

Word Worth®

WORD WORTH

WORLD MAGAZINE OF
IDEAS AND THE ARTS

January 2010

Volume X Number 1

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The Burden of Knowledge – and the Joy of (Small Amounts of) Ignorance

by Graceann MacLeod

You know everyone is ignorant; just on different subjects.
—Will Rogers

I'm no Rhodes Scholar. I'm fairly unexceptional in most ways, and I'm okay with that. Recent experiences have even persuaded me to believe that in some respects I'm better off compared to my more learned contemporaries.

I've written previously that, because I do work as a copy-editor/proof-reader, typographical errors fairly leap off the page at me when I'm trying to read for enjoyment. This is a frustration and mars the pleasure I seek in the printed page. Thankfully, I'm not as well versed in other areas, so I am able to relax and let those experiences wash over me.

To illustrate, I have many friends who work in film - production, restoration and history. Attending a screening with these people is educational and not always in a positive way. I leave the theatre excited by what I just saw, full of enthusiasm for the actors, the performances, and the music, whatever. I turn with my beaming face to my companion, and hear the following:

- ❖ “Didn't you notice the awful editing!? I counted 23 separate incorrect cuts!”
- ❖ “How could they use that terrible score?”
- ❖ “The toning and tinting was entirely wrong – completely anachronistic.”
- ❖ “They ran it at the wrong speed! Clearly this film should be at 20 frames per second and running it at 24 frames per second **ruined** the film!”
- ❖ “The 1972 Italian print is **far** superior (sniff, sniff).”
- ❖ “How could you enjoy that? They ran a DVD transfer rather than running film!”

You can imagine how my joyous evening has now been somewhat coloured by this negativity. Variations on this theme are having my simple enjoyment of the event laden with lengthy, boring lectures on the background of the filming, the influences of the director and the motivations of the screenwriters. I don't know how to tell these folks that I really don't care about the basis of a comedian's work in the "commedia dell'arte." I just think it's funny when the house falls on him. Rather than feeling like a dolt, however, I often feel sorry for my companions. Rather than being blissfully ignorant like me, they are so weighed down by their knowledge that they are no longer able to simply sit back and enjoy. They must analyse every bit of fun out of the experience and thus they lose the magic of it. A bit of knowledge is interesting; a master's class after a fun night at the cinema is overkill.

The world will always have obsessive, detail oriented people in it, and that's a great thing. Without them, we wouldn't have beautiful restorations, complete and accurate histories, medical innovations, space travel or countless other wonders. I am thankful for these people, but at the same time, I'm thrilled that I'm not one of them. I'm an average person. I have a variety of interests, but I'm not consumed by them.

I recently heard a talk by an author who discussed famous First Ladies. She told very funny, little-known stories about the ladies behind the men who have helmed the United States over the last couple of centuries. The First Lady I enjoyed hearing about the most was Julia Dent Grant, for a darling reason. She was a fairly uncomplicated, oblivious woman (in this author's opinion), and thus she was almost always happy. She didn't know a huge amount about what was going on in the world. Her largest interests were with her family and friends, and almost everyone adored her. Now I grant you that stupidity isn't something to which we should aspire, but a certain amount of oblivious disregard sometimes comes in handy, and it sounds as if that's what Mrs. Grant had in her corner. Maybe it isn't so much "not knowing," but doing your best, being satisfied with that, and not particularly caring whether it's good enough for the rest of the world, that should be the goal.

I realize that this flies in the face of all that is held in high esteem by a great many people. "Winning is the only thing" and all that. Competition makes for rather an ugly atmosphere at times, however, one where the air can be awfully hard to breathe for any length of time. You compete with your co-workers for that raise (or for the simple goal of keeping your job nowadays); your company competes with others to stay alive in the marketplace; making a living competes with living your **life**. Perhaps this is why I didn't survive in a business environment; in a sink-or-swim climate, I sank like a very heavy stone. Once I got over my short-lived shame at having "failed," I found that I rather liked it at the bottom. There's nobody down there I need to impress, and I no longer have to care. After many years of dragging myself to jobs I loathed just because I had to pay for luxuries such as rent and food, the brilliant discovery of having a life has become a blessing.

Knowledge is a great thing. Learning is a joy and the world is a great place to explore. I love reading and discovering, especially with regard to history and personalities. What I'm trying to avoid, however, is having the knowledge that I gather ruin the experiences coming my way. I feel somewhat sad for those who have lost the ability to relax their intellects a bit for the time it takes to watch a film or a play, read a book or engage in a moment of silliness.

There's a quote from a long-running television series. It sticks with me and surfaces from time-to-time. A

world-weary doctor says “I've seen far too much to ever be wide-eyed again.” I'm doing all I can to remain wide-eyed. It gets more difficult as the years pile up behind me, but I keep at it.

“Years ago my mother said to me, 'In this world, Elwood, you must be oh so smart or oh so pleasant.' For years I was smart. I recommend pleasant. You may quote me.”
—Elwood P. Dowd in "Harvey", 1950

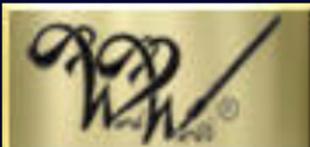
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Nomenclature

by Helen Peppe

Rarely was I called *Helen*, except by teachers and best friends, unless it was followed by *smellin'* or some other made-up word that voice modulations made sound insulting. My sisters called me *spoiled brat*, *pigget*, and *retard*. They had learned from my brothers who called each other *Jap*, *Jappy*, and *faggot*. My mother called me *Helly* or *Helly-Welly*; my father called me *Heck cat*. These names were born from a lack of creativity on the original five letter word not from any devilish behavior on my part. Evidence of this is the nickname *Ally-cat* for my sister, Alison and *Tina-cat* for my sister, Tina.



The last three kids out of nine were the only ones who got nicknames, except for my sister, Sharon, who they sometimes called *Shinky Bell* just to irritate her. My mother, if angry, called me *piss pot*. My father would, for variety, substitute pesky for heck and sometimes even replace *cat* with *nag* or even coin *God damn nuisance* to demonstrate his facility with nomenclature. If I had been a dog, I would never have learned to come when called because I wouldn't have known my name.

Scaredy-cat, Baby, Retard, and Tattle Tale were the names settling on me in the dust-filled barn one summer day in 1971. I was just over four years old in an abandoned building with three of my sisters. The structure was ancient, sagging at the seams. A strong wind would have knocked it to the ground if my parents hadn't fortified it with several hundred bales of hay that they had cut from the fields they didn't own. They didn't own the barn either, although no one had actually said my parents couldn't use it. My sisters liked to play in the ramshackle structures that dotted the fields around my house, and I tagged along as the youngest child or the family dog often will.

The bales of hay were stacked so that my sisters could climb them like stairs up to the rickety loft. I watched in envy as they leaped from the second floor platform to the large pile of hay on the wooden floor, shouting with happiness in explosions of dust and dried alfalfa. They looked like they were flying and dropping into fluff. I wanted to drop into fluff, too. I climbed the bales, following Alison on her turn.

Helen Peppe is a student in the Stonecoast MFA program. She is a freelance writer and photographer and has been published in a wide variety of publications from books and magazines to grain bags and treat boxes.

Helen's writing and photographs have appeared in the *Equine Journal*, *Practical Horseman*, *Dog Fancy*, *Equus*, *Dressage Today*, *Cats Magazine*, *Lynx Eye*, *Women's Glib* (an anthology), and others.

She is currently working on a collection of stories called *The Youngest Child*. Helen lives in Maine with her husband and two children.

It was a hard and scratchy climb, and I was wearing a jumper, barefoot as usual. I was hot and itchy. At the top, I couldn't believe how high I was. The pile of hay that had seemed large and soft while I was standing on the floor below now seemed ragged, shallow, and very far away.

"I want to turn around," I said, my voice trembling. My stomach zinged in panic. "I don't want to jump." I tried to go back, around my sister, Patti, older by six years.

"You can't go back." She blocked my way. "It's too hard to climb down." She shoved me forward. "Just jump."

I remembered that one time on the slide. I had been afraid to go down after I had climbed to the top. I had asked all the kids to move so that I could go back down the ladder. I didn't understand why Patti was saying no. "I can, too, climb back down. I don't want to jump," I suddenly felt a new and different fear. I had always been afraid of her. She was big and loud. And she killed frogs and caught snakes. She threw kittens in the pond.

"You are such a scaredy-cat, you little baby. We're all jumping and no one is crying over it like you. Why do you always have to be such a retard? No one made you come with us. We didn't even want you and now you're in my way."

I turned just slightly to look down again, considering, careful to keep my feet from the edge. "But I don't..." and Patti hit me hard in the middle of my back, pushing me out of the loft. I didn't scream in surprise. There was no time. I didn't cry because there was no air. I slammed onto the floor on all fours before falling to my chest and belly, the wind knocked out of me. It felt like something had punched my stomach in too far, taking away my ability to breathe. "Uchh..ucch..." there was no air in my throat. I couldn't move, but I was flailing.

"Why did you push her?" Alison screamed from somewhere. "We are going to get into so much trouble!" Tina began to cry, and she sucked her finger while she held the small pink blanket that she took everywhere with her. There was a loud thump beside me, but I couldn't see or speak. I continued to gasp, fighting for air.

"Get off the floor!" ordered Patti who had landed beside me. "Stop pretending you're hurt. You always have to ruin everything." She picked me up and started thumping me on my back. Possibly she thought this is what you did when someone couldn't breathe. And then I was able to push out my stomach and take a small breath.

"I.....want.....Mamma," I finally rasped out, and then I began to cry and couldn't stop.

"If you dare tell Mamma, you'll be wicked sorry you did!" threatened Patti. My stomach hurt and I needed to go home. I limped away toward the barn door trying to leave, but Patti grabbed my hand.

"All you're going to tell Mamma is that I helped you after you fell. You say anything different and you'll die." She refused to let my hand go and dragged me across the field. Back in our yard, Patti pulled me up

the porch steps into the house.

My mother was in the kitchen reading the newspaper, drinking her morning cup of tea. I felt so much relief at the sight of her that I collapsed crying against her side. “What happened to you?” she asked surprised and looked at Patti, the oldest of the four of us, for an answer. Patti pretended to be nice, innocent.

“She fell and I cleaned her up as best as I could, but I couldn’t get the blood off her knees or all the hay out of her hair. She’s lying like always if she says anything different.” Alison and Tina slunk in and disappeared upstairs. Patti followed, laughing.

My mother used to kids getting hurt was, after nineteen years, familiar with hysterics and blood, and oddly timed laughter. She had stopped long ago trying to sort out who-did-it when it came to simple things like injuries. The teenagers in the house were giving her far larger and more serious problems than scraped knees and hay-filled hair. So, I didn’t tell because at four and a half I knew Patti was crazy, and I knew she could *get me* if I made her mad. The reward for my silence was that my mother would send me with my three sisters as her personal watchdog. They would ask to visit friends, and it would be allowed only if I went along. I lied more with silence than Patti had to with words.

Patti took advantage of my mother’s trust in me by taking me with her when she met boys for sex, cigarettes, beer, and pot. I was her shield until she left home when I was twelve. Tina and Alison were Patti’s best students and I was made to go along with them, too.

Despite the hard work of living on a farm with little time to call our own, I read hundreds of books during those long summer hours, waiting obediently at the doors until I was told I could go home. Sometimes I would bring scraps of paper and a pencil and try to write stories about horses and dogs forming extraordinary friendships with young girls. Sometimes I would bring blank paper that I tore from the roll of butcher wrapping in the cellar and draw. I knew the wait would be long.

Nancy Drew and Hardy Boy books were read on lichen covered ledges and in the doorways of the tumble down bunk houses that stood crooked at the top of the hill above our house. I kept my feet tucked underneath me, away from snakes and earwigs. *Heidi* and *Black Beauty* were read on the logging road that had a secret trail leading to an abandoned hunting cabin. Besides broken glass and trash, there was an old stained mattress on the floor. I wished I could be like Heidi, free and well fed on cheese and bread in the mountains. I wanted to save *Black Beauty*.

I read in a corner of that cabin while my sisters did what they did on the mattress with people I didn’t know. They drank and they smoked, and these smells were hard to cover up with inexpensive perfume and the sticks of gum they stole from my father’s lunchbox. My mother, when she smelled the hint of cigarettes, would yell at my sisters, shoving them backward with her voice. Sometimes she smacked them with a broom. They would laugh, a response that infuriated my mother and confused me.

Hanging around the house while my parents were home did not have any benefits. There were no cups of hot cocoa while sitting on the porch swing or cookies while discussing the day’s events. Families like

those depicted in *The Waltons* and *The Brady Bunch* were the stuff of fairy tales. In between weeding the garden, hanging laundry on clotheslines, cleaning the animal pens, killing chickens, and mowing the yard, my mother, exhausted with the kids and the work, could begin yelling and not end yelling until night at the doorway of a bedroom. She would get stuck on a subject and find it impossible to think about anything else, dragging each child into her anger, forgetting the source of the grievance as she lost herself in her rage.

Not one of us knew what could send my mother off into a fit of anger. If one of my sisters, by accident, left globs of toothpaste in the bathroom sink, my mother would begin at the toothpaste and all the work those globs caused her and how we must hate her because we gave her so much work to do and then journey back in time to all the bad things we had done in the last six months, maybe the last year, to how we didn't love her, how we were awful hateful children, ungrateful brats actually, and then eventually she might make her way back around to the toothpaste and how lucky we were that we even had toothpaste, but usually she ended at the same tired conclusion: no one loved her and how could we treat her so terribly when she worked so hard for us.

Being the youngest meant that my mother had years of practice honing her disciplinary technique of pulling a cheek or an ear, while, at the same time, wagging her finger in a face. I was the recipient of her upper level experience accrued through punishing six teenagers: my mother would call me by one of my sister's names in a sneering tone, depending on which sister my behavior best matched. Such as "Okay, Patti, you just continue to lie and see where that gets you," or "Yes, Tina, that's right, do nothing, be lazy and filthy." Or sometimes she'd decide my behavior resembled none of my siblings, and she'd shout, "You little piss pot!" During one of these finger shaking, cheek squeezing, hair pulling episodes, I think I was eleven, I suddenly realized with a surreal clarity that my mother used names to distance herself from the abuse she was inflicting.

It's like Helen wasn't there. The names she used made her kids less human to her and gave her more of an excuse to punish them in the same way she was able to eat one of our many chickens or sheep by pretending it wasn't the animal she had talked to and fed each morning and evening for several years. Instead she ate a breast or a roast.

For years I wondered why my father never called any of us kids by our own names even when we weren't in trouble, but then I realized he didn't call my mother by her name either—*Honey* or *Mamma*, but never *Eleanor*. She called him *Daddy*. My mother insisted we call her *Mamma* with no variation. I was so envious of my friends who got to call their mothers, *Mom*. Even when my sisters and brothers began to marry, their husbands and wives had to call her *Mamma*. Boyfriends went straight from the formal *Mrs. Herrick* to the babyish *Mamma* in the few seconds it took to say I do. My father insisted on *Daddy*, but grown men had difficulty with the word so they avoided addressing him altogether.

If you name something you make it yours—like when you give a name to a stray dog. My mother likes to tell the story of how nine methods of birth control failed; by refusing to call us by our birth names my parents denied claim. Rather than actually punishing Linda, Gary, Ronald, Sharon, Danny, Patti, Tina, Alison, and Helen, they punished sluts, piss pots, idiots, brats, and tramps, all with added-in obscenities for good effect.

It has been thirty-eight years since Patti pushed me out of the loft, and I am afraid of heights. I'm never convinced that someone won't rush out and push me off the top floor of the parking garage. I am afraid of snakes. Never has a snake bitten me or harmed me, but the sight of one paralyzes me with fear. Waiting for people fills me with angst, and I have to tell myself "it's okay, it's just toothpaste" when I see blobs of it in the sink, but the real me survived.

Now, my parents can't always find the name that matches the daughter or son they are talking to and run through different names before the right one reveals itself. I have no idea who my father means when he says *Mamma*—if he is referring to his own mother, his mother-in-law, or his wife. As I listen, I realize that my father worked for so many years blurring faces into nameless entities and teaching his kids how to do the same that he doesn't seem to know himself what name belongs to which person.

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The Styl e-Rite Hair-O-Matic Model 500

by Philip K. Edwards

That Janey Yost entrusted her brother Alan with the most important day of her life was hardly a surprise. How it turned out was a different matter altogether.

Janey slipped out of her bed and into her familiar old robe and worn slippers and went quietly out into the apartment. She sought out the open stairway, avoiding the noisy elevator, whether to avoid waking the sisters-to-be or to preserve her sense of dreaminess, she did not know. At the bottom of the stairs she turned the bolt on the heavy steel door and entered the Style-Rite Salon, dimly lit to a cool blue by round fluorescent fixtures mounted near the floor. It was early in the morning of her wedding day, and she couldn't sleep.

She wandered among the machines, all stainless steel or enamel or chrome, all very well padded, their control and power wiring all skillfully sheathed in big umbilical coils. A good part of her day would be spent here among these machines and sometimes in these machines. There were the usual Wash Buddies, the standard Hair-O-Matics, the big Style-Rite 500, and the cute little Nail Buddies. Today she might get a chance to try one for the first time. She sat on the comfortable stool and put her hand on a Nail Buddy's clamshell cover, still warm from yesterday. Though completely alone, she felt cozy in this queer, mechanical place.

She knew it must seem strange to others—the sisters had said as much about the apartment and Dolores was a little cranky about having to stay there. But whenever Janey was in the apartment with its smells of wood and carpet, she felt as though she were in a regular home, and whenever she was in the salon with its smells of cologne and nail lacquer, it felt like a real salon and, whenever she went out the back door of the salon through the office

area and out to the factory floor that smelled of soldering irons and machine oil, she felt as though she were entering a normal workplace. In fact, the apartment had been home to her more than once, the salon did on many occasions have real customers, as it would today, and the factory had been her workplace for several happy months Alan was the glue that held these incongruous environments together—since their parents had passed away he was the only constant in her life. ... [Continue](#)

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Even while they lived, her parents never seemed to know quite what to do with Janey. Alan had become Janey's protector practically since the day she had arrived, the summer he turned eight. When she starting walking, it was he who kept her from crashing down the cellar stairs or falling off balconies or drowning in the plastic pool. When she began to talk, it was he who interpreted for her, he who could tell a parent where it hurt. When she was in her twos, it was he who followed her around to stop her from squeezing cats or pulling dogs' tails or putting things into electric outlets. It was he whom she sought out to show off her first success at the potty. When her talents with pencil and paper began to develop, it was to him that she showed her sketches. In her memory, he had always been there when she needed him, and she had always adored him.

That Janey constantly needed protection was merely a byproduct of her adventuresome, candid, loving, outgoing nature. It was not exactly that she made bad choices, but more that she tried to make every choice, to try anything so long as it was not mean-spirited or evil. Her little friend Hester once told her it was OK to take candy from the convenience store because it was a corporation and anyway they were insured. When the manager pinned them into a corner and harangued them until they emptied their pockets, it was Alan who answered the phone and talked the man into letting them come home.

Her nature did not change with physical maturity, which occurred at age thirteen while Alan was away at college. She freely engaged in sexual experimentation, first with herself in her bathtub, and later with little Horace Metzger in her tree house. In the back of the bus coming home from her eighth-grade class trip to New York City, she slipped a breast out of its cup and pestered Denny McKenzie until he put his hand under her blouse to feel it. Unfortunately, Denny became obsessed with her, stopping by the house every afternoon and hanging around under her bedroom window at night in spite of her protests. When Alan came home for the summer, he ran Denny off for good. At the end of that summer, on the Friday night before Labor Day, she took Carl Johnson to her treehouse and put her hand down his pants.

In high school she had sex with several different boys, and though it was always with someone she liked, she took on no steady boyfriend. Not until college did she make the mistake of falling in love. The guy was from California, tall and tanned and two years older, the sexiest thing she had ever seen. He said, “Hi, I’m Bob,” and her legs buckled when he shook her hand. Within a month she was practically living in his dorm room. She announced her love for him to anyone who would listen. He was in love, too, he said, and after sex they would talk about how many children they would have and what they might be named.

One night early in the second semester she slipped through the fire door into his hallway and tried his door but it was locked. She knocked quietly, but there was no reply. She couldn’t bang on the door without calling attention to herself so she left, figuring he was asleep.

Two nights later she passed a tall girl leaving through the fire door as she was arriving. She whispered, “Hi” to the girl and headed for Bob’s door, which was just about to click closed. She grabbed the handle and pushed it open with a “Hey, I’m here,” and almost ran into him—he had been standing just back of the door. He had one sock on, his shirt was unbuttoned, he was trying to stop the ...

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door from opening with one hand and he was trying to pull up his pants with the other. She looked around.

The overhead light was off and the curtains were partly closed. His bed—their bed—was a disaster, the sheets more on the floor than on the mattress. His other sock was on the computer keyboard. “I-I just woke up, he said.” She took inventory of the room once more. He looked around, too, and said, “Boy, I must have had a nightmare!” But she knew his habits. She went to the side of the bed next to the computer desk and looked into the wastebasket. In it, draped over a folded-up pizza box, was a limp condom. It was shiny. It was wet. She left the room and left school, taking an all-night bus back to Maryland, but she didn’t go home—she went to Alan’s. That was the first time he took her in.

“But never again!” she now thought. “I’m marrying Mark today!”

Unlike the unfaithful Bob, Mark was solid, almost like Alan was solid, and though he wasn’t an engineer, but a second-generation Philadelphia lawyer. He’d met Janey at a Friday Happy Hour while he was on a long-time assignment in Baltimore and camping out at motels. Before long they were pretty much living together in her apartment except for some weekends when he would return to Philly, where he had a fine two-bedroom apartment in downtown with a great view. She had been in the apartment but never spent the night. It was a little Spartan, but she would fix things up after they were married, and anyway he said they would soon be looking for a house.

Mark’s family was Main Line, and though they had suffered financial reverses after Mark’s father was shot dead by a crazed partner six years earlier, they held their heads high and made do with what they had. Janey felt accepted by them right from their first meeting. After she and Mark decided they would get married, Mark asked her to come home with him to Philadelphia over Mother’s Day weekend for a formal visit to meet his family. She had expected to stay in his apartment, but at the last minute he announced that he had arranged for her to stay at the family home outside the city in Paoli. She had met Mark’s sisters then—Dolores, the tall older sister, and Sara, the small younger one—and

Mark's mother Margaret, a tall, regal woman with just a hint of an English accent. "Call me Mother," suggested Margaret, as she welcomed Janey into their modest frame house

When Mark left, the four women sat down to cake and coffee at the dining room table. After dessert Margaret left the girls alone in the living room. Dolores, the older, talked about how proud she was of Mark and said she hoped Janey truly appreciated him. Sara giggled and said she'd heard that newlyweds "did it breakfast, lunch, and dinner." Dolores told her to shut up. Later they fought over whose bed Janey would have. Sara won and spent the night in Dolores' room, which seemed to make Dolores a little peevish.

Mark slept in town, but returned on Sunday morning with sweet rolls and the morning paper. They lounged around at home most of the day, and for Mother's Day dinner itself they went out to a steakhouse, Mark's treat. Janey had hoped to stay over at the apartment on Sunday night, but Mark dropped her in Paoli again with the others. He said he had hours of preparation to do, but that he would pick her up in the morning for the drive back to Baltimore. That was two months ago and now here she was, almost a married woman again. ... [Continue](#)

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The first time Janey had shown up on Alan's doorstep, from college, back in 1984, Alan was still living in the apartment above the factory. His company designed and manufactured FACS—Fully Automated Hair Cutting and Styling machines—and at that time Alan had just gone from employee to part owner.

FACS owe their existence to a 1972 Defense Department program called HairProcTac. The army wanted to automate the inductees' traditional first hair cut to save processing time. A design competition was held in 1973 but a working model built by GFI was not approved until 1978. Alan was still in college when the first machines were deployed at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas.

These early machines, built into an unpadded chair frame, offered only one style—crew cut—but they could be programmed in steps of final hair length from the standard 1/16" for recruits to 5/8" for the swarthy full-headed romantic types. All the services except the Coast Guard had installed them within two years.

Although the 'Proc' required a great deal of maintenance, for the most part they were efficient and effective on all but the lumpiest heads. Some soldiers complained about abrasions ('touch-downs,' as they're called in the trade) but in most instances this was the fault of the soldier who would furrow his brow during the scalp-scan phase and thereby cause false topo readings.

Alan's first job after graduating in 1980 with an E.E. degree was with a startup called Hair Systems, Ltd., which had been founded by disgruntled GFI employees to enter the commercial FACS market. The company's first product, the Hair-O-Matic, was introduced shortly after Alan joined the firm, but it did not sell well. The financial backers had started out with high hopes of placing Hair-O-Matics in every barbershop in the country, but unexpected resistance by an entrenched barber industry discouraged them and soon they pulled the funding. With no paychecks coming in, most of the original team drifted off, signing over their portion of the ownership for a piddling sum to a rump group made up of the gregarious senior systems designer 'Brute' Smith,

a clever but taciturn mechanical designer named Jack King, and the gifted Alan, as the electronics engineer.

The Hair-O-Matic had used much of the original GFI design, which had little appeal for a civilian population. After the reorganization Smith huddled with his two remaining partners: “Let’s do this right!” They abandoned the old technology and redesigned from the bottom up. Another year of development resulted in the Model 100, which proved to be the first FACS to achieve commercial success.

The Model 100 cut men’s hair only, but now it offered four choices of style—Crew Cut, Part-on-Left, Part-on-Right, and Part-in-Middle. Programming options within the crew cut style allowed for Forward-Crew, Swept-back Crew, and Flattop. The Model 100 had a smaller and lighter hood and, instead of the mechanical topo-mapping roller (which, frankly, did tickle) it used descending probes and interpolation software to map the head shape. The operation of the Model 100 was controlled by a speedy Z80 microprocessor, and best of all, a client’s contours were stored in non-volatile memory. A client could take home a floppy disk with all his personal data, so theoretically he could get the same haircut at any shop in the nation sporting a Model 100. ... [Continue](#)

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Though it would never be a high-volume product—and it still jammed on ponytails—the Hair-O-Matic 100 established Hair Systems as a niche manufacturer in a highly-specialized industry with excellent profit margins. Smith bought them a cavernous old factory complex and refurbished most of the main building into a clean, modern manufacturing and assembly facility. In the middle they boxed in modern offices and conference rooms and a company kitchen and dining room for entertaining clients. In the front end, close to the road, they installed an operating salon/barber shop—open to the public—which was used to demonstrate the equipment and to test new ideas. In the old executive suite above the salon, with tall windows overlooking the shop floor, they created an apartment for Alan, still a bachelor. It was to this apartment that the betrayed Janey first sought sanctuary.

She had refused to go back to school that semester. She was too ‘rattled,’ she said, she would start over in the fall. Her parents said it was OK as long as she got a job, so Alan put her to work in the drafting room of the factory and let her use a spare bedroom until she could work something out. A week later she had moved in with her old pal, Hester.

Through junior high and high school Janey and Hester had remained close. It was difficult sometimes, however, because although Janey’s behavior was a little erratic, Hester’s had become downright wild. Since junior high school she had made poor choices of boys to hang out with and poor choices of substances to abuse. She had run away several times, once to Atlantic City where she was shackled up for three weeks and came home tattooed. She had an abortion in tenth grade and her first detox experience in eleventh.

Hester had made it only half way through 12th, and she had scandalized the school when she showed up in May and took a seat among the graduating class, refusing to move when asked. Anxious moments went by as the Principal tried to reason with her and then tried to pry her out of the chair. Just when everyone thought there might be a fight she grabbed his tie and pulled his face down to hers and hissed something into his ear. He looked shaken, but then he walked away. She sat demurely through the ceremony and applauded when her former

classmates tossed their mortarboards into the air. “It’s not what you say, it’s how you say it,” she replied when asked how she got him to let her stay.

When Janey moved in, Hester was relatively substance-free and between men, but also between jobs. Janey persuaded a reluctant Alan to take her on too, if only for Janey. During her orientation he took Hester aside and delivered a stern warning about drugs in the workplace. Hester cried, but promised she was “beneath all that now.” Alan said he hoped so.

For three months everything went smoothly and Alan began to think that Hester would work out. In preparing her return to school Janey had learned from her counselor that she could get credit for two of the courses she had dropped if she could pass proficiency tests. Alan gave her the time off with pay, and in the first week of August she took the bus to New York.

Hester did not show up for work the next day, or the next. Concerned, Alan tried reaching her on the phone, but there was only the answering machine. When she didn’t show up the third day, he went to the apartment, but again there ... [Continue](#)

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was no response. He decided to drop it—it was up to Hester to call him if she wanted to keep her job.

When Janey got back on the weekend, she found Hester in a horrible state. She was asleep in her unmade bed and didn't immediately respond to Janey's shaking. When she tried again, Hester's eyes fluttered and opened for a moment but she didn't speak. Janey felt her forehead and could tell she had a considerable fever. She went to the bathroom for a cold washcloth, and from the state of the bathroom Hester had apparently had a miscarriage—a messy one—and probably had been bleeding off and on ever since. Janey immediately called for an ambulance. When the EMTs got Hester to respond, and then to sit up, a bottle that rolled out from under her. She was not only weak, but also drunk.

Janey called Alan from the ER but said only that Hester had taken sick right after she left for New York and had been too weak to call in. She said it would be another week before she could come back to work. Hester healed quickly after getting good care, she did not return to work until the Monday after Janey moved back into her dorm. By November she had begun missing time, first arriving late on Mondays, then not at all, then missing Tuesdays as well. One Tuesday on which she did show up she was noticeable wobbly. Her supervisor called Alan, but before Alan could get out to her work area Hester had backed into a curing machine and burnt the images of four heating coils into the back of her upper arm. She was alternately smiling like a cherub and wincing in pain as they led her away to first aid. When she refused a drug test, Alan dictated her letter of termination.

Back at college Janey studied hard and avoided men. After college she got a steady boyfriend and a job at an ad firm doing illustrations, but neither the man nor the job lead anywhere. She dumped the boyfriend after two years and, after two more years of pasting clip art onto artboards she decided that she needed better credentials. With help from Alan she enrolled in a respected Baltimore art school, doing freelance work in her spare hours to help pay the bills. After three years of study and practice she had earned a fine arts degree and was seeking

‘real’ design work.

After months of interviews she finally got her break. In a highly competitive selection process, her concept sketches landed her a temporary position at the Wilkins Gallery, where she would design displays for its collection of Art Deco jewelry. She threw herself into her work and earned praise from her older and more experienced coworkers. In her last weeks as a temp the Director singled her out in his public remarks—and announced she would soon be joining permanent staff. Her confidence soared. On the strength of it she plopped down a deposit and signed a year’s lease on an apartment.

When the day came for her to be given a new assignment, the Director called her in. He told her there had been a delay in funding, but not to worry, it would be cleared up soon. She should clear out her things and wait for a call, but the call never came. When an insider told her the truth, that there wouldn’t be a position, she was heartbroken. She wailed to Hester, “They even showed me my desk!” Without a paycheck she wouldn’t even make her second month’s rent. It was in this upheaval that she met Mark. [...Continue](#)

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She had gone to meet Hester for a commiserating drink, but Hester was late, as usual. Hester had been scarce lately, and Janey was not encouraged by her appearance—she had gained a lot of weight and was wearing layers of dark makeup that didn't suit her at all. She wasn't talking about her latest man, which usually meant he was not much to be proud of. But Janey needed Hester to show up this night.

Janey stood at the bar but, as usual, avoided mixing—she had become highly skilled at deflecting inquiring glances and discouraging pickup lines. Suddenly Mark was directly in her face, asking what she did for a living. The directness of the question took her aback, and without meaning to she started telling him, first the basics, and then everything, right up to being fired, if you could call it that. It calmed her to be able to tell the story and, because for a change she was doing all the talking, she didn't feel she was being hit on.

Finally he said: “Well, from everything I've heard, they have abused you. If they don't either hire you or come up with a severance package you should sue them,” and added, “and I'm a lawyer so I know.” She felt as though she'd been granted a pardon. Then, after he'd said she looked like a capable person and that she should quit that place and do her own thing, she asked him if he'd like to get a table and have dinner. During dinner she forgot that she had been waiting for Hester, who was a no-show anyway.

They dated whenever he was in town. Although he could say little about his practice, he was always eager to hear about Janey's prospects, especially now that she was getting some freelance work. With his help she drafted a letter to the museum demanding a settlement. To her surprise the Board had finally answered and agreed: she would receive six months' salary and a letter of recommendation which she could write. She felt she owed it all to Mark. When he proposed she accepted at once.

And now the date had come! Margaret had generously accepted Alan's invitation to stay at his place the weekend of the wedding, and Alan had also offered the apartment for Janey and the sisters. It was to be a small

affair, but with all the niceties—everyone in his best attire, haute coiffure, haute cuisine. Alan booked a reception room for thirty at Baldwin House for the ceremony and dinner. The bridal party—Mark’s mother and sisters, Hester, and Janey—were to get the royal treatment at the Style Rite Salon, then drive to Baldwin House and change for the ceremony.

It was five-thirty and the sky was just beginning to show a little light when Janey tiptoed back into her room and curled up in her bed to await the official start of the day. At nine o’clock a catered breakfast would be set up for them in the company dining room. Alan would deliver Mark’s mother, while Hester and Mark would each find their own way.

At seven she was still dozing when she heard Dolores cursing from the living room. She went out and found Dolores holding a plant stand and shoving pieces of a broken pot out of her way. Little clots of damp earth stuck to the side of the couch and a little way up the wall, and some was ground into the carpet. The broken plant had been knocked clear and was some inches away against the baseboard. Dolores stood up and stopped cursing when she saw Janey. “Sara left her damn overnight case in the bedroom doorway. I ran into it in the night.” ... [Continue](#)

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Sara joined them, looking sleepy. When she saw the mess she appealed to Dolores: “What happened?”

Dolores snapped, I’ll tell you what happened. I ran into your damn bag, that’s what happened. Why was it in the damn doorway?”

Sara responded, “It was dark. I just wanted to prop the door open to let in the street light.”

“There wasn’t any damned street light, you boob. That was the moon, and it set.”

Janey calmed them down and sent them away to get ready for breakfast, then she picked up as much of the mess as she could.

They dressed casually for the breakfast and their Salon treatment, then took their cases downstairs to meet the others. Alan and Margaret were waiting in the foyer, and Mark walked in a few minutes later. By nine-fifteen Hester hadn’t shown so they went ahead with breakfast.

Afterward Alan gave Mark and the women a tour of the Salon, showing off the various work stations in the center: the various Hair-O-Matics, the Colorama Frost’n’Foil, and the big Style Rite Model 500 cutter-styler; the line of three Wash Buddies on one wall and the cute little Nail Buddies scattered about the room. He showed them how to use the interactive YourLook™ style center, where a camera mixed their images with their style choices and put their pictures up on a big screen. “Now what can I do for you?” he asked. Mark said he didn’t like the look of the Hair-O-Matic MacroStyleGTO with LaserTopo™ technology and thought he’d just go to a regular barber. Promising to be back in an hour or so, he left, taking their overnight bags with him.

Delores and Sara both thought they’d like to go right to the Style-Rite—Sara would have hers done ‘ShortnSpiky’ but Delores said she’d would to go for the ‘A La Grecque’ option with bangs and ringlets. Margaret thought the French Braid looked good, but she wanted to try the Frost’n’Foil to get some highlights first. “Great!” said Alan, and directed

them to the Wash Buddies.

As the machines hummed along quietly through the soaping, lathering, and rinsing cycles with their patented gentle massaging action the ladies talked about other weddings they'd been to or been in. Janey sat with them—she would take a turn with a Wash Buddy after Hester arrived, if Hester ever arrived—and told them about Alan's modest wedding with only a few close friends as witnesses. Margaret said it was a shame about the demise of the big wedding: "I suppose it just comes down to money." Of her own, she said "We had two hundred in the church, and over four hundred at the reception. I was beautiful then, and everyone said Herbert was the catch of the century. It was the talk of the Main Line—everyone wanted an invitation."

Delores said that when she got married she wanted a big wedding and a honeymoon cruise. Sara told Delores, "You should have married Charlie; he was a lot of fun." Margaret said, "A man like Charlie is only good for fun." Then Sara giggled: "He told me this great joke. At this wedding everybody's dancing except there's this man with a false eye and this woman with a harelip. She is thrilled when the man finally asks her to dance. They dance beautifully and when the music is over he whispers in her ear, 'Did you enjoy the dance?' She says, 'Oh, Didn't I! Didn't I' and he drops her right there and shouts 'Harelip! Harelip!' " ...[Continue](#)

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Margaret looked perplexed, but Delores rolled her eyes and said, “I think it was ‘Wouldn’t I, wouldn’t I, not Didn’t I, Didn’t I.’ You know, as in ‘wooden eye.’” Sara said she thought that might be right.

When their washes were done and their hair properly turbaned, Alan asked who would go first on the Style Rite and Sara called dibs on it. Delores protested, “But what am I going to do while I wait?” Sara argued that with a short hairdo hers would take less time. Janey refereed: “While she’s in there, I can get you started on the Nail Buddy, Delores. I’ll go last.” Then she explained the Style-Rite’s operation to both of them, and input their styles under their code names. “You can stop the machine at any point in its cycle and finish later, just remember to be sure to push the clear button and put in your own ID code before you resume.”

In the meantime Alan took Margaret to the Frost’n’Foil to get her started. “You want to keep your color but just add some highlights—no problem, but we just have to get the settings right. Your hair—um—it’s naturally blonde?”

“Of course!” shot back Margaret, with something of a glare.

Alan continued, “I’m sorry, I just had to ask. It’s about the chemistry we use to do the highlights, it’s different for, um, artificial...”

“Mr. Yost,” she interrupted, “There’s nothing artificial about me. Let’s get on with it.” He saw to it that she was set up and installed in the machine and went out to make a call.

While Janey was getting Delores set up in the Nail Buddy, Sara was experiencing the Echogram™ mapping phase of the process. She was talking on in a monotone about something, even though she couldn’t hear herself and no one else was paying attention. Then in a voice way too loud she said, “Hey, this thing tickles!” Janey gestured that she’d be over in a minute, but a few moments later Sara went on, “Hey, I’m not kidding. This thing tickles. It’s giving me the creeps!” Delores said, “Just let her ramble.” Janey shrugged and finished up with Delores. Sara

quieted down on her own, but when the machine signaled that it had completed the mapping phase, she abruptly pushed the hood release and, when it had lifted off just enough, she wiggled frantically out of the chair. “Gotta go to the bathroom,” she said as she grabbed her towel and hurried away.

When she came back a few minutes later, calmed and properly re-turbaned, she wandered over to the magazine rack and thumbed through some back issues of *Style Automation*. When Alan returned she approached him and told him she wanted to try one of the Nail Buddies. He took her to an unoccupied one and explained the operation—“Put your fingers and thumb into the flexible digit receptacles, then close the lid with your other hand. The unit has to calibrate itself, sort of get to know your hand. Watch the LCD screen—it will tell you to make a fist, then to stretch your fingers out, then to relax your hand. Choose natural or synthetic, pick your taper style and your color from the screen, and then just let the machine do its work. If it tingles a little, just push this up or down arrow until it feels just right.” Just remember, follow the instructions.” He took her through the setup with her right hand, and then left to make more calls.

There was still no Hester, but Janey decided it was time for her Wash Buddy. She got herself into position and let the machine start massaging her tired

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scalp. During the first wash cycle Janey's eyes closed, and soon she was fast asleep.

After a while Delores put down her *People* magazine and, when she looked up, noticed that Sara was not at the Style Rite. "My turn," she thought and pushed the Finish OK button on the Nail Buddy. The lid quivered for a moment and then popped open. Now both hands were smooth, cuticles gone, and each finger ended in a beautiful ruby red synthetic nail with modified square taper. She gathered her stuff and made her way to the Style Rite, made herself comfortable, and then typed in her code. Nothing happened. She put her code in again. When nothing happened again she studied the display. It read 'RESUME?'

"Of course," she thought, and pushed "Yes."

The machine came to life with a gentle whirr as its hood came slowly down over Delores' head. She settled into the soft cushions and waited. Meanwhile, the Nail Buddy had finished with Sara's right hand so she had shifted position and started it on her left. She was contentedly turning pages in *Cosmo* and admiring the elegantly painted nails on her right hand. Margaret was on her last few minutes with the foil machine. Except for the hum of the machines and the gentle breathing of Janey the room had gone quiet.

It was sometime during the second rinse that Janey sensed a muffled but insistent voice trying to get through her consciousness. "Can't." "Get." "Out," it was saying. "Get." "Me." "Out." Then louder, "I said, Get Me Out of Here!" Suddenly Janey was awake. She twisted in the seat to see where the voice was coming from. She could see Margaret just lifting the lid of the Frost'n'Foil, smiling but starting to look around, too. Delores was still in the Style Rite, but she was frowning and looking generally uncomfortable—maybe she was hearing the voice, too. Then Janey realized it must be Sara. She was at one of the Nail Buddies, not in a clear sight line from Janey's Wash Buddy, but she could see that Sara standing up at the machine, though at an awkward angle. "She's having some trouble with it," thought Janey. She had switched off the Wash Buddy and was impatiently waiting out the shut-down procedure when

Sara called out again, this time very clearly and emphatically, but now with a panicky note in her voice: “I am stuck in this thing, will somebody pleeeeee get me out of here!!”

Janey called out to her, “I’m coming, Sara, just a moment!”

“My God, it’s eating my hand!,” cried Sara, louder again. “Get over here!”

Janey was on her way to help Sara when Margaret shrieked, “Oh, my God, look at this!” What have you done?” and grabbed Janey as she tried to pass by. Margaret had been holding a mirror, staring into it with horror on her face, and now she thrust it into Janey’s hand as though it contained the image she wanted Janey to see. “It’s orange. You’ve ruined my hair; it’s orange!”

Calling over to Sara, Janey said, “Sara, just push the release button. It’s on the side.” Turning back to Margaret she looked hard at the thirty-odd places in her hair that were to have been highlighted. They were all orange. Bright orange, like that surgery preparation beta-something, only a bolder orange. “Like Day-Glo,” thought Janey, but did not say it.

Instead, she reassured her. “I don’t know why it’s—uh—a little off color, but this is not permanent, Margaret...Mother. It’s all right, Alan can fix it.” Then over to Sara, “Don’t twist it that way, you could hurt yourself. Find the release

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button. It will let you out.” And back to Margaret, “I’ll find Alan.” She tried to twist her arm free.

Margaret had taken back the mirror. “I’m telling you it’s orange! It’s ruined! Damn your brother! Damn this machine!”

Janey tried again to reassure her. “I’ll get Alan. He knows all the chemistry. I know he’ll make this right,” but she was interrupted by a blood-curdling scream from Dolores. Margaret finally let go of Janey’s wrist and all eyes turned to the Style Rite, where Dolores was yelling and gulping and jumping in her chair and pushing and pulling at the hood, trying to get it off.

“It’s ruining her hair. Somebody stop it!” shouted Margaret. “It ruined mine—just look at this!”

Janey attempted to get control. Furrowing her brow and dropping her voice an octave, she addressed them one by one: “Dolores, stop that screaming!” “Sara, push the damn button!” “Margaret, we can fix this.” Just then the front door swung open and in came Hester, swinging a pair of shopping bags and grinning sheepishly. She stopped in her tracks when she heard the din.

Seeing her, Janey pleaded, “Hester! Where have you been??? Help me with Dolores and Sara.”

Hester dropped the bags and lost no time getting over to the Style Rite where she yanked on the umbilical so hard the tubing bent, but fortunately she did manage to pull the power cord out of the wall at the same time. The hood started to open and Dolores, half-standing, started moaning and shaking and trying to feel around her head. One hand touched a sensitive spot and she yelped. When her hand came down there was blood on it. “She screamed again and fell out of the chair and into a quivering heap of loud moans.

Margaret, still holding the mirror, was looking alternately at herself and at her older daughter and repeating, “Oh, my God, oh, my God, oh, my

affair, but with all the niceties—everyone in his best attire, haute coiffure, haute cuisine. Alan booked a reception room for thirty at Baldwin House for the ceremony and dinner. The bridal party—Mark’s mother and sisters, Hester, and Janey—were to get the royal treatment at the Style Rite Salon, then drive to Baldwin House and change for the ceremony.

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I've never seen anything like this in all my years. The machine just can't do this." He was shaking his head vehemently. "It just can't do this if.. "

Just then Mark intervened, tearing Dolores' hand from Alan's and taking up a handful of Alan's shirt. "I heard that. You are trying to blame this young woman—this simple child—for the tyranny of your machines." He backed Alan against the Style Rite's hard chrome superstructure. "You-will-not-get-away-with-this," he seethed, pulling Alan forward and banging him backward into the machine with each word.

It was then that Janey went to her brother's rescue, approaching Mark from behind. She wanted to kick him in the balls, but his back was to her. So she kicked him behind the knee of his left leg. He yelped and fell away to his left, almost taking Alan down with him. He bounced up immediately, though, sparring, looking for someone to punch. There was only Janey, and suddenly he seemed to regain his train of thought.

Straightening up, he growled, "There will be no wedding here today, I can tell you that. We're going to get to the bottom of this." He ordered his family: "Come with me."

With Mark dragging his injured leg, Dolores holding a towel to her head, and Margaret hauling Sara behind her, the four of them stumbled toward the entrance. Sara turned back at the door, shook her finger, and said, "Janey, that really, really scared me. I hope you're sorry!" But Margaret had yanked her through the front door before Janey had a chance to reply.

They surveyed the scene. One overturned chair, one bent umbilical, one broken hand mirror, a little blood on the blades in the Style Rite. It wasn't so bad.

Hester burst out laughing. "Doesn't this say it all! All I can say is I'm sorry I missed the first two acts." Then, realizing that it probably wasn't funny to Janey, she took her arm and said soothingly, "I'm sorry, honey."

Janey spoke up, “Why was he so mean to me? I didn’t mean to hurt anybody. I like his mother, and his sisters—well, I mean I really do. Or did, I guess.” Then, “I guess I did, anyway.”

Alan said, “I think I know what went wrong. The Style Rite was programmed for Sara, but then Dolores got into it without resetting it. She probably pushed the RESUME button instead of CLEAR, so the machine thought it was working on Sara. I think she suffered a touch-down, maybe two. She has a much smaller head, I don’t know if you noticed.” Hester giggled, “In more ways than one.”

Janey said, “I think Sara just panicked. She didn’t know you could get out the Nail Buddy any time by pushing the release button. If only she’d been more patient. But I am sorry about Margaret’s orange highlights. You could fix that couldn’t you, Alan?” Before he had a chance to answer, though, Janey had put her head in her hands and was sobbing. “How could he be so mean to me!?!?”

“Come outside,” said Alan, leading her by the elbow, “let’s get away from this mess.” The three of them sat under the awning on the stoop just outside the front door. Through her tears Janey muttered again, “How could he be so mean?”

Hester put her arm around Janey and waited until she stopped shaking, then she said, “Let me tell you some things I’ve learned, Honey.”... [Continue](#)

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“Mark is not who you think he is. I know a lot about him. You know that night I didn’t show up at the QuikOne? That’s because I was with his buddy Choke. His buddy Choke...whew, never that one again... Choke is short for Charlie. He and Mark grew up together. I met both of them about three months before you did, in the same bar. Only he didn’t hit on me, his buddy did. Oh, we had some laughs together, the three of us, but then Choke and me started going places where we could score. I hung out with him in Philly for awhile. He told me all about Mark and his family—they were from the same neighborhood in South Philly—and he showed me their house. I even saw his mom once.” She winked, “Choke used to boink Delores after school, but don’t tell Mark.”

She went on, “Anyway, Mark’s not really a lawyer. He went to law school and had enough courses, but he was kicked out near the end before he’d turned in all his stuff. He tried to take the bar anyway—seems it’s perfectly legal—but never passed. He works for Counsel Legal Services, kind of a law clerk, you know, he takes depositions and things. Couriers papers. Looks things up. Choke says he’s down here helping to search through records for a big class-action suit. He’s pretty much just a flunky.

“Oh, and his apartment? He’s got a roommate. Or really, his roommate’s got a roommate, since it isn’t Mark’s place, it’s the other guy’s place. And the other guy’s furniture.”

“And the other guy’s view,” mumbled Janey, who could see it was probably all true.

“And another thing,” Hester went on, “Mark’s dad did get shot, but it was because he was caught red-handed stealing money from the office safe. When his partner was on vacation at the ocean, he faked a cash request from the escrow account and had the money delivered to the office. The partner’s AA put it in the safe, thinking her boss had ordered it. The partner got a confirmation call from the bank on his cell and figured out the scam. He was back in the office to get the money and return it when Mark’s dad interrupted and they got into some kind of fight. There was a gun in the safe—it came out and somehow Mark’s dad

was shot.

“He’s not dead, though, just in prison. And the partner wasn’t charged. Maggie sued, though, and got a jury award of I-don’t-know how much, but enough to pay off that dump they live in. If she’s careful, I don’t think she has to work.”

“Oh, and the hair problem? I don’t think it’s your machine, Alan. When I saw her, Maggie was a redhead. And it looked a lot more natural than that blonde hair she was wearing today.”

Janey sighed. “Oh, Hester. I was tricked. I tricked myself. Again.” Then to Alan: “It looks like I’m not getting married after all.” He put a hand on hers and said, “I know. I’m sorry.”

Hester turned back to Janey, “What style were you gonna do?”

Janey replied, “I thought maybe the BridesHead, with the MoonGlo option. But I think I’ll stick with FreeStyle for now.”

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