, what made her different from Helen, from Julie

Cosmological Considerations

– special. But what he loved about her the most, she had denied him, forcing a domestic life on him more cruelly than what Helen had done. She had done that to him, her soul mate, the only one she could ever truly love. She could have helped him continue creating greatness, but instead she had insisted on procreation – willfully forcing this on him. No wonder he had become a bitter old curmudgeon. She was sobbing into her pillow as silently as she could. She had to get up and think through this.

In the office now, her robe over her shoulders, she sat at his desk aware of how he must have come in here in the middle of the night so many times – without her. Opening his cosmology file, she thought about his intention of getting Professor Smith involved, but she had planned a trip instead and that had gone off in totally other directions and she had never corrected course. She admitted to herself now that it seemed always to be her way or no way.

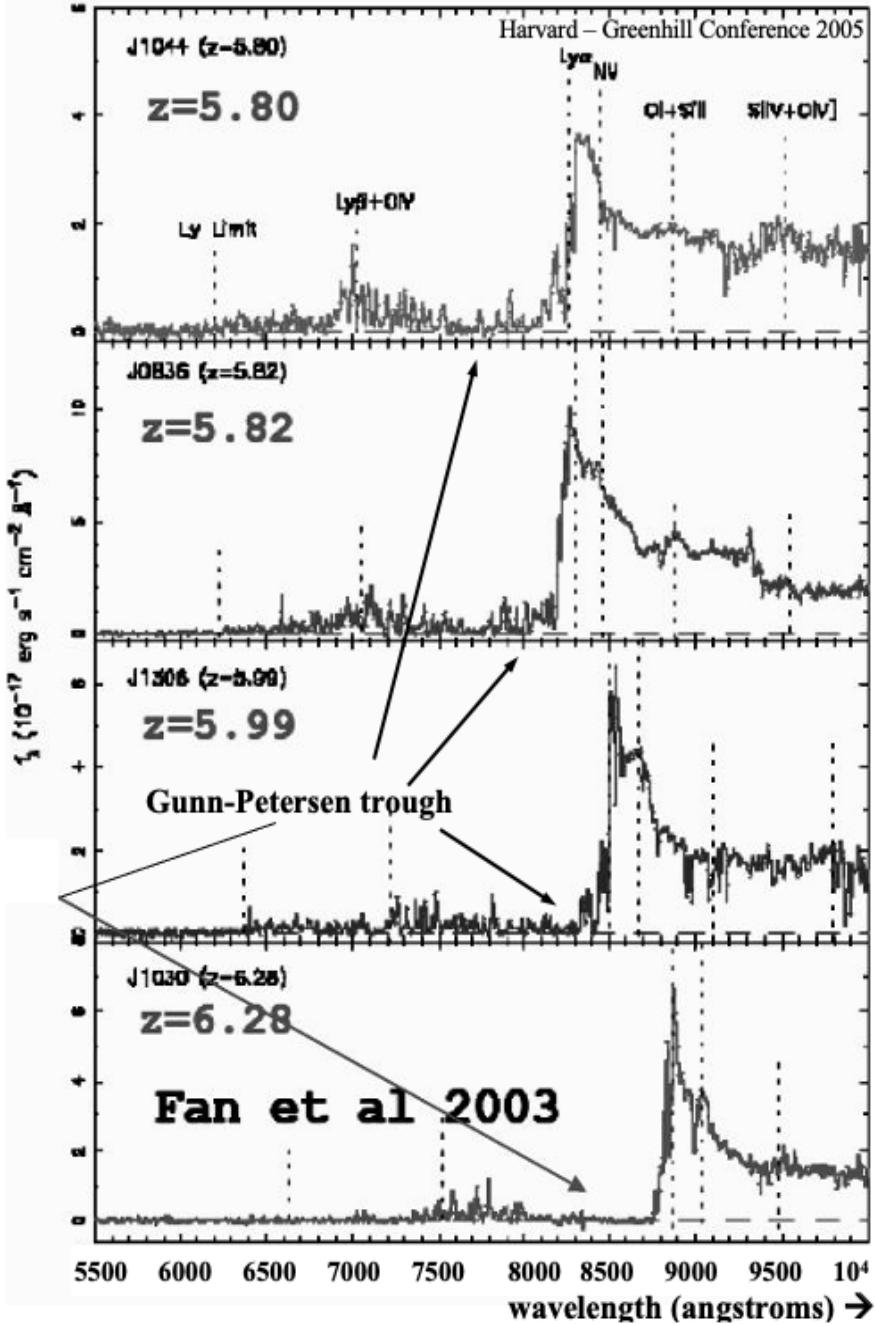
It occurred to her that she had become her mother without her mother's excuse. She could have continued as a top-class physicist; Ray wanted her to; the physics community did, but somehow, she had opted for motherhood above all else – to the exclusion of the physics she had loved. Motherhood was not a bad thing; it was a good thing, but she could have had both. She should have had both. Ray should have expected both from her. Her mother should have continued her career. There were reasons why she didn't. But Lesa had no excuse; the skids had been greased for her. She and Ray would have been happier; they would have achieved so much more. She had been the key to getting Ray's (and her) ideas accepted by establishment; she was familiar with 'Science in Action' as described by Bruno Latour.

Ray must have just fumbled through this file the last few months she suspected, apparently not sure how to proceed; the last section was not as clear and immediate as his work usually was. She had looked at the Lyman alpha forest data with him earlier; it seemed straight forward enough as due to absorption in hydrogen cloud protogalaxies between radiation sources that were primarily in cores of galaxy clusters and observations on earth. Ray had clearly depicted that much earlier. She should have been working with him to get this resolved rather than him just muddying the water over and over.

The shorter wavelength photons of the more remote radiation sources get redshifted to the Lyman alpha spectral line of intermediate hydrogen clouds where they get absorbed. That didn't seem like something that would have given Ray much trouble. She scrolled further to the data on Lyman break galaxies and the 'Gunn-Petersen trough'. At a redshift of 6.0, the Lyman alpha peak emission of 1,216 Angstroms would be redshifted to 8,512 Angstroms. At shorter emission wavelengths the spectra are totally absorbed. Every aspect of the quasar or galaxy spectral profile at shorter wavelengths than the Lyman alpha limit of 920 Angstroms would be obliterated by the increasing number of hydrogen clouds. That is what the data shows. Even the quasar data at closer range exhibited absorption lines right up to the Lyman alpha peak with virtually not much at shorter wavelengths and that would be from the traces of other elements that exist in the intergalactic plasma. All this absorption occurs

Cosmological Considerations

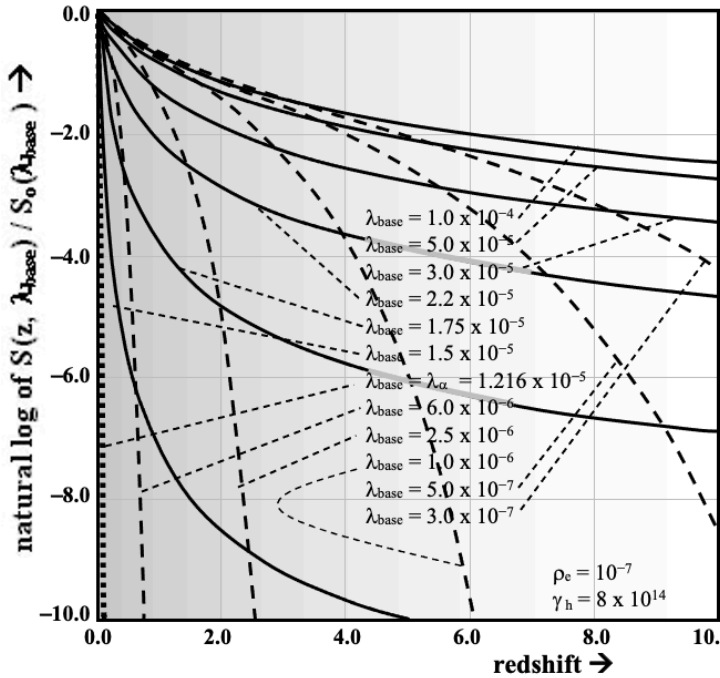
for hydrogen at a temperature below the ionization, virtually none of it in passing through galactic clusters.



The Gunn-Petersen trough as it affects QSO spectra

Cosmological Considerations

Ray had worked absorption profiles of his scattering model thoroughly. In particular, he had determined the profile on both sides of the Lyman alpha resonance line. Lesa read what he had written a long time ago concerning the formula and plot of expected behavior of the absorption characteristics in and around the line for neutral hydrogen. The difference in behavior above and below the line is extreme. This was all accomplished using the Lorentz-Lorentz formula and Lambert's law of absorption with the parameter values determined for the intergalactic plasma that produced the equivalent of the cosmological redshift. He had been thorough; it was a pleasure reviewing what he had done – as it had used to be. But he was losing that clarity.



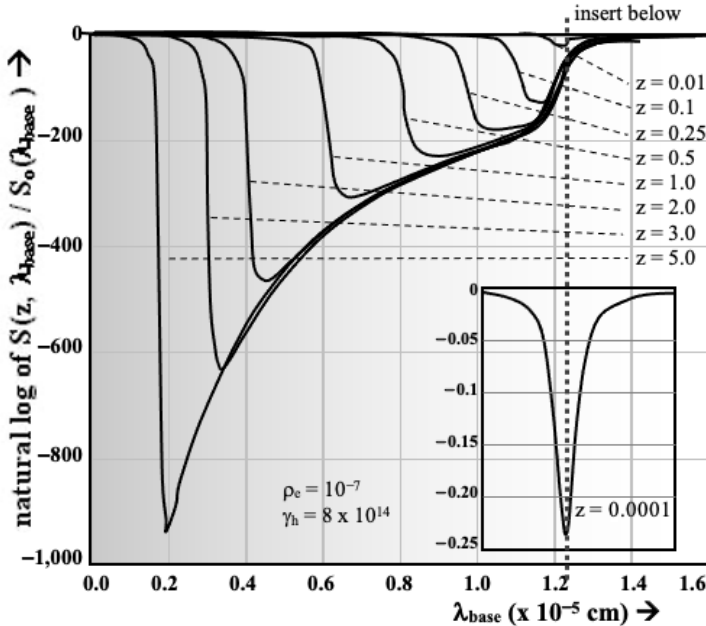
Form of predicted absorption characteristics by neutral hydrogen on both sides of the Lyman-alpha absorption line

Lesla looked over his absorption formulas and then accessed the plot program she preferred using. She generated a series of plots on a log scale just to determine how extreme the absorption should be according to Ray's model in the Gunn-Petersen trough. The absorption was so extreme that at a redshift of $Z = 1$, the luminosity of the observed object would be reduced to one part in more than a google – 10^{100} .

She applied this absorption 'profile' to the 'Lyman break galaxy' data that Ray had worried about for years. She should have been on it that long ago. It was just the Gunn-Petersen trough applied to galaxy spectra at redshifts from zero to seven. There was a plot of that data in Ray's files. She couldn't remember whether it was simulated or observational, but it didn't really matter.

Cosmological Considerations

She applied her theoretical absorption data to uniform spectra of galaxies to see if it correlated correctly with the data. She found the figure that provided the data to be matched. The absorption profile fit the spectra data at each of the various redshifts. Voila! It worked like a charm.



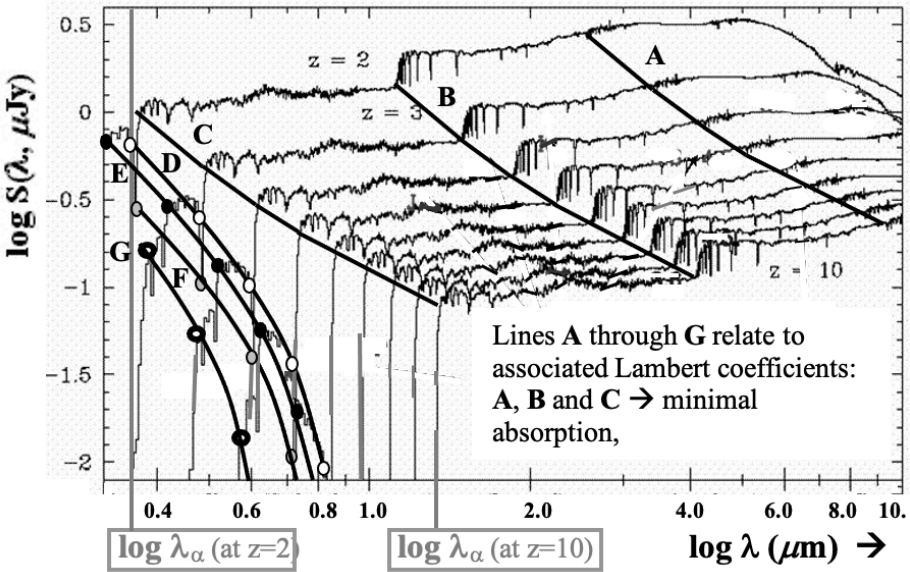
The Gunn-Petersen trough of neutral hydrogen absorption as implied by the Lorentz-Lorenz formula and Lambert's law

Now she just felt only regret for not having spent this tiny amount of her time to easing Ray's mind about this issue months, and even years ago? But what had Ray's problem been anyway? Why hadn't Ray just wrapped this whole thing up long ago? Because he wanted me with him, she answered her thought question. So why hadn't she gladly jumped in to help? That was a tougher one. It delved down into her psyche, a place she did not want to go – again.

What needed to be done to get this whole thing out the door?

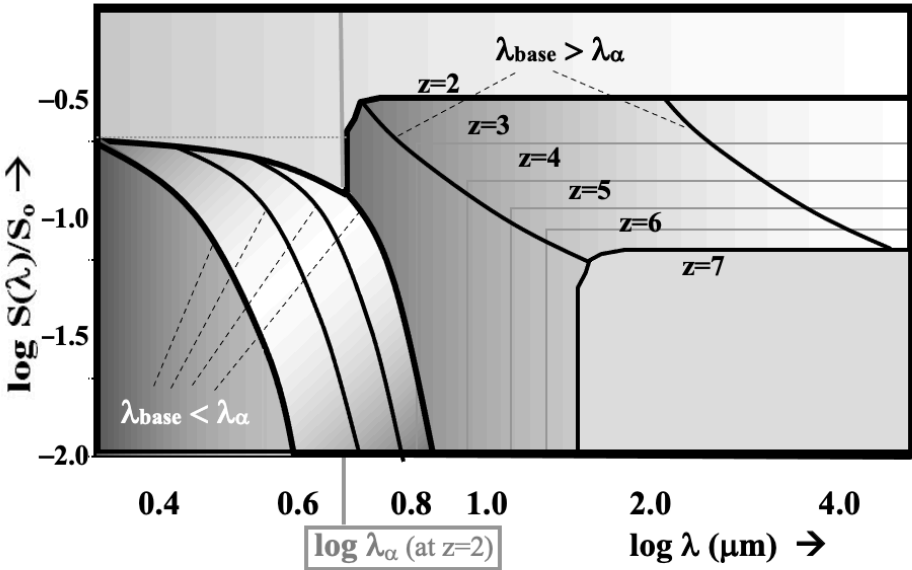
That was a question she could resolve; it was in her wheelhouse. Their reputation even though it pertained in another arena years back would still persuade most in any scientific field to take notice. Ray's arguments were persuasive, but it required more than that to carry the day in a scientific discipline. The organization of the material was of the utmost importance to success in any scientific circle as the work of Bruno Latour had so thoroughly documented. Subtlety in the stacking of references to substantiate the findings is how one convinces those who must be convinced that one has truly achieved what is claimed. Researchers must be convinced that those they respect would themselves be convinced. That was why Ray had wanted her to go with him to talk with Peter Smith. When Ray got feeling better, they must do that.

Cosmological Considerations



Lyman-break galaxy spectra vs. redshift, survey limits indicated. Figure is modified from M. Dickenson, GOODS Legacy team (and STScI)

Original at: <http://ssc.spitzer.caltech.edu/documents/compendium/xgalsci/>



Symbolized effect of the predicted absorption characteristics of neutral on uniform spectra on both sides of the Lyman-alpha absorption line showing a very basic agreement with Lyman break galaxy data.

Cosmological Considerations

There were also issues with posing so major a propositional change in the overwhelmingly accepted standard model. Were there enough cracks in that paradigm to warrant the attention of any cosmologist that matters? She must contact some of them to test the water with tidbits of what Ray was proposing. It would constitute a totally new paradigm replacing a century of concentrated research. How should that be broached.

There are always new buzz words coming into favor in science and for acceptability it would be best to be aware of them and apply them where they are appropriate. ‘Counterfactual conditionals’ were now being applied by physicists. It involves the use of conditional sentences which discuss what would have been true under different circumstances. There certainly was a way to apply that to Ray’s work. For example, “If it had been known that a mechanism existed for producing redshift other than recessional Doppler, Ray’s cosmological model would have become the ‘standard’ if introduced a century earlier.” That was maybe the angle that should be taken. A little more subtlety maybe.

She looked at the clock time on his computer screen. Wow. Time had flown by. She must get in there to bed with Ray, so she’d be there when he woke up.

#16 Lifetime Awards

It was another day. Morning. Lesa was beside him again, asleep now. What day was this? Raining again. Ray reached over to touch Lesa's face just to push the hair back so he could see her better. She jerked – awake.

“Ray, are you okay now?”

“I think so, why? Now?”

“Yes. I was worried about you last night before I got you to bed. I called Sharon and she thought I must have fucked you to death.”

“Oh, God, not that!” he forced a laugh. “Why Sharon? I like Tom.”

“Oh, Ray. I like Tom too, but Sharon's my friend. I was so worried about you. Maybe I'm just like everyone else that thinks you are so spectacular at so many things that I forget that you do it all in a frail human body that ages just like the rest of us.”

“But at lightning speed like Superman or Jesus, you mean?”

“Oh, Ray. Don't turn William Shatner on me now; I couldn't handle a Denny Crane at this point in our lives. I was almost beside myself though, but just like Sharon said, it turns out to have been nothing.”

“Nothing? Almost getting fucked to death by a beautiful woman is nothing to you now. Have some sensitivity woman.”

From her perspective he might just be back from exhaustion but from his it had been a bout with the singularity about which he wouldn't want to worry her. But he felt great now. What's not to tease about? So this is Monday. What's so bad about having one more Monday? He looked at the clock. It said 10:30.

“Is that clock right?”

“Yes. I got up earlier and got Roger off and came back to bed. You were exhausted.”

“Really? How long have I slept?”

“Over fourteen hours. That's how exhausted you were.”

“Hmm.”

“Ready to get up and have some breakfast?”

So they did that, and the week settled into what Ray had always liked to refer to as serenity down his private little street. On Wednesday they went up to talk with Professor Smith about Lyman-alpha forests. They had a very

Cosmological Considerations

pleasant discussion with Professor Smith, who seemed honored by their interest in his expertise. Lesa hinted at some of what would be controversial topics of Ray's approach, always referring to it as "Ray's approach" which annoyed Ray but he could not compete with Lesa's insistence. They were told of other researchers in the field such as Professor Petersen, who, Smith assured them would be glad to help. Smith forwarded reams of data and URLs to published papers that addressed the issues at the heart of Ray's research.

In the end they had communicated the broad outline of Ray's thesis and discussed Smith's counter arguments, together with citations that supposedly addressed such refutations. These seemed on further investigation to be the same old contentions that had been around for fifty years or more. But at any rate, the re-emerging physicists had those data on which the establishment position depended, upon which they could now apply their reasoning. The days flew by with Lesa wading into the research and swimming with delight. Her only exception to the material he had put together was his reference to the forward scattering process as a 'cloning' process. For some reason that Ray could not understand, she hated it.

"Why would you refer to the replacement of a photon as a cloning process, Ray? You despise the misapplication of a biological term evolution and yet you introduce a similar misapplication."

"That's what it is," he insisted. "A forward scattered photon is almost exactly the same as the original."

"No, they're not. Your discovery is that they are not identical; they are more analogous to an 'offspring' but even that is stretching it. The correct term is 'extinction process', not a 'cloning' process." Ultimately he convinced her more by his insistence than by logic that it should remain.

Friday came around again and another night of sitting on hard benches of the outdoor stadium in the rain. It was another impressive win for Roger's team propelling them into the state football finals. For Lesa and Ray, a well-deserved evening of relaxation with cards afterward with the Wilsons.

They seldom mentioned the little Bonn growing in the pod that rested between them every night, but it was not a cause for concern to either of them and an occasional delightful flight of fantasy. Ray knew that for Lesa it was an unconscious source of happiness in everything she did. When they did talk about it, Lesa exhibited the sheer pleasure she felt in being the one to foster its arrival; that was readily apparent to Ray. He took pleasure in that.

Roger and Ellie were seeing more and more of each other. Whether they were, had been, or would soon be, sexually active was on Ray and Lesa's minds, but now at last with no more concern than most parents have felt from time immemorial about a trend that will not be reversed. The parents contented themselves with the knowledge that the two were intelligent, socially responsible individuals. The fact that both were obvious about wanting much more out of life than just hopping into a connubial relationship unprepared for the rest of what makes for a meaningful life lessened their concern. Stephanie

Cosmological Considerations

seemed always to come to mind in such contexts, although it seemed that other than immediate economic advantages so available to the rest of the family, she had found a most congenial situation.

Roger had heard more from Stanford and it seemed that Ellie kept pace by having also been contacted with regard to expectations for her upcoming basketball season. But such institutions were not oblivious to the facts of their academic excellence. The physics department contacted Roger to assure him that they would like to have him set aside some time to speak with several of their professors while he was on campus. Ray noticed when Roger told him about that situation, that there was a Professor J. G. Thompson on his list of professors to contact.

“Does the ‘J.G.’ happen to stand for ‘Julie’ in this case?” Ray asked as he pointed to the top name on the list.

“Yes, it does. After the funeral I talked to Eddie and he told me I should talk to her. He said I would have an ‘in’.”

“Yeah, I suppose you would.”

“Now why would you suppose that?” Roger had sensed an edge.

Ray ignored the question and asked, “The other day you said you were interested in my book on relativity.”

“Yes, I really am. You know, what really interested me was the way you went about refuting the arguments against an infinite universe. Gauss’s law or the divergence theorem discussion I guess it was.”

“Well, maybe we should have that discussion before you talk to Julie.”

“Eddie said she was in your class that you taught there.”

“Yeah. She was brilliant. I think maybe I had something to do with getting her looking at gravity as maybe being something other than a distortion of geometry.”

The two of them had just been sitting at the table before dinner, with Lesa busily dishing up ready to eat.

“She’s the one that got your dad talking to me again, Roger.” Lesa looked at Ray. “Remember? Your protégé.”

“Protégé? Not by a long shot. Anyway, of course, old men always remember the past.”

“How far has Julie gotten on that, Ray? Did she go down the octonion path you asked me about?”

Roger ignored the games his parents were playing. “I’m going to run and get that book so I can show you what I have a question about.” Roger was up and gone.

“I don’t know,” Ray said finally. “I don’t think I ever asked her about the possibility of octonions having a role there. I haven’t talked to her in almost twenty years.”

Roger was back. “Octonions? You mean hypercomplex algebras?”

“Yeah. Why? Do you know about them?”

“Just what Mom told me one time, and what I found on the internet, but it sounded pretty interesting.”

Cosmological Considerations

Ray looked over into Lesa's smile.

"Anyway, these are the essays I was wanting to discuss with you – here, on this page and on several more pages."²

"Oh yeah. The divergence theorem and the confusions that Einstein and Hawking had with it."

"Were they really confused about that? It seems so straight forward."

"Well, it does to me too, of course. You'll have to read what they had to say about it."

"I have," Roger said.

"They just came at it from a totally different perspective," Lesa contributed. "There are concepts that just don't meet in the middle. The divergence theorem is one of them. It depends on symmetry arguments and different symmetries give you different answers. Your father's argument stands or falls on the validity of the symmetry that he showed. It applies in the case of infinities."

"Yes," Roger responded. "But how can perfectly legitimate arguments lead to different results? That's what bothers me."

"Contrafactual conditionals", Lesa interjected. "Different conclusions follow from different situations."

"Both arguments are valid," Ray said. "However, they each depend on a different premise, so the ultimate validity depends on the legitimacy of the two premises to the situation at hand."

"I can see that, but there is a way of looking at the other symmetry argument that makes it seem more legitimate than yours. You have to step back quite a way to see why it isn't. I understand why there is still an important contingent that doesn't get it. Your approach is 'drawing a line way out around their argument' – you sort of double the space."

"Exactly. Except that it's cubed or something like that, so it's eight times or more. Right?"

"On which side of that line is Professor Thompson?"

Lesa hopped in. "She'd be on your dad's side. Every time," she smiled. "no matter where he put it. "His women are like that."

"What makes you so positive of that?" Ray asked.

"She told me."

"She told you what?"

"Yes. She came up to Harvard while I was there to check out the department to see whether she wanted to work on her advanced degree there. She told me about that last conversation you had with her."

"That must have been a short discussion you had then."

"Yes, it was. It was just physics after all," Lesa stated quite smugly. "Apparently, you had convinced her of that."

² The material being referred to here can be found on pages beginning at 195 in the third edition of *Aberrations of Relativity*.

Cosmological Considerations

Roger had watched his parent's expressions with some interest but wasn't sure he understood what he had seen, and they continued their three-way conversation for some time, but with Ray's concentration waning.

Roger's football team won State and then immediately afterward he had his second basketball game. He had played only about half of the first game because of the remaining football schedule and a lead that would not be overcome. They won both their first two games easily and were ranked first in State, a ranking that would not change until they had in fact won State.

As it happened, the girls' team started out ranked first in State also, which gave the two something to compete over. Each was the star of a very good team. The two-a-week schedule of high school basketball added to their busy schedule, but also to the pleasures of both Bonns and Wilsons.

Then Thanksgiving was upon them. Roger did not want to go and leave Ellie or his team practices. Ellie just wanted to come along, which is what ultimately happened. Leonard brought his girlfriend home with him from the university, so the young people hung together and did a concert and other tours that delight their peerage. The old folks stayed home to eat, relax, and converse in the easy manner that had always characterized their getting together. Among the old folks were Sharon and Edna, who showed less interested in their upcoming publication than Ray would have thought.

On an occasion when the young people were all sitting around bored with the older set, Lesa broke their news about the coming of another baby. Neither she nor Ray had thought that it would affect Roger as it did. Clearly, he was upset by the news. It was also clear that both he and Ellie figured that they knew when this had occurred, and at least Roger considered it a very sleazy and ill-conceived precipitation into a domestic scene that he had always envisioned as ordered in a very proper manner – around he and Ellie.

Cynthia and Fredrik were happy about the coming occasion. Fredrik seemed to have a new lease on life with the success of his surgery. He was energetic and a thoroughly charming host. The younger set made fun of the formalities of the Thanksgiving dinner. The pomp, with which Fredrik carved the turkey, placing a handcrafted pile of meat on each plate was just too much for the boys. Ellie and Maryanne (Leonard's girlfriend) were, on the other hand, delighted both with the pomp and how their beaux handled it.

Ray and Lesa got on the squawk box to relay the happy news to the rest of the family back on the West Coast. Clearly all of them were startled. It was Eddie's role to be the most cynical, of course, and he played that role to a tee.

"Pop! Have you forgotten how old you are?"

"Nope. I ache every morning, Eddie," Ray replied.

There was merriment to be sure, but it was clear also that Eddie had said what was on all their minds – not least of all, Ray's.

Lesa intervened. "He doesn't either, Eddie. He's as fit as can be."

"For an old man, maybe." Eddie would not be denied.

"I'm with you, Ed," Roger put in. "I think they're nuts."

Cosmological Considerations

“What’s this one going to be, Lesa?” Lisa asked as a diversion.

“It’s a girl,” Lesa responded immediately.

Ray noticed a very smug look on Sharon’s face when Lesa had said it. Ray recalled her confidence that Roger would be a boy even before the sex had been determined. Was Sharon on the front edge of something? There was always that certain smugness about Sharon that was disconcerting to Ray. It wasn’t that he didn’t like her, because in some ways he did, but her conducting of the concerts of the Bonn infant entries left him uneasy.

Sharon took Lesa off to her clinic to do more tests to make sure the baby’s development was right on schedule, she said. How had Homo Sapiens ever evolved without Sharon there to assist? Ray wondered whether that had ever troubled Sharon on her sleepless nights.

He mentioned his irritation with Sharon, because it could really be called nothing else, to Lesa. Of course, Lesa went off on the tack of promising minimal overlap of Sharon with their domestic routine. Ray tried to indicate that it wasn’t that exactly, but more to do with her lordly airs about the conduct of her role in Bonn pregnancies. Once again it came down to Sharon being highly respected, a good friend, and a good person. Ray still thought that, man or not, Tom would have been much his preference for handling that for which Sharon had the monopoly.

Roger and Ellie flew back early to stay with the Wilson’s until Ray and Lesa finished out a couple of weeks at the Sorensen mansion. By the end of it, Ray was anxious to get back to that serene little street where very little happened that he didn’t understand fully – well, at least it was somewhat serene most of the time and he seemed to be increasingly becoming master of what happened there.

Upon returning, there were the flurries of activities with Allie and other women in the family and of their friends. There were also the periods during which Lesa was just plain sick. It seemed to Ray that she was more nauseous this time than she had been with Roger. Roger was not very tolerant of his mother’s lack of cheer on these occasions, although Ellie brightened them all up when she was there, what with her extreme interest in how Lesa was feeling and wanting to know everything about the experience. Even Stephanie’s experience although so few years before, was before Ellie was ready to consider the situation of pregnancy and what all it meant. She seemed ready to learn this topic now. Lesa saw it as cute, but both she and Ray saw it as indicative of something else to which they attempted to remain oblivious.

Other than all of that, their research involved with wrapping up whatever the story might happen to be about the effects of scattering in the intergalactic medium got under way again. Lesa had climbed to the top of that pile of research debris and was efficiently reorganizing it into a more coherent story of the effects of coherent scattering in a plasma medium. Once again it was a pleasure for Ray just to watch the way she went about things, the speed with which she overcame obstacles. His merest premonitions and intuitions became elaborated arguments that began to dovetail into a treatise complete with all

Cosmological Considerations

the relevant references that could convince any rational being – or so it seemed to Ray.

“Why hadn’t you put those two ideas together before?” she had impatiently asked Ray on one occasion before withdrawing the question.

Upon thinking about it later in the middle of the night, it began to worry him. Why indeed had he not? It was as clear as could be. It was totally obvious. It required extremely weak logical abilities to see that the two pieces of the puzzle belonged together. Yet he had not seen it beforehand.

So, with the advent of working once again with Lesa, Ray began to witness his own intellectual decline. He thought he was still as witty with his one-liners perhaps, but linking complex arguments was something that became increasingly laborious. When he thought about his own intelligence, as he increasingly did, he thought of it as being a bit murky – like seeing through fogged glass. He saw aspects of the research that needed to be evaluated and yet he found himself deferring the actual working out of the details, and often tried to entice Lesa to do it instead. When he did try applying his mathematical tools to his chores, he found that the process was a mental strain in which he took too little pleasure. It was as though he were always too tired to get right to it.

When Lesa was away on visits with her friends, when they were over busy chatting away in the living room or kitchen, or if she was just off in the other room resting because of her nausea, he would return to reading the latest in a string of novels. It was a habit he had picked up again after many years of preferring nonfiction technical material. Sometimes he would work crossword puzzles if it were a Monday or a Tuesday, or even sometimes on a Wednesday or Thursday, but never on a Friday or a Saturday anymore. They were too difficult for him.

There were so many evenings of going to basketball games now, what with the two kids’ busy schedules. That took up a lot of time. The allocation of time to research was severely diminished. What was worse, Ray found that he did no longer disparage that fact. Sometimes he would go into their office after setting his current novel aside to find that Lesa had been working away on her own and seeming to enjoy it without him. He felt increasingly as though he just slowed her down.

She would josh that he had gotten so far ahead of her that she had to work to just catch up with organizing what he had already figured out. But it wasn’t true. Ray knew that it wasn’t true, and he knew that Lesa knew it too.

At about that time when Major league Baseball Spring Training began once again, the commissioner called to tell Ray that he had been nominated for the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. He would accept if he were selected, would he not?

“Of course, but there are rules. I haven’t met the criteria,” he insisted.

“The criteria are clearly at the discretion of the committee. You’re having played in that game ten years ago made it easy to bend the rules just enough to get you nominated.”

Cosmological Considerations

“But is that the right thing to do,” Ray asked.

“Of course it is. The primary criterion is that no one should be excluded whose absence would be egregious.”

“What about Pete Rose and Barry Bonds?”

“Don’t go there, Ray.”

So he didn’t and following selection he had an appointment for late July in Cooperstown, New York. That hullabaloo took over and stole more time from a timer that was winding down. The press, the family, and the Mariners were all demanding time. Everything stole time from his slowing timer now, Ray noticed and abhorred it. It is more noticeable when, after returning from each interruption, what you were doing no longer works as smoothly as before, if he even remembered what it was that had gotten interrupted.

After Roger and Ellie had administered their own Midas touch to the State basketball tournament, baseball began for Roger and softball for Ellie. This was what Ray loved to watch. The weather was warming. He made many of the practices. The coaches always wanted Ray there to help with batting practice. Roger had every aspect of the game down pat, but several of his teammates needed considerable help with hitting and Ray was able to make tolerable hitters out of a couple of them.

Ray remembered the dream. He had loved playing baseball more than any other sport. His domination in other sports had been nothing compared to his abilities in America’s pastime. He sat in the bleachers now watching before a game on one occasion. Julie was sitting with him.

She was there on one of her many visits through Lesa’s pregnancy. She was indeed just one of the family who both Ray and Lesa welcomed with open arms each time she came. She had foregone running for office and her candidate had such a commanding lead in the political race that she was not required to provide much in the way of support. She would help Allie with her bid for office, with the two of them spending hours together sometimes on planning sessions, but she always came to the kids’ games with both of them.

“I would love to have got to see you play baseball in high school, Ray,” she said. “But after that first summer I always got up there after your season was over, so all I ever knew was what people said about it.”

“Me too,” he replied laughing. “But I’ll tell you what, Julie. You watch Roger, and you’ll be looking at me. When he plays, his reactions to every situation are exactly what I see myself doing – the way he moves his feet, the way he throws, everything. Even when he pitches to close out games, the ball moves the same way. His slider has the same movement, his curve drops just the same – everything. It’s weird.”

“His home runs?”

“Yeah. Them too – every time. He is walked more than any high school player who ever played the game; I swear. If there’s anybody on base, they walk him. If there isn’t, he steals bases and scores anyway. He’s better than I was at stealing bases. He’s uncanny.”

Cosmological Considerations

“Do you feel like it’s him being inducted into the Hall of Fame?” Julie asked in her considerate way.

“Interesting,” Ray said, although he didn’t know why.

Lesa came and sat by them. “You two just previewing the game?”

“Oh, hi Lesa,” Julie said. “No. Ray was just telling me how much Roger’s abilities resemble what he used to do up the canyon.”

“Sometimes I wonder how much of that is just senile remembrances,” she responded cheerily.

Words hurt – those did. Ray went silent as the two women continued chatting. The game got underway with Roger doing what Roger does. Ray got up and walked down to stand behind the backstop alone to watch.

When the game was over Ray went to his car to drive home with Julie, the way they had come.

“Ray,” Julie said as soon as they had got into his car. She reached over to stop him from starting the car just yet. “Lesa was really sorry about what she said. She was just teasing you. You know how much she loves you.”

Ray looked over at the deep dark loving eyes and could not avoid looking on down to where her cleavage was interrupted by the large heart-shaped pendant that said so much about so much. It’s brilliant flashes as sunlight glinted off the many facets of the diamonds and sapphires focused additional warmth on him. The spiraling alternating red and clear sapphires with gold between begged to be held in the palm of one’s hand. He reached over to slide his fingers into the cleft and under the heart, closing his hand over it. It just fit his palm. It was his contribution to the design of the hearts – it should just fit his palm.

“And you know how much I love you too.”

“I do,” he said. “Both of you. And I know how much of my ability to comprehend even love that I am losing. Even my models of you two are eroding with the general demise of myself. Julie, have you lost much yet?”

“I don’t know, Ray. You see, I never had the extreme abilities with which to compare my losses.” She smiled. “You have probably forgotten more than I ever knew, but you’re still so far ahead of me or anyone else that I love just sitting by you and hearing what you have to say.”

“Well, if that’s the criteria, we’re both doing fine then.”

He felt better. He let go of the pendant feeling the bulges on both sides of the cleavage on the back of his hand as he let her heart fall back into place.

“I wish you had one of these to carry me around in if I go first.”

“How about if I promise to carry yours around in my pocket if anything happens to you first? Would that work?”

“As long as it’s the inside of your front pocket.” There was the smile.

“That’s where it will be.”

That night Lesa cried telling Ray how sorry she was for having made him mad by using the term “senile” – that it was the last thing she would want to do. They both knew that he was brilliant, she said.

Cosmological Considerations

“Lesa, Lesa, Lesa,” he began. “I don’t remember getting mad; I’m not sure you’ve ever made me mad. You didn’t do anything wrong. As long as you can tease about my senility, I have nothing to fear. And as long as you tell the truth about it like you always do, I will respect you as the one I love. So let’s not hide facts from each other, okay. I don’t know how bad it is, but I’m not so far gone that I don’t notice that I’m not what I once was, even a short time ago, and I know that you notice it as well. There are some things – like loving you, and making the odd, cute remark that I do as naturally as ever still, but I think the physics is over for me. Sadly, it’s all about physics.”

Lesa started to say something, but he stopped her.

“I don’t mean it’s over in the sense of enjoying it. I really enjoy what you’re doing and being a party to it. I understand the brilliance of the new things you’re putting into that study and I can help review it. But I can’t get these neurons to establish any new paths; they just prefer the old ones. You have to cut the new trails.”

“Oh, Ray, please hold me.”

He held her and all the loving emotions and machinery went into motion and performed admirably.

With the bulkier aspects of pregnancy, Lesa was burdened down with her concerns of the coming labor and now for Ray. She talked with Julie about the need for her to come to stay before long.

“I worry about Ray,” Lesa said. “When Sharon comes it will be awful.”

“Me too. Sharon could be a bit brutal in his condition don’t you think?”

“She’s my doctor though. I don’t really know how to handle it. Will you stay on and maybe just go on long walks with him and maybe to some Mariners games, or just anything that takes his mind off this new baby? I know you’d rather be more intimately involved with the baby, but this thing with Ray is really important to me.”

“No, Lesa, I wouldn’t rather be involved with the baby,” Julie said. “You’ve never been fooled about how much I love Ray. As much as I love you and am thrilled about the baby, Ray is why I’m here. If you don’t mind my hanging out with Ray, then my dreams will have all come true. But you’ll have to tell Ray it’s okay. You know how he is.”

So Lesa talked with Ray about what was going to be happening here shortly with Julie. She would be here for good long before Sharon came.

“You think I need a babysitter?”

“Oh, Ray. Don’t. I just know Sharon gets on your nerves and I know why.”

“Why?”

“Okay, so I don’t know why, but I do know that she does and that’s all that matters. Sharon will only be here as long as I have to have her, and then we’ll have her go back to her life. She’s doing me a real favor, Ray.”

“I know she is. I can handle it.”

“I know. Anyway, Julie’s going to be here too to run the house, so you can help her, and I’ll try to keep Sharon out of your hair when she comes.”

Cosmological Considerations

So that's the way it happened except that it happened earlier and had very little to do with when Sharon would come. Lesa told Julie she needed her full time earlier in the spring than they had planned. Of course Julie had come up to visit several times already, including their Christmas celebration, before that, and to help Allie on several occasions. But this time when she came, it was for good – well, at least for the foreseeable future.

Lesa had taken the opportunity of Julie's coming permanently to inform Ray of one last secret she had withheld. She had promised last fall to never keep any more secrets from him, but because of all that had transpired as well as her perception of Ray's failing condition, she had not been able to bring herself to share this final one.

The evening that Julie arrived, she broke it to Ray and Julie. As she had thought he would be, Ray became violently angry and in the end was left devastated. Lesa tried to convince him that what she had held secret was a direct result of her extreme love for him... and would he please, please, please forgive her?

Then a couple of days later, partly because Ray insisted, Roger was told. Roger's reaction was perhaps less predictable, but even more violent than what Ray's had been. His anger was almost beyond measure and it was days – if not weeks – before a more or less normal rapport could be established between mother and son and between Ray and Roger, neither being comfortable with the other.

The overall tension in the family unit was hard on Lesa and she knew that Ray was not ever at ease with her anymore. She only hoped he would be again soon. So Lesa encouraged Julie to get Ray out of the house walking and doing things. As for her, she wanted to get as much out of the way as possible on this investigation into the cosmological effects of scattering in the intergalactic medium, to which he now seemed incapable of contributing. Although when he got over the first waves of anger and humiliation, he was still helpful in criticizing her work when she had made some progress.

Ray spent some time working on what he would say at the induction ceremony that would occur at just about the same time as the baby was due. Ray didn't want Lesa's help on it at first, preferring Julie to criticize and comment on what could be said, although eventually Lesa seemed to get through to him that this would be like her speech in Stockholm where she had had to go without him. He would have to go without her this time, but his family would all be there. Julie could go if he wanted.

Ray and Julie became very close – closer than either had ever dared dream – walking along beaches or through the woods. Once they even spent a day going up to the North Cascades to spy on their old stomping grounds. They got out and trekked the woods with the same ferns and rain forest foliage they remembered from that first summer they had met. They picnicked and lay together sleeping on a blanket Julie had brought. She held him next to her so tightly that it brought back the memory from the previous fall when they had fallen to sleep on his and Lesa's bed and awakened clutching each other. Now

Cosmological Considerations

they cling to each other unabashedly for a while after having awoken, looking into each other's faces peacefully.

"Ray, it is so wonderful to be able to be with you in our advancing age and be relaxed about it, isn't it?"

"Vintage matters, doesn't it?" he asked rhetorically as he grasped her heart-shaped pendant and then let it go to fondle her breasts the way he had always wanted to – the way she had always wanted him to.

"We're senile old fools, aren't we?" she said smiling at him.

It was much later in the summer that Sharon had come barging into Julie's room unannounced to ask her something or other. Ray had been in there lying with Julie on the bed resting, both with their heads on their hands looking up at the ceiling talking about old times or recent times, or something. Ray thought about their picnic and other more recent similar experiences he and Julie had shared and was glad Sharon had not barged in on something like that.

"What the hell is this all about?" Sharon exclaimed storming out of the room apparently outraged.

Ray was startled by her reaction and had started to get up.

"It's all right, Ray," Julie said, pulling him back down. "Just stay here. Lesa will come in; it's all right."

After a considerable amount of yelling and then some time of more calm discussion off in the kitchen, Lesa did come. She was smiling when she came in and sat on the edge of Julie's bed. "It's all right," she said, just as Julie had said she would. "Thanks for not mixing it up with Sharon. She'll be all right too. You guys just keep lying there. I'll open the door so Sharon will see that there isn't anything secretive going on here behind anyone's back." She bent down, her huge belly a tremendous inconvenience, to kiss Ray. She put a hand over on Julie's arm. "It's so nice to be with you both. After Margie comes and Sharon is gone, we'll have great times together."

So the summer of demise and discontent progressed on into late July.

Ray had gone to more Mariners baseball games than he had attended in all the years the Mariners had been in Seattle. He had gone the first year they had been in Seattle in the old Kingdome that had seemed like a miracle of construction at the time – later, of course becoming a miracle of destruction. The first game he had attended was for him a realization that playing in that venue was what he had wanted more than anything else as a career. Jonesy had been home for some reason and had got tickets for a game for the two of them. Helen had made a point of being up the canyon at their mother's places while Jonesy was in Seattle and then returned immediately to Seattle when Jonesy had gone to the canyon. Ray had realized more than ever before how little Jonesy appealed to him too – it wasn't the run in they had had, or the fact of Jonesy's having been drafted instead of Ray. It was just *him*. He was not an enjoyable person to be with.

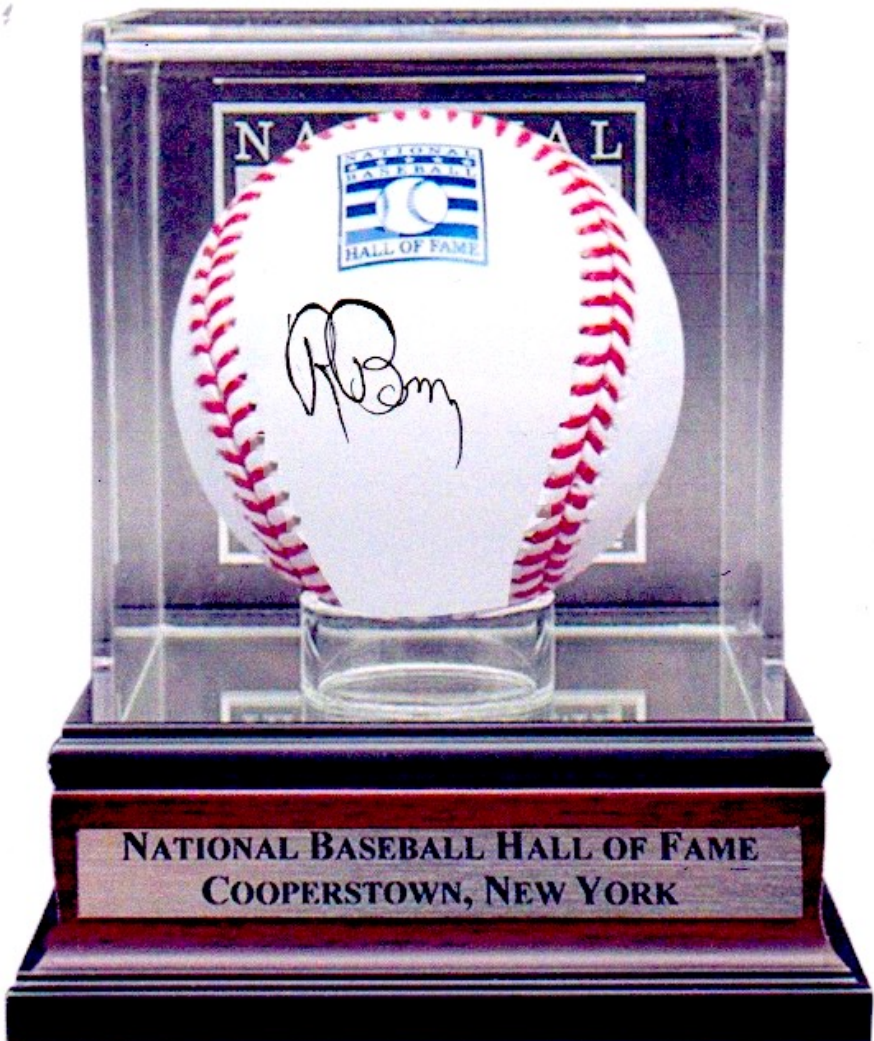
With Julie now, it was so different. To be sitting next to someone who shared one's outlook on life, who enjoyed the same things, who respected you,

Cosmological Considerations

and whom you respected – loved, in fact. It was just fun grabbing handfuls of popcorn from the same bucket with someone whose very touch contributed to the pleasure of the occasion, with someone you loved.

Roger and Ellie went with them sometimes, and once Lesa and Sharon came too. On one of those occasions Ray had thrown out the first pitch, and then later spent an inning or so up in the broadcast booth.

Then the Hall of Fame induction ceremonies came and went. That whole experience so overwhelmed Ray that it became engulfed in murkiness so that he could barely remember any of it. He guessed he had said what he had had prepared. His children had said they were proud of him. But he had stumbled coming off the stage. Maybe that was it. He didn't like any part of the memory.



Cosmological Considerations

Then Margie arrived.

She came like the symbolic locomotive in the old literature full of promise and portent. She was loud and colicky. Whereas Roger had been stout from the beginning, Margie was dainty, wiry really, high strung, and noisy. That was what he remembered.

Sharon left very soon having fallen out dramatically, first with Ray but then also with Lesa. Julie stayed on. Julie never left; she couldn't leave after Ray and Lesa died so tragically, leaving that dear little girl.

#17 *Denouement*

Eventually one outgrows the need for fairy tale endings of ‘And they lived happily ever after’ in bedtime stories; one comes ultimately to realize that ‘They died comfortably in their sleep’ is the very same sort of obituary fairytale ending, a euphemism prettied up for adult consumption. ‘Died comfortably in his sleep’ typically means “Hospice was called in for legalizing marination in morphine. We do not ‘pass on’; we die. It’s not pretty. Dylan Thomas may not have been a Saint, but he should at least be given reduced time in purgatory for his honesty.

The terms *math* and *aftermath* seem to have no direct relationship. Math is just short for mathematics, which pertains to the science of numbers applied variously in any of the branches of science or engineering. But it is interesting that the latter term is not a follow on or an afterword of the former. They are totally unrelated. Webster presents the following:

aftermath

- 1: a second-growth crop, a direct succession of the first.
- 2: consequence, a result stricken with guilt as in an **aftermath** of the accident.
- 3: a period immediately following a usually ruinous event, as in the **aftermath** of war.

It may seem strange that this term should apply so directly to any ongoing story of the polymaths Ray Bonn and Lesa Sorensen. Sadly, however, every single one of Webster’s alternative definitions does apply. There is a next ‘crop’ (if you must) of Bonns and Sorensens, whose stories are yet to be told. There is also more than enough ‘guilt’ to go around about Ray’s and Lesa’s demise. And there was a ‘ruinous event’ whose ultimate consequence was a ‘result stricken with guilt’.

There are often secrets buried with the dead that would have embarrassed any of us, most such secrets are, in fact, mercifully buried with the person or persons who have hidden them. But some aren’t buried; they live on, iniquities of parents visited upon sons and daughters to the third and fourth generation. And just as there are lawyers figuratively ‘chasing ambulances’ to profit from

Cosmological Considerations

mistfortunes, there are biographers who lack the sensitivity of loving family members that dredge up such muck. Celebrities with heroic stature seem to be prime targets for such shameless discrediting. There have been some of those type of accounts of Ray and Lesa – and there will be more. The family seemed content to leave all secrets buried, rarely mentioning the occasion of their deaths. It seems more appropriate to allow such an ennobled couple to rest in peace – at least for the time being until some perspective had been obtained. So we'll just clear up a few of the loose ends left behind awaiting that perspective from which more clarity can be obtained. This approach involves definition number three of aftermath.



Lesa, showing signs of stress

Ray was suffering from the ravages of Alzheimers. Lesa was struggling under the stress of Ray's declining abilities, the arrival of a new baby, and her accelerated attempt to finish Ray's opus on cosmology, for which she felt she had been delinquent in helping him earlier. She had aged.

That 'ruinous event' that took the lives of both Ray and Lesa involved the tumbling of the Rover over a cliff onto boulders below. It was near the Cliff

Cosmological Considerations

Hanger restaurant very shortly after a Thanksgiving celebration when the Bonn and Sorensen families had all come together one last time. It occurred just the day after Roger's last final of his first quarter of the study of physics at Stanford University. Ellie had completed her finals the day before. They had just crossed the Siskiyou in the Suburban, glad chains had not been required on I-5. They were notified by Jamie via iPhone of the terrible accident. They pulled over at the next rest stop and sat there for an hour or more in shocked silence before continuing the journey back to the serene little sorrowful street in the conifer forest where now sadness prevailed.

The immediate proceedings of funeral arrangements, handled primarily by Jamie, were typical although vastly exaggerated by the celebrity status of Ray and Lesa. The vastness of the occasion overwhelmed the family and brought much unwelcome interest by do-gooders and the media.

After the first of the year Roger and Ellie headed back south to their same apartment in married student housing, but soon found more spacious accommodations for the addition of Tommy and the absorption of Julie and little Margie into their growing family unit. That Ellie had become pregnant had not initially been met with joy, but that sense of welcoming a product of love had prevailed. It had not been unnatural for Julie to take over the complete care of Margie since she had largely been doing that already, what with Lesa's commitment to the effort of getting Ray's cosmology book published, which his declining mental condition would have precluded otherwise.

Allie worked as executor of the will, much of it handed off to Jamie, because of her new involvements in Washington DC. But she settled many of the financial aspects before heading east because she had worked so closely with Lesa over the years since Helen had died. She also helped with closing up the house for the winter before having to be sworn into office as a newly elected Representative. In the Bay area, it was primarily Eddy's wife Lisa who provided additional help with the Roger Bonns' new arrangements, the two babies and other duties.

Little Margie settled into the new surroundings readily with mothering little Tommy becoming what would be a lifelong obsession. Developments of the two infants cheered everyone involved and alleviated much of the pain of loss. Ellie was sitting out the winter quarter, so mothering, domestic chores, and socializing with Julie and Lisa became her life for a spell, but in no way dissuaded her from her goal of obtaining a degree in genetics. So she spent a fair amount of the free time afforded by Julie's and Lisa's care of the 'only child' twins studying for the courses she would be taking in the spring.

Roger's activities, other than evenings with the household when he wasn't off in his den doing homework, were more intense. He remembered hearing how Ray had spent so much time playing with Cecil and Stephanie before he had come along, and then with him and Ellie. Roger wondered how he had done it. Of course, Ray had been retired by then and Roger had heard from Jamie and Eddie that Ray had played with them virtually not at all – was pretty

Cosmological Considerations

much absent from their lives when they were young. That was when he had been in school at the university and then working as an engineer. Theirs was a bitterness that had persisted longer than it maybe should have – Eddy’s had.

Ray’s earlier absence from family life seemed more like the role Roger had been given. In the first few months after the accident, he buried himself in his studies. He enjoyed his physics and mathematics classes most of all, and he was rather enthralled with the entire university experience. He had sat out football as a strong recommendation of his professional baseball agent who had arranged for him to play in the minors in the summers. Very soon he was involved in the preseason training for the university team. Then the PAC Twelve season opened during which he excelled. As soon as school was out that first year and the next three, he was off playing ball for minor league teams associated with the Giants who had drafted him.

The family began their life as nomads, going south every fall and then returning to the northwest every spring. Roger was always on the move from one series to another, hitting home runs and hearing ‘déjà vu over and over again’ until he was sick of it. The women and children enjoyed the summers in the old Bonn home down that serene little street – the nest that Helen and Ray had made and Ray and Lesa had maintained.

But physics was what Roger loved. He loved learning it; he loved doing it and, in the end, whether to go on in graduate school or become a full-time major-league baseball player became a very difficult decision for him. His professor, Julie Thompson, the student his father had encouraged before Ray had married Lesa was a major part of what he liked about physics he admitted. That overlap of father and son was obviously a pleasure to her as well and that fact manifested itself whenever she spoke with him.

One day after class she asked how he was doing.

“Oh, fine.” Then after a pause, “You knew my dad, didn’t you?”

“Yes. Yes, I did. Some of my fondest memories.”

“One time he told me to ask you about gravitation.”

“Did he? Yes, he explained his dissatisfaction with current explanations of it and how it had been formulated; he indicated that he thought fixing it would be significant.”

“Yeah.”

“You remind me so much of your father.”

“Yeah, I get that a lot.”

“I’ll bet you do get that a lot in baseball, don’t you? I think you’d get it in physics too, but that’s a good thing.”

“I’ve committed to baseball.”

“I am aware that you have extreme abilities in that department. But you would have in physics as well; I wish you would pursue that path.”

“Yeah.” And then awkwardly, “I have a family.”

“Yes, I know you do, but you can’t be strapped for cash.”

“Oh no, but one can’t just rest on one’s oars.”

Cosmological Considerations

Julie laughed. “You wouldn’t be resting on your oars if you went on to graduate study. It’s pretty intense,” she laughed. “I happen to know that your father regretted not going on.”

“Yeah, well, he regretted not being drafted in baseball too. Having a family can limit one’s options.”

“It shouldn’t – at least in your case.”

He was leaving. “Well, it does,” he said.

That was but one of their many conversations over the four years. Some involved his asking her about complex homework assignments, once spending hours together working through one that she admitted as being much more difficult than she had thought when she had assigned it. On other occasions he asked her about curricula and which elective mathematics courses she thought the most useful to a career in physics. But always she pressed him about the relative worth of his athletic and intellectual abilities, emphasizing the superiority of the latter.

She had helped assure that he was accepted to several of the more prestigious graduate physics departments not only in the US but also abroad. In the end, however, and right before graduation, he was promoted by the Giants up to the majors. He had progressed all the way up through the Triple-A Sacramento River Cats to the San Francisco Giants – as big as it gets and where he wanted to be – in the majors. The tremendous salary boost made a difference too, more as personal esteem, he admitted than even the money. He was the first to admit that it shouldn’t have affected his decision, but it did. He was big time in baseball, in physics with merely his BS degree under his belt, not so much.

Thus, after graduation it became the norm for Julie Davidson, Ellie and the two single ‘twins’ to live in the old Bonn house year-round with Margie and Tommy attending K through 12 in the northwest. Occasionally during the summer Ellie would spend a week or two with Roger when the team was ‘home’ for any period of time. Roger lived on the road in hotel rooms; in the Bay area he maintained a permanent apartment. In the fall and winter months they were all together down that serene little street with children yelling and laughing with the family dog.

At school Margie excelled; Tommy didn’t. It was largely her attachment to him that propelled him one grade at a time. Teachers reported how Margie interceded vociferously in helping Tommy, often complicating their teaching protocol. Margie was clearly brilliant beyond her years; Tommy wasn’t. He was shy and receding excepting on the playfield during recess and sports activities after class. Margie was always there with him, but clearly, she could not compete athletically, and she didn’t care. She loved watching Tommy doing what he did so well. There were suggestions from virtually every teacher to move Margie ahead to higher classes, but these suggestions were met with Margie’s fits of anger that made such moves virtually impossible. When Roger was a party to the discussions, he pushed to have Margie moved

Cosmological Considerations

forward despite her resistance and to let Tommy be himself, but Margie even at that young age made any such change virtually impossible.

Tommy was popular in school due largely to his agreeable disposition and athletic prowess, but there were no girl friends, primarily because Margie didn't allow it and Tommy acquiesced willingly. Margie didn't attract other boys despite her physical attractiveness and being 'cute as a bug' which was used to describe her more often than she liked. "I do not do cute," she would virtually hiss back in response.

In high school Margie was aloof, taking advanced college prep classes; Tommy was not. He maintained a very good grade point average largely due to taking easier classes and Margie's help. Margie was off the charts and because of the celebrity of her parents was virtually in 'draft' competition by the better universities. Tommy was being drafted by professional sports – most notably major league baseball where his father and grandfather had paved the way in gold bricks. But it seemed reasonable to the family that he should get some university experience before going pro. The fact that Margie was also pushing this alternative is what made it stick. He made it through a couple of years before begging out.

To say that Margie was a handful would be a major understatement, but if anyone was capable of accomplishing the task of raising such a child, Julie was. She loved Margie whole heartedly. It gave a meaning to her life that she wanted it to have. It was in some sense a continuation of the life she had begun with Ray and Lesa; Margie did indeed become all that she should have been.

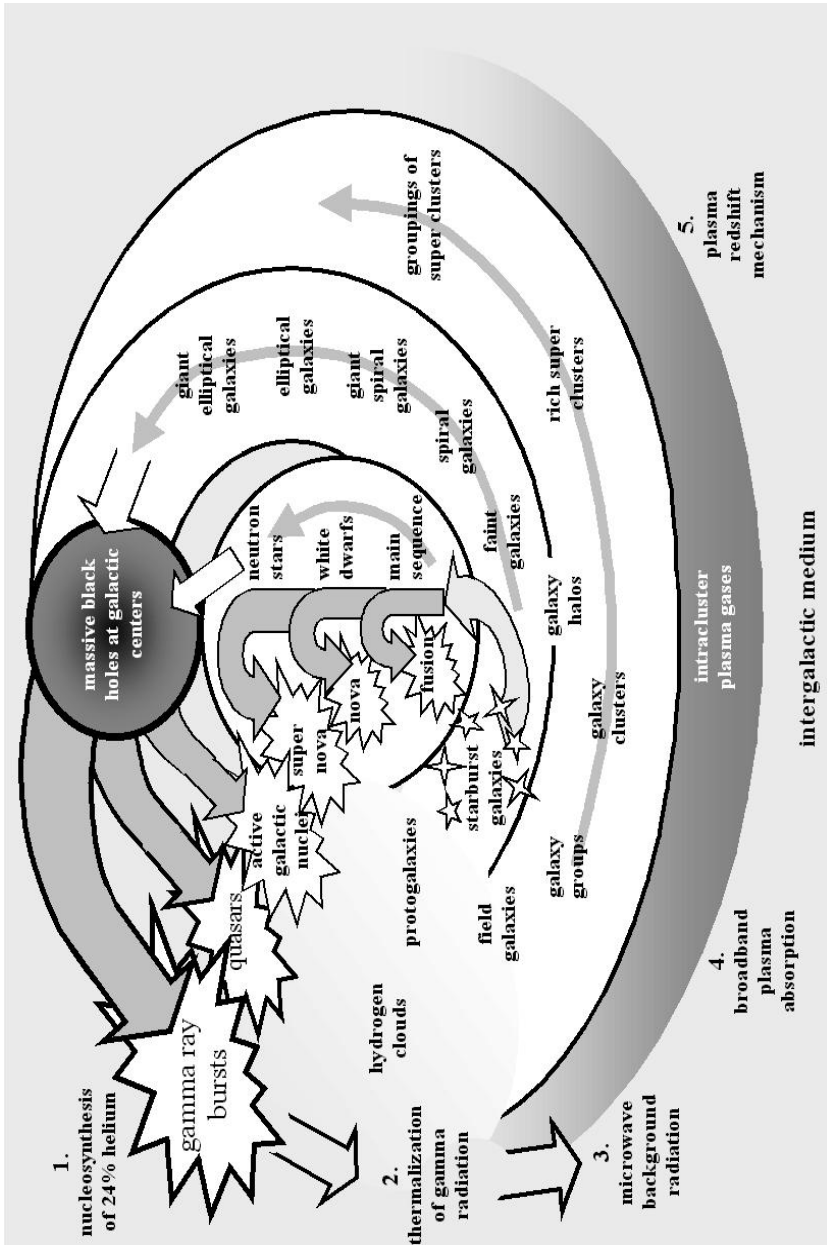
Julie, although instrumental in the intellectualization of her cousin Helen as well as the love of her life, Ray, she did not appreciate, probably because she could not fully understand many of the technological innovations of her generation. It was, in fact a misfortune of her generation that women were left out of the dramatic achievements in the science of her time. It was her association with Ray and Lesa that provided her with some background to enjoy the work that had interested Ray so deeply. As Ray's intellectual abilities had declined and Lesa had become responsible for completing Ray's opus on cosmology if it was to ever get published. Lesa had excelled, not only in extending Ray's ideas, but also in expounding them, at least to Julie, in a way that Julie as a laymen could fully appreciate if not fully understand. As a part of this effort, she had developed a comprehensive, but still quite simple, diagram of the workings of the universe as a whole. When she had first shown it to Julie and explained it step-by-step, Julie felt a sense of enlightenment that she associated with Ray.

The diagram found its way into the postmortem publication primarily because Julie had insisted upon it after the manuscript had been sent to the publisher. Of course, to fully understand it and validate its authenticity one would have to understand what each item in the diagram stood for. Lesa had gone over each in detail with Julie and Julie became proficient in relaying the information that Lesa had told her. The significance of the diagram became

Cosmological Considerations

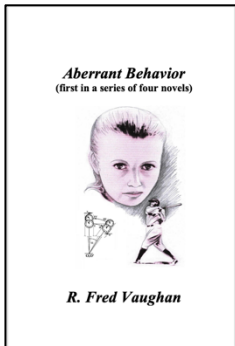
more and more clear to Julie after the tragedy, which in retrospect did not seem to have been accidental.

The diagram and indeed Lesa's legacy was all about how the universe and the major events within it are all regenerative. There are cycles within cycles of déjà vu all over again.



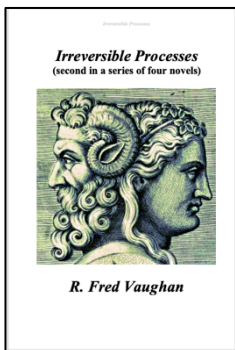
The 'stationary state' of the universe

The four novels in this series



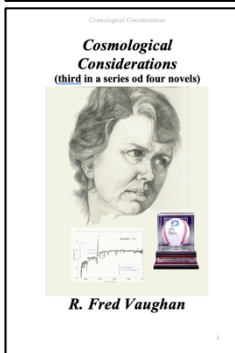
Aberrant Behavior

This book describes a two-week period in New York City that shapes the destiny of three generations of the Bonn family. A book signing tour ends here; Ray meets Lesa, collaboration on a new book describing the origin of entropy is born, Ray is forced into going up to bat in Yankee Stadium as a gimmick, Lesa's biological father is found, and then Ray returns to a life down what he had always considered to be a serene little street in a hemlock forest in the northwest where he was born and raised.



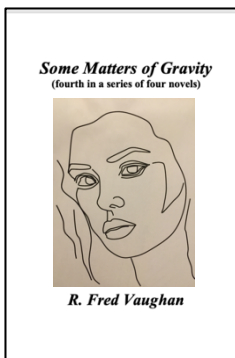
Irreversible Processes

This book describes a stressful two-year period following Ray's return to his life with Helen and his family. The collaboration continues but in fits and starts, as a new fan favorite with the World Series on the line baseball will not go away for Ray, the collaboration meets with the ultimate success of a Nobel prize, but Helen becomes terminally ill succumbing to the disease in the end. After many difficult months Ray and Lesa marry and settle down at the home where Ray and Helen had lived.



Cosmological Considerations

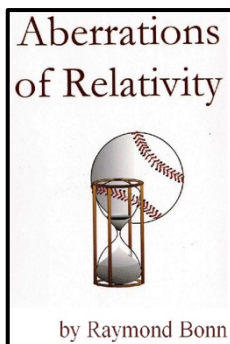
Despite their deep enduring love for each other, paradise is not without its problems. Lesa's domestication in a home like she had never had consumed all her energies as a mother and a supporter of liberal causes. The science that had forged their relationship was supplanted by the pleasures of family and raising an extraordinary son. Roger was so like his father. But in the layers beneath all that happiness Ray was frustrated by not having been included in family secrets and Lesa's lack of scientific enthusiasm that Ray had loved so much about Lesa.



Some Matters of Gravity

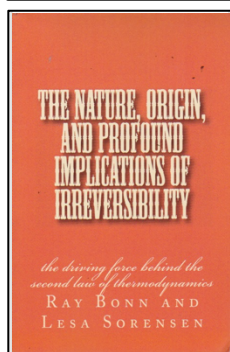
Ray and Lesa Bonn's ultimate demise and the beginnings of Roger Bonn's family is remembered by their dearest of friends Julie Davidson. Roger has retired early from major league baseball, which their son Tommy has just begun. But having never let go of his love of the physical sciences; Roger involves two extraordinary women in pursuing his intuition with regard to a new look into the nature of gravity, merging it with electric charge to explain the nature of the subatomic particles. Romance and tragedy alter Roger's life much as it had Ray's.

Nonfiction books referenced to this series



Aberrations of Relativity

This book is a composition of skeptical articles with regard to the dogma that has come to be included in Einstein's Special Theory of relativity. It provides an illustrated description of the theory to be understood by any reasonably intelligent individual. It suggests that aberration of light transmission is the central fact of coordinating relatively moving observers. Observations dispute the central premises of the possibility of aligning orthogonal frames of reference and that the same timed even is seen by in relative motion.



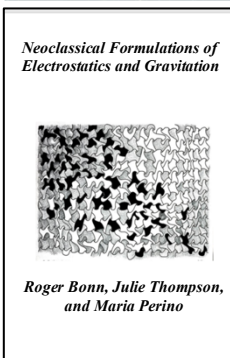
The Nature, Origin and Profound Implications of Irreversibility

This book demonstrates that the ultimate source of entropy is in the submicroscopic interactions mediated by photons of electromagnetic radiation. Every mediated interaction results in the reduction of energy difference between interactants. It is shown how this results in the stationary state of a closed thermodynamic system. A thorough treatment of the major thermodynamic discoveries is provided as well as analyses of other conjectures of possible origins of entropy.



Cosmological Effects of Scattering In the Intergalactic Medium

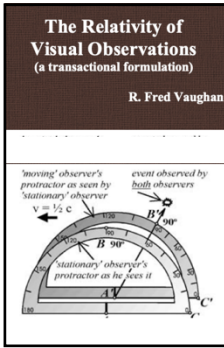
This book develops a more viable alternative to the standard cosmological model at explaining the multifarious effects of observations of the distant universe. It is forward scattering in a relativistic plasma that produces cosmological redshift, not recessional Doppler. The amount of redshift per unit distance is determined by the hydrostatic pressure of the medium through which light passes; this magnifies the effect through galaxy clusters and surrounding large spiral galaxies, thus accounting for what has been attributed to dark matter.



Neoclassical Formulation of Electrostatics and Gravitation

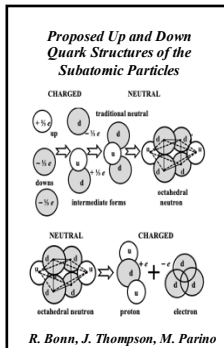
This book addresses similarities of electrostatics and gravity to identify the causal relationship between the two. Solution of the Poisson equation appropriate to both disciplines shows that 'point' particles and action-at-a-distance are relics of an inconsistent formulation. Charge (both electrostatic and gravitational) are constrained to a small region of space, not a point. Gravitational charge is derived from the electrostatic energy of a particle which plays out at the quark level. Together, these charges provide all the forces of nature.

Other books pertinent to these topics



The Relativity of Visual Observations

This book introduces a modification of Einstein's relativity theories to include the spacetime metric in the special as well as general theory. This accommodates misalignment of the coordinate frames of two relatively moving observers. The misalignment of coordinate frames affects the transmission of light between frames. The transverse field vectors (one from each frame on an interaction) results in a spiral transmission path producing Lorentz contraction and time dilation of the individual electromagnetic interaction, not the whole of the space time of the observers.



Proposed Up and Down Quark Structure of Subatomic particles

This book elaborates the combined effects of electrostatic and gravitational charge of up and down quarks to effect the observed synthesis of subatomic particles without the need of gluons and a separate 'strong force' to enforce confinement. There is a continuous trend of lower energies in successive generations of particles. This involves a bipartite neutron structure through which the reduction in total energy proceeds and an electron that is comprised of three down quarks.

