

INCONGRUOUSNESS  
-a collection of short stories  
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INCONGRUOUSNESS (Stories Dec. 28, 2014 to )

### 1. Animus Revertendi

The porcelain cup with its cheery yellow and pink floral pattern winks at her. She feels reassured.

There is a knock at the door. "Miss Samuels! Miss Samuels! It's the manager."

She turns her head toward the door, slightly startled. Was it the door talking to her again? She steps closer to hear it better.

"Miss Samuels. It's Frank. I found your cat outside again."

She starts to comprehend. That janitor has her cat again. He is always meddling, in her opinion.

A note on her door reads that the apartment complex manager's name is Franck. "Frank? Is that Frank?"

"Yes, it is, Miss Samuels. Your cat got out again."

She is at the door undoing the chain and the deadbolt. She wants to get her dear creature out of that person's clutches immediately.

"Ah, Jinx. You're a clever minx, Jinx," she says as soon as the door is opened wide enough for her to spot the little furry imp that is held against the chest of the man. She never forgets the names of her pets. "Come here."

She reaches to take the cat away from the manager. "Did you leave the window open again, Miss? Did you forget about closing the door? I know, they're cagey, both your cats. Try to be more careful or they'll get into worse trouble one day."

"Oh, Jinx knows how to push open the screen, now, and she's big enough to pull open the door farther if it is only left open a crack. Cagey, you say, but they don't like cages. No, they don't."

"Let's hope they stay safe, and you as well," says Frank as he steps back and turns down the hallway.

"Thank you, Frank. Don't worry," she replies. Muttering to herself as she turns closing the door with one hand behind her, "I'll take care of them as good as they'll take care of me. No

worries. No worries at all.”

Jinx leaps out of her hold onto the floor and his companion, Miss Marple, named so because of her plumpness and grayish long fur, steps cautiously out from behind the quilted arm chair. She mews with trepidation. Jinx responds by walking past and rubbing his side against hers as if to reassure her.

“You’re good kids, you are. I don’t blame you,” says the old lady. “Just pay attention. People sometimes don’t care or don’t open their eyes to see.” She nods at conceding this fact of life.

“Now, how about a little treat,” she adds, whereupon a cupboard is opened with a subtle creak. It is enough for the pets to notice, so they eagerly make rapid steps towards the inviting cupboard door, as if it were beckoning them. The rustle of cellophane and swish of light cardboard follows, announcing the appearance of fish flavoured catnip. It is brought down by a wizened old hand to their head level, and licked up swiftly to disappear faster than it had manifested itself.

“Ho-ho. You always like those!”

Smacking their lips, the cats cry for more, but the package is closed, plastic rewrapped and cupboard door shut softly but firmly. “That’s enough for now. You don’t want to get fat.”

The two feline animals flop around the floor then head to the sunny spot on the carpet by the wall where they curl up beside each other for a nap. Soon, they are motionless except for the steady quick rise of the breathing torsos.

In the sunlight, Miss Samuels notices a gathering layer of dust. “My, my. Dusty again? It’s an endless chore.” She crosses the room to pick up the duster hanging at the end of the counter and take it back toward the shelves of books and knick-knacks.

“There-there. I’ll get rid of that stuff.” The shelves and the objects they support seem to smile back at her as she wipes them lightly with the duster. Actually, she enjoys the task, for it allows her to hold and admire each pretty treasure. She takes her time caring for them. They gleam back at her in appreciation.

Miss Samuels has lived in this apartment for twenty years, her and her deceased husband’s pension paying the rent. She does not remember much at this point, but she remembers his passing. She awoke to him lying calmly beside her. He would not wake up, she recalls, so she attempted to rouse him. He felt very cold to the touch. That is a strong memory. She knows that she moved into this apartment two years after his death, when her children suggested that life would be easier and more comfortable in a smaller place. She passively accepted her fate. As long as she could take along some of her treasures and the memories they safeguarded since she could not remember very well any more, she was content. One of her daughters lives not too far away, she recollects, though she cannot remember her visiting. There are nice shops nearby, and a pleasant green park to walk in. It is fine, she reminds herself.

The telephone beeps at her. She comes out of her reverie. Who could it be, she wonders? She is cautious for there are always strangers calling her. She wants to get rid of that telephone but has not—she cannot recall why not.

Nervously, she picks up the receiver. “Hello?” she says tentatively. “Hello, Mom,” is the reply. The speaker phone is always left on, but the handle feels good. It must be a habit to lift it. She does not recognize the voice, though it says “Mom.” She never recognizes them. “Yes. *Who* is it?”

“It’s your daughter, Valerie. How are you doing today, Mom?”

“Valerie? Oh, yes. Valerie—you’re my daughter. How are you, dear?”

“I’m great, Mom. I’m at work today. I just thought I’d give you a quick call.”

“Thank you. It’s quiet here today. I think the cats got out again. I’m not sure. Not to worry. They always return. The people here spot them, it seems.

“Yes, I know. Keep an eye on them.”

“On who?”

“Your pets. Jinx and Miss Marple. Keep an eye on them.”

“Well, for Pete’s sake. What are they going to do? Where are they going to go? Anyway, they’re sleeping now.”

“Good. Okay, Mom. I’ve got to get back to work. I’ll see you on Tuesday.”

“Tomorrow. I don’t know...”

“Tomorrow is Saturday, Mom.”

“Saturday? Saturday is good. It’s good for you, right? Can you come and visit on Saturday?”

“No, Mom. Your helper visits you on Saturdays. I’ll call you again on Sunday.”

Miss Samuels wakes up early as usual at around 5:30 and the cats are already hungry as usual. She could just leave the feed out for them, but she thinks they might eat too much. Anyway, she likes dishing out the food for them.

A big calendar hangs on the wall above the calendar. Saturday is circled in red. The numbers of the days before it are crossed out. “Is it Saturday?” wonders the woman. “I wonder what is so special about today?”

For herself, she makes tea. Next, she fumbles for the cereal box. It is kept out on the counter. The cats are never interested in it. Nothing much is inside the upper cupboards because it is too hard to access nowadays. There is a small carton of milk on the inside of the fridge door. She knows because she can easily see the fridge and it is always there when she opens the fridge. It somehow makes its way back to its place in the fridge after she uses it, for it is always there.

The phone beeps. "What's that?" she wonders. "Oh, it must be that telephone." This time, she just presses a button. The thing keeps beeping, so she tries another button.

The telephone speaks at her. "Hello, Miss Samuels. This is Jeanie, your house cleaner. I'll be there in an hour."

"Jeanie. Oh, I don't think I need a cleaner. The house looks good. Thanks anyway."

"But your daughter wants me to visit, anyway. I'm a friend of your daughter, Valerie."

"Oh, yes. Valerie, my daughter. Okay. I'd like a visit. Would you like tea?"

"Sure, Ma'am. I'd like some tea. See you very soon." The phone stops talking. It hums, so she fumbles around and hits a button that makes it quiet.

The old woman looks around. She wonders if she was supposed to remember something special today. She makes her way slowly across the floor to the refrigerator. Something there catches her eye. It is a bright orange paper stuck on the upper door of the fridge. It seems to wave at her. She squints to read it in the grey light of a rainy day that hovers outside her kitchenette window. It says, "Jeanie comes on Saturday to help you." Perhaps it is already Saturday, thinks the woman.

She has forgotten about it but sits sipping her morning tea on the sofa across from the cooking area when the doorbell chimes a warning. She jumps a little in her seat and puts the teacup down on the coffee table. ("Why is it a coffee table when lots of people drink tea," she always wonders.)

"Who's there?" she calls out warily.

"It is Jeanie, your daughter's friend. Can I come in? I thought you might need a hand."

Curious, and enchanted by the young sweet voice, the woman steps toward the door. "Who?"

"Jeanie. I help you on Saturdays."

"Is it Saturday, already?"

"Yes, Ma'am. It is Saturday. It is my day to visit you. Can you open the door?"

“Well, all right.”

Door unlatched, it opens up and reveals a short brownish girl with long shiny hair standing there. “I’m Jeanie. Here.” The girl holds up an i.d. card and presents a note that is signed, “Valerie.”

Valerie is her daughter. This must be something that Valerie wanted. She gives into the visit.

Jeanie has a bag full of food and household things. “This is for you. Valerie asked me to get them for you.” There are bananas and grapes, packages of this and that, slices of meat, sliced bread, juice and more.

“That’s a lot of stuff. I don’t know if I have enough money with me today...”

“That’s all right, Ma’am. It has been prepaid.”

“Prepaid? That’s marvelous.”

“Yes. How about if I make a hot meal for lunch, Ma’am? I can cook pretty good.”

“A hot meal sounds lovely, but don’t they bring something to the door sometimes?”

“Not today, Ma’m. That’s only Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I’ll cook some stuff and leave most of it and some salad in containers for you.”

“Oh, if you don’t mind. That’d be great.”

Miss Samuels plunks herself down on the sofa to observe the proceedings with avid interest. The girl chirps at her about this and that, most of which she does not fathom. There are words like “baby” and “sister” and “job” and movies. Whatever she is saying, it is pleasant to hear and the girl’s movements are fascinating. She is so quick!

Her visitor prepares a most agreeable lunch and tidies up well. While more food is cooking on the stove, she rounds up some laundry and takes it downstairs to launder it.

“Wasn’t there someone here?” wonders Miss Samuel presently. She smells food and notices the pot on the stove. “Oh, no! I’ve left something on the stove. Oh! I don’t know what to do.”

She is standing over the pot, hand on the controls of the stove, when Jeanie re-enters the room. “That’s okay, Miss Samuels. I’m cooking some dinner for you to have later. I’ll take care of it.”

“Oh.” She is confused about the presence of this pleasant but unfamiliar person in her suite. She is aware that something has slipped her mind yet again and nods to feign awareness.

She sits down and resumes her gaze at the surprise spectacle taking place before her.

On Sundays, nobody comes by. Her daughter pays her visits on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the late afternoons, though she calls nearly every day. Jeanie is there for a few hours every Saturday. The manager knocks on the door and steps in for a quick greeting now and then. That is her life, though Miss Samuels does not know it. She lives comfortably and happily in the present, permanently (well, for the “long term,” as it is said). It goes like that for years.

Valerie thinks that things continue to go well without major mishaps, and her mother always protests when she suggests relocation. Everyone is used to this routine. Her mother is comfortable. Valerie supposes that she is better off in surroundings that have become familiar, and worries that location would be too stressful for her mom and everyone in her life.

Miss Samuel likes her place. She is at home surrounded by all her little friends. She does not need the TV much. The appliances blink at her. The crockery grins and chatters back at her. The telephone and kettle bleat and hum, respectively. The sun peeps through at times, and sweeps to take over the room at others. Her pets frolic or sleep, laugh or murmur as per their mood. She does not feel alone at all.

One week, however, the rhythm is interrupted. Things get out of step.

It starts when there is bad weather. Miss Samuels and her pets are protected and well supplied inside. One Friday, though, the hot meal does not arrive. She was supposed to remember something about that? What was it? Didn't that janitor guy say something?

She finds something to eat ready and waiting in the fridge and the cupboards, so she does not worry. The orange note tells her that things are in order. A bright pink one refers to a “Jeanie” and informs her that this “Jeanie” is on a holiday. “Betty” is to be there on Saturday. The note is dated, but the date means nothing to her.

She is supposed to cross out the days on the calendar but that system no longer works as soon as she skips a day on the calendar. She is lost and outside time. She never recalls whether the phone or doorbell has rung or whether someone has spoken to her recently. She feels happy; that's all she knows. She enjoys reaching back into the back of her mind to see images of her childhood, school, early married life, and motherhood. She always likes reminiscing. That is enough to fill the days for her.

Betty never shows up. Miss Samuels does not know the difference.

Miss Samuels gets up from the couch that evening when she feels it might be time for bed. She trips over Jinx and falls onto the coffee table, then rolls onto the floor. Something must have broken, for it hurts a lot. She lies there, confused. She flails about, reaching forward to grasp at something. The coffee table falls on her. It seems heavy. She tries to crawl, sideways on her good hip trying to push herself along the floor. It occurs to her that she does not have anywhere to go.



She does not know what to do. Above her beyond her line of vision on the end table and glued to the phone, as well as a lamp, the door, the fridge and a kitchen cupboard door are the numbers "9-1-1". She knows there is a phone around here somewhere, but it is not within sight.

Her immobility slows down her metabolism and therefore the blood flow. The blood gathers here and there in her legs and at her groin. Her determined heart keeps pumping. After a few hours, then a day, and a half, it gets feeble. While the woman is unconscious, a clot reaches her lung and she can no longer breathe. The heart stops.

On Tuesday, an alarmed woman of around 40 years bursts through the front door of the apartment building where the manager meets her. She knows that the meal did not arrive on Friday as planned because of a storm. She is aware that there was a problem with the substitute domestic worker. Valerie was able to reach Jeanie, who assured her that there would be plenty of extra food available. Valerie's second husband had kept the homecare worker preoccupied all weekend, so that she did not even make a call during that time. She feels extremely guilty and perturbed. Her mother did not answer the phone yesterday. The new volunteer delivery person said there was no answer when he tried to drop off the hot meal yesterday, a Monday, but Valerie believes the guy must have been an incompetent. Everything has been going smoothly. There have been hitches before, she recalls, so there must not be anything serious to worry about.

Valerie and the building manager open the door and are horrified. The cats, coated in blood, are frolicking about the body of her mother who lies flat on the back beside the coffee table with flesh torn from her middle and chewed guts exposed.

END

## 2.WISHES

She was a born optimist who learned to be skeptical early in life. She was skeptical of people and their words. For one thing, she was too well aware of her parents' weaknesses and failings, and those of their parents. For another, the world had turned out to be colder and meaner than she had anticipated.

She did not ask for much. She had a university degree, though not stellar, and an employment history, as criss-crossy and zigzaggy as it be. She worked hard and tried to live a safe life so as to avoid hazards and minimize calamity. Right now, she only wished for a steady job where she was welcome and treated fairly from which she could derive a reliable income. With that matter taken care of, she could finally get on with her life.

Violet sits on the bus preoccupied with these thoughts. It is a familiar chant in her brain that sounds off a mixed jingle of reassurance, hope, doubt, wariness and temperance. She walks a fine line to her current job every day. She keeps enthusiasm well in check, for there have

been too many disappointments already.

Just in time, Violet perceives her present location. The bell has already been rung. She darts up and out of the bus, hand bag over her shoulder and coat open.

There is a just a short walk to the office where she has been an administrative assistant for nearly three months. The probationary period is almost over. She is trying to hang on.

She deserves better, she knows, but her doubts and hesitations during her senior student years and right after graduation had held her back. She had blown a few unique and interesting opportunities with a future-the airlines, the convention center, the nonprofit society and insurance firms had all offered her careers. She did not know what she wanted back then. She did not know who she was.

Now, passed the age of 30, she still does not know that. The brashness and vanity of youth have faded somewhat, so now she just wants to settle into a regular life so that she can get a handle on everything. Struggling month to month does not allow her the chance to get her bearings and make some real choices. She cannot be choosy at the moment

It is good to have somewhere to go every day, and a well defined role to play. It is good to have a schedule and duties. It is good to belong somewhere and be acknowledged at least a little by some people.

Violet arrives at the government office ten minutes early. Others, who begin a half hour earlier, bear friendly smiles and say, "Good morning, Vi." She lets herself feel she belongs. It is going well.

The "human resources" manager passes by her along the hall and says, "Hi!" She always sounds chipper and bright. Violet feels too wary of this person to be lead on by this false friendliness. She does not seem quite human to Violet. She can never feel comfortable and natural around this sharp-nosed woman. She is a shadow of big management and does not seem quite real. She has power. She controls the files and is the harbinger of personnel evaluations. She has a say in the hiring and firing. She is often the messenger of bad news.

This notorious woman spoils the atmosphere that would be pleasant otherwise. She has noticed other staff shrink back, or avert contact with her. Some who are bolder suddenly shift gears so that their voices sound uncharacteristically brittle as they bring up odd topics like plans for decorating, weekend escapades and favorite pricey restaurants, signals of middle class rights and privilege. It is creepy, thinks Violet.

Out of the blue, the personnel manager calls to Violet, turning on her heel. "Oh, Violet."

Expecting to be mostly ignored, Violet stops and stiffens, wondering what is up, but tries to sound calm and cordial. "Yes, Trudy?" (Everyone is told to use first names.)

"I noticed that your birthday is coming up."

“Oh, yes, it is.”

“We always honour birthdays, around here.”

“Really?”

“Why, yes. We have a break and have some cake. We won’t forget your cake, Vi.”

“Thanks, Trudy.”

“Have a great morning. You’re looking great, by the way.”

Somewhat disconcerted, Violet continues on her way. She removes her coat and hangs it up in the closet. She straightens her skirt and jacket at the mirror before entering the kitchen to grab a cup of bad coffee.

What should she make of this exchange in the hallway? She is not totally trusting, but thinks that this cannot be trickery. Being treated like one of the regular staff is a good sign. Her optimism takes hold.

Glancing at the clock in the kitchenette, Valerie notices she has one minute to spare so she rushes to her desk behind the padded room divider, punching in the “on” button of her computer as soon as she gets there. Her mind turns the stack of files in the tray on her right and the day planner on her left.

Violet works her way through the files, day after day. She reads, checks, inputs data, initials forms, and makes and prints out reports. She attends meetings on quotas, targets, and procedural updates. She reads the office news letter and weekly memos.

Glad to have steady work with pay, Violet feels a sense of accomplishment at the end of each day. She constantly checks the calendar, reminding herself of the passing of the number of days required to complete her probationary period. She strives to get things done in a timely fashion, though not too fast. There is a delicate line between efficiency and showing off to the coworkers, as it antagonizes regular staff when a newbie seems to outdo them. She works on maintaining a casual and friendly rapport with staff, while dumbing down her language with them and occasionally feigning a careful measure of ignorance. She does not speak much—just enough to remind others of her presence and demonstrate control over her position, as lowly as it is. She hides her true feelings and thoughts for the most part. That is playing it safe, keeping an even keel on a steady course without making waves. The end of the probationary period soon lies in sight.

Finally, it is the final week of her probation. It happens to be the same week of her birthday. Co-workers wink and hint of the acknowledgement of her birthday that is to take place on the Thursday of that week.

Violet finds herself relaxing. She is so close to the finish line of this stage of the job and she feels comfortable. Those around her appear to be signaling acceptance and approval. She believes she has been doing everything right.

Violet therefore sleeps better at night. She also allows herself to start making plans, considering that this job will continue and so the paycheques. She starts smiling to herself, trying to correct her expression when she realizes it. She still does not want to appear over confident.

The day of the birthday ritual arrives. As expected, a message turns up in her email account instructing everyone to go to the kitchenette at the coffee break time, 10:30. Violet knows it that the reason for the gathering is to celebrate her. She feels happy to be appreciated like this.

Promptly at 10:30, Violet rises from her desk and makes her way to the coffee area, as do the others around her, murmuring and grinning a little in anticipation of this little reward from the employer.

Violet is the only one with a birthday this particular week, and so the only one whose birthday is being celebrated. She is thus the star of the little show, the focus of the attention for the next 10 minutes.

When she gets to the kitchenette, trying to act nonchalantly on a routine trip to the coffee maker, the staff who arrived before her turn to greet her with a chorus of, "Happy birthday, Vi!"

Violet smiles widely and replies simply with, "Thank you, everyone. This is great."

Suddenly, the lights in the windowless room are switched off and someone appears from around another corner bearing a candlelit cake. The cake is set down on one of the tables. It has white creamy frosting and fruit on top. The words, "Happy birthday to Vi" have been written in chocolate around the fruit.

Vi feels obligated to utter some noise in response, so she let's out a mild, "Wow." The people around her begin the traditional song. She stands there nodding and smiling during the song.

"You know what to do, now," someone says. Violet bends down before the cake, closes her eyes to fake an indication of wishing, and blows out the ten candles on the cake. "There," she declares after the last flame has been extinguished. Everyone around her claps.

Then someone, one of the co-workers in her section who sits nearest to her, proffers a small wrapped package. "Oh!" says Violet. "I did not expect a gift."

"Come on, open it."

"We always do that."

"It's nothing much." The last voice is that of Trudy.

Violet proceeds to untie the bow, then tackle the tape. "You're so careful!" remarks someone. "I just rip it open."

Violet does not like to tear into a prettily wrapped package. She is in the habit of being careful to preserve nice wrapping and ribbons when she can.

Within a few seconds, a box is revealed. It is easy slide her finger into the slot so as to lift open up the tab, then the whole box lid. Set in some shredded packing paper is a ceramic mug. It is two-toned green glazed clay mug, with gradated black on the bottom. "Well, this is very nice," states Violet, dutifully. "Thanks everyone."

"It's our pleasure," announces Trudy. "We're happy to have you with us."

Time is up and the chatter begins today down as every reluctantly turns, remaining cakes enfolded in napkins in palms, and cups of coffee in alternate hands. Signs are heard. It is back to the routine.

For her part, Violet fumbles to get the new mug under her arm, so as to take her office cup filled with coffee and a piece of cake and try to carry it all the few steps back to her desk, but Trudy intervenes. "Oh, Vi. Let me help you with that. Say, why don't you just use your new mug? Isn't it nice. Josephine picked that out."

"Oh, really? That was nice of her. She has good taste."

"Yes. Here." Trudy takes the plain office issued cup out of Violet's hand and sets it down on the counter. Then she removes the present from under Violet's arm and rinses out in the sink. The coffee from the old cup is transferred into the new mug. "There. That'll be easier to handle."

"Yes, you're right. Thanks."

"Happy birthday, Vi."

Violet turns to leave the kitchenette and head back to her desk. Trudy calls after her. "Could you come and see me just before 4:30? I want a word with you. It'll just take a minute."

Four-thirty is quitting time. "Okay. See you at 4:25," answers Violet. She could not answer otherwise.

"Good."

Violet is curious about the meeting. With her probationary period ending, it is probably about that. Violet does not worry, for she is confident that a good evaluation is forthcoming.

She believes that her time will be extended. She believes that there will be good news. She is bound to be made permanent. There is no reason to reject her that she can see.

Josephine, having witnessed Trudy's request to Violet for a brief meeting, looks at Violet as she passes by and gives Violet the thumbs up. Violet passes by, with a quick glance but does not show any other reaction.

The rest of the day passes as usual. On her lunch break, Violet skips out to get a simple sandwich from the convenience store and returns to the office to consume it. Though she often brings a bag lunch, she did not on this day, but she still wants to eat at her desk. That's the best way to get return to her duties on time after lunch time.

Precisely at 4:24, as indicated on the computer system, Violet puts aside the file she's been scrutinizing, logs out of the network, and switches off the computer. She gets up to arrive at Trudy's office exactly at 4:25.

"You wanted to see me, Trudy?"

"Oh, yes, Vi. Did you enjoy your cake?"

"Yes, it was light but tasty."

"Yes. Phil's Bakery always does a good job....So, Violet. Your three months will be up tomorrow.

"Yes, I remember."

"On behalf of the firm, I'd like to thank you for all your hard work so far. You're a great employee."

"Thank you."

"Unfortunately, management has decided not to extend the position. It's been a pleasure to have you. There is just no full-time position at this time." Trudy pauses, with a sly look up at Violet standing before her.

Violet is taken aback. "Oh. I see. So my last day is tomorrow, then?"

"That's okay, Vi. Take the day off. You'll get paid for Friday. We'll mail you your pay."

"Uh. Okay." Violet blinks, somewhat stunned by the news.

"All right, Vi. There's no need for me to keep you any longer." (Violent notes the double entendre in that choice of words.) "Be sure to take your mug home, now. Take care."

There is that false friendliness again. Violet wonders how she could have been so foolish as

she turns and goes back to her desk. She keeps her head down a bit, and does her best to maintain a composed countenance until she can exit the building.

Josephine faces Violet for a moment as she is leaving her work station. She can read her co-worker's face. With a sigh, she speaks. "Didn't you know? You're position is temporary, permanently temporary. They only bring in an extra person to take care of a backlog about three times a year. They never really mean it when they tell you you could be a full timer. They'll bring in someone else in a few weeks."

With what she hopes is an expressionless face, Violet looks at Josephine without replying. She appreciates Josephine explaining the situation to her, though she would have appreciated it more had she been informed of the intention a few weeks ago. She has been duped, and feels that her co-workers have been complicit. No-one tipped her earlier, though they easily could have.

Violet leaves the mug and the used napkin with the remaining icing and crumbs on the desk and kicks over the trash can under the desk. She reaches over the slide a few of the stacked files until they fall off the edge of the desk.

With a spiteful grimace, she turns to retrieve her coat. A security guard, slightly shame-faced and averting his eyes from the scene at Violet's (former) desk, is ready to escort her away. "Good luck," he whispers. "Remember, it's them, not you."

END

### 3.SYNCHRONICITY

When I got home, I decided to try watching a little TV in order to relax or divert my mind from the activities of the day and sleep, even though it was already nearly eleven at night. I flipped through the channels, dissatisfied with what I found, until I came to the French language station, TV5 Monde. There was a documentary about the life of Napoleon Bonaparte, with testimony a descendant, Charles Bonaparte, and interviews with historians and other experts. It struck me as a coincidence because the topic of Napoleon Bonaparte had come up out of the blue earlier in the evening, when I was out with my boyfriend at a bar. We wanted to try going to a new place. Across from my boyfriend, who faced me and the wall behind me, was a framed art piece featuring Napoleon posed atop a horse. Hm. He remarked on the piece, so I remembered it.

I eventually got to sleep. Just before slumber overtook me, my mind with its usual self purging or spastic process in which all kinds of seemingly random images and ideas flow through rapidly. In a more anxious state, weird and ugly or negative thoughts fly around and race through. It usually takes more time to fall asleep in that kind of state. Other times, the images and ideas are neutral or pleasant. The ideas can make no sense; the images disconnected and irrelevant. My experience is of the latter kind this night. This time, an image and fractioned memory of exchanges with an acquaintance of mine comes to the fore and lingers. I am awake enough to be aware how odd it was that such memories should appear in my mind's eye at that moment.

In the morning, I go about my normal routine, which is to tidy my bed, wash my face, make coffee and then turn on the computer. While the water is heating up, I get into my social media and email accounts. Strangely, I notice a posting that has been replied to by this same long lost acquaintance of my “twilight” mental activity the night before. “That’s weird,” I say to myself.

I have time to look at more postings. Oddly, the name of an actor mentioned rarely in the media these days comes up three times. He has been out of the mainstream media ever since his hit series ended three years ago. I wonder why his name has come up at this time, because there is no indication of a reason, like an award, a conflict, a new movie or a death.

I then complete the morning routine, downing the coffee along with vitamin and mineral tablets before getting around to eating breakfast. I regret that there is no fresh fruit for breakfast. I must leave soon to get to my first class of the day, so I do my face and dress right after eating the bowl of cereal. In short order, I am ready to take off. Remembering to pack a lunch today, I again regret that I have no fresh fruit. I give up the idea of taking a lunch to work.

It is time to read the gas meter and write down the reading for the gas company employee because she is due to pay a visit to the apartment building today. I remember that just as I am about to put on my shoes, so I dash back inside to read the meter. Seeing the number on the meter, I pause briefly. There is something significant about that number, but I cannot remember what. Shoes on, meter reading written on the sticker outside my apartment door, I can take off

Coffee as well as cold air makes my nose drip slightly in the morning. Outside I wish that I had remembered to take some tissue along. No matter. When I get to the corner, a couple of church women are handing out packets of facial tissue as well as brochures. I gratefully take a packet of tissue, though I decline the offer of the propaganda.

After I get to my office, I settle into a day’s work. My coat is hung up, my computer on, and day planner open. Unexpectedly, a colleague drops by on a quick social call. She bears fresh fruit and offers me some. I gladly take the dried figs and single kiwi.

In the first class, I greet the students. Since I arrive early, there is time for some chit-chat before starting into the lesson. I engage in an exchange with one of the eager students sitting in the front row.

“Do you know the actor, Steve Carell?” asks one young man.

“Oh, yes. A comic actor. How do you know him?”

“I saw an episode of ‘The Office’ yesterday. I was just doing a random search. I tried watching it. It was hard to understand, but funny. Do you know that show?”



“Yes, I used to watch a few episodes.” This is quite a coincidence because Steve Carell is the name of the actor that appeared in the social network postings in the morning. I liked that show and this comic actor.

Between classes, I get a phone call. My handbag buzzes against my hip before I notice the particular melody of the mobile phone. I manage to juggle the books and water bottle in my hands and get the phone out of the purse. The call is from a colleague who asks me to stand in for her in a couple of weeks. The hours seem to work, I say. “I know,” replies the colleague. I checked your timetable before I called you. So you wanna take it?” I say, “Sure.” Actually, I am happy for the extra work. Just yesterday I had been grumbling to myself that I did not have much overtime work because I was looking for extra pay. This subbing job will help me.

I feel a little sleepy-eyed but there is not time to go get some tea or coffee. I move on to my next class in a room on the opposite side of the building. I arrive there with a few minutes to spare.

A student ambushes me at the doorway. “Teacher, could you check this?” He holds out a can of coffee. “Not if it is an assignment or homework,” I reply. “Oh, no. No, it is for a contest. Can you check my English?” “It’s really a contest?” The young person explains the situation and I am satisfied that it is truthful. I bring him into the room to set things down and scan over his paper. I notice that number there in the text, the same one I read on my gas meter that morning. I make just a couple of changes to the writing and hand it back. “It looks fine. Good work. Good luck.” The student thanks me and, as is the custom, offers me the drink again to signal gratitude. “Here, teacher.” I accept the coffee beverage with pleasure. It is just what I wanted.

It is my lunch break following that second class. I decide to take lunch in the staff cafeteria even though none of my friends can accompany me at that hour. I want to save my bag lunch for my evening meal since I have an evening class and the options for dinner on campus are worse than what you can find at lunch. Anyway, I recall that I have just enough money for a campus lunch. I count the coins. I have 60 won. (Sixty-two is that number that keeps coming up today.) I need to get to withdraw more cash soon. I do not mind sitting alone for a quick lunch, so I hope that the menu is good and put my supplies back in the office before I go to the cafeteria. I have to exit this building and cross over to the next to the west.

On the way there in the courtyard, I encounter a colleague with whom I am chummy. I have not seen him for awhile. “How are you these days? Long time no see,” I say. “Yeah,” he replies. “Where are you headed? Have you had lunch yet?” “No, I was just heading to the staff cafeteria. Why? Do you have time to eat with me?” “Sure,” he says. “Actually, I wanted to ask you something.” We proceed up the concrete steps and in through the building to the cafeteria. My companion steps ahead and gets to the ticket dispenser ahead of me as we exit the elevator. “Let me treat you, today. I want to pick your brains.” That is fine with me—I get company for lunch after all, and I get to hang on to the few bills in my wallet for a few more hours.

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