





ANDREAN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SCENE ONE	Benjamin Lord
BALLOONS	Jim Ryan
A SAINT IN EXILE	Bruce McKillip
PUPPETS AND PUPPETMASTERS	Tom Lawton
WITHERING PINES	Craig Barrows
STRINGS ATTACHED	Benjamin Lord
WINTER SONG	Kevin Flaherty

Scene One

His hands had dropped to his knees, rubbing his silk pants in the reverie of purpose of one resolved to do nothing. He ran his long white fingers thoughtfully along the fabric as his disposition slowly was aroused towards its evil design. His pants were red; he hated red, but then that was why he wore them. In fact, of all fabrics, he hated silk especially.

"RED SILK PANTS!" he shuddered, throwing up his arms. One of his hands, the finely manicured one, came to rest on the serpent arm of the chair, the other poised on his chest as he suddenly rocked back in a fit of malicious mirth.

"And Gry . . . Gryph . . . GRYPHON LEGS!" he laughed until it hurt - he never laughed for any other reason. "What an ABSURD chair! What a MONSTEROUSLY ABSURD CHAIR!" He hated the chair dreadfully and spent half of his waking hours in it to spite it. "A shave . . ." he mused, tugging for his whiskers, the fit passing. "Do I . . . FOOLISHNESS!" he snarled. "How should I know if I need a shave? There are no mirrors in THIS house and if there were I should never look in them . . . The very idea! A shave? . . . MIRRORS? INCREDIBLE!" But he wasn't thinking of the shave or the chair or the pants or the brown walls or the flood light in front of him: he was thinking of the man with the veiled face.

Surrounding his chair were a series of brown bound social journals, weathered leather trade handbooks, yellowed newspapers, magazines, maps, charts, pamphlets and all manner of reading material; set about him in a most calculated state of disarray. He had patterned his life towards the perfection of disorganization. "I am proud of myself . . ." he announced warmly and suddenly the image of The Blessed Mother passed across his mind. He always saw Her at moments like this and he pondered the singular uniqueness of this vision, his hands caressing the serpent heads. The furnace belched. ". . . and I have every right to be!" he snapped peevishly, looking defensively about the room, his eyes finally falling among the twisted towers of books and papers.



"What have we here?" he mumbled absently and picked up one of the brown social journals at his feet. He blew the dust off the cover and opened the book slowly so as not to split its ancient binding. "Monique Morantz . . ." he read aloud, careful to mispronounce the name and most careful to only half read the column and draw the wrong conclusions through careful analysis. "Whose parents are prominent" he continued, "in the Rep . . . Aha! . . . nationally recognized . . . mmmm. Why is it always so HOT in this Damned House? . . . recognized . . . mmmm. A friendly smile and a cheery "hello" describe . . . God!" he burst, hands flailing towards the heavens. "RANCID prose, RANCID! . . . Seen with only the best of company at their summer home in . . . A man can hardly breathe!" The brittle pages poured out of the book as he read; the mildew pleased him. ". . . home in Boston. Boston!" he almost laughed; chances were good that he would never see the debutante since never in his life had he ever been, nor had he the intention to go, to Boston. And, of course, it was too late now; "I'm not what I used to be," he sighed. But he underlined the name several times in red ink and committed the address to memory. "I'll drop in on her soon . . ." he resolved. The incongruence of this statement amused him; he was not insane, merely contrary, and unshakably convinced of his madness. "After all . . . she is either in the grave or in an old people's home. SILLY ME!" he chuckled and placed the book at the foot of the chair so that the pages of the book would be sure to be bent when he got up and stepped on them. "After all, it is, or was, a library book; well, it's MINE now!" he said firmly, grinding his heel into the book as he pulled himself up from the chair. The furnace rumbled; the kettle boiled. "And that is the way it should be . . . WHAT NOW? WHAT NOW? Four o'clock? Already?" Tea time. But since it was half past three he decided to put off tea for at least half an hour and maybe altogether. "Silly tradition! Man is bound by silly traditions." He had acquired, in his years at the House, a profound dislike for and a flourishing distrust of tradition, routine and British; more especially British custom. He hadn't bought tea for years and didn't drink it when he did. But he wasn't thinking of the tea or the china dolls or the black candles or the bricked-in bay windows: he was thinking of the man with the veiled face and his plot to murder him. It had been his obsession for years . . . years; since the very day that he had moved into the House. Death by drowning in the River. A vow.

His thoughts were manifest in action.

Down on his knees - decked - in his houndstooth coat and red scarf; he crawled through the cellar window, past the fiery furnace. He recalled the whispered vow: not to return to the House without having killed the man with the veiled face, and was perplexed. A paradox. He coughed; loosening the cord about his neck, he breathed in the stifling air while somewhere beyond the House another group of passengers was being ferried across the River.

Balloons

Behold the balloonman.
He steps lightly,
 quickly,
over burning concrete.
His smile breaks
 the breathless air,
And puzzles
 the indifferent city.

Above his head,
 his captives wave at the sky,
 bright prisoners in a gray land.
They rustle and whisper,
 and their colors cry to be set free,
 but the balloonman pays them no heed.

The green park huddles
 in
 on
 itself
surrounded by
 speed,
 noise,
 and volume.

As the sun slants down,
 hiding its eyes,
 the balloonman strolls into green shelter.

He greets with kindly eyes,
 sleeping tramps,
 old ladies in tennis shoes,
 and fat pigeons.

He unfolds himself
 on the sward,
 and stares at the blue eggshell
 enclosing his head.

At length bright colors ride up,
 through the smog,
and dance in the breathless ozone.
 They wink and nod at the balloonman,
a sleeping speck in the morning grime,
 far below.

For the first time in quite a few years, Duryea was feeling quite happy with himself. His job was almost done, and he would soon be going home. Duryea's job was to supervise the construction of a radio outpost on Beta Tet, a cold but habitable planet a little smaller than Earth occupying the fourth orbit around Beta Centauri. He hated his job, hated the planet, hated the centaurs; he even hated the coffee he was drinking, but he was quite happy at the moment.

Duryea reflected that, even though his work there was almost finished, he still felt that Beta Tet was useless. The scientists, however, had not thought so, because Beta Tet was the first planet they had found where atmosphere and climate was compatible to human life. Duryea did not find Beta Tet's climate compatible to his own life; he had been trained for the mission in Siberia, and, in retrospect, he was beginning to think that he would find it far more pleasant there upon returning. As dirty and crowded as it was, Duryea missed Earth.

The thing that Duryea disliked most about Beta Tet was the part the scientists loved. Duryea did not like centaurs. The zoologists loved them, had christened them anthro-centauroids, and had assigned to them, in a rather arbitrary manner, an R.I.Q. of eighty, roughly equivalent to the intelligence of the extinct terrestrial porpoise. Duryea thought - no, he was certain - that they were wrong. Centaurs were not very intelligent looking, really; they resembled their mythological namesake only in that they had four walking legs and two "arms" ending in very nimble six-fingered hands. Otherwise they looked like the bastard offspring of a lemur and a three-toed sloth. They were classified as intelligent life because they could be taught a few words of Unilingo and could be used as cheap labour in the construction of the radio outpost. However, they were regarded in about the same light as dogs by every human on the planet - except Duryea. He was convinced that centaurs were not dumb, just inscrutable. Certainly, they had scored as sub-human on the tests, but *what did that prove?* Only, perhaps, that they had no *desire* to score any higher. In any case, Duryea did not like them; he was certain that they were smarter than they seemed.

Anyway, he thought, in a little while he would never again have to worry about whether or not the centaurs were thinking, or what they were thinking about; his job was almost done. He took another sip of coffee and grimaced at the radio tower, which he could see from the window of his office. Useless thing. Why anyone would want a radio outpost on this rock is beyond me. Duryea had a bad habit of feeling sorry for himself whenever he had nothing else to do. I was a soldier once, he thought bitterly. He had, in fact, been partially responsible for the defeat of the Venusian colonies in the last Great Revolution; he had made the Signal Corps famous as fighters, not just radio operators. He had been serving equally well in suppressing the Martian Revolution when his new orders had come. Somebody in the Interstellar Exploration Division had decided that the Terran Army should have a radio outpost on Beta-Tet, forty light-years away, and High Command had agreed. So Colonel Charlemagne Duryea, in the middle of fighting a war, had been loaded onto an in-

terstellar transport with thirty other men, placed in a glass coffin, frozen like a piece of synthetic meat, and sent to a cold and barren, but habitable, planet that he had never hoped to see. His wife Jean would be faithful enough during the hundred or so years that he would be gone; she was occupying a similar glass coffin on Earth.

Duryea and his men had been on Beta Tet about four years. Two men had died, and Duryea was still suffering from a cold he had caught a week after arriving. The centaurs were getting less and less co-operative and there were rumours of rebellion. At times Duryea had wondered why all this had happened to him, whether Someone was playing a vile trick on him. He often thought of appealing to the God his grandparents had known, but had always thought better of it. It had, after all, been established at the end of the Twentieth Century that religion was a crutch for the superstitious; it was officially discouraged by the Army and no good soldier would dream of blaming his problems on the Unknown. The centaurs were rumoured to have a deity; the human race had outgrown that sort of thing.

"I'm going to have to face this mess myself", he muttered over his coffee."

"What was that, sir?"

Duryea jumped out of his daydreams and looked up at his secretary. "Oh, nothing, Peters. When did you come in?"

"Just now. Got a message from Dobrovich. Says he'll be ready to hook up the antenna tonight. Wants a go-ahead to open communications with Earth whenever you say."

"Really? Wonderful. Tell him twenty-four hundred will be fine. And get out a memo to the rest of the base; we might as well have everyone there when it's turned on."

"Yes, sir." Peters turned to go.

"Now, wait a minute, Vic," Duryea interrupted, "haven't you got a minute to spare an old man?"

Peters grinned, shed some of his military formality. "Sure, Chuck. But I wish you'd get off that 'old man' bit. You've got a long way to go."

Duryea was actually only sixty-five, but he was beginning to get a little grey around the temples. He felt that his life was half over.

"Nonsense, Vic. This B-Tet weather is going to finish me yet. But sit down, will you? I need someone to talk to."

The younger man sat down. "So? Go ahead and talk."

"Well, I might as well get right to the point." Duryea leaned forward. "What's all this I've been hearing about the centaurs rebelling?"

"Oh, nothing much, really. Some of them have been getting rowdy. Last week in the welding shops one of them got mad at the foreman and started ranting some gibberish about a great new leader and a fight for freedom and happiness, all that kind of nonsense. Then the rest of them got all excited and refused to work. Foreman had a hell of a time getting them calmed down. Damn, dumb animals."

Duryea coughed uncomfortably. "So?"

"So the M.P.'s went after the rabble rouser leader. Managed to round up about twenty suspects, and got rid of them. No problem."

"Well, I suppose it was necessary." Duryea looked pained. He

despised these mindless young soldiers. Everything by the book, cut and dried. The thing that bothered him about Peters was that he, at least, had the intelligence to know better. Well, the project was finished, so why worry about it? "We *did* have to get our job done, I suppose."

"Yeah. Funny thing, though."

"What's that?"

"Stupid bastards never flinched. Just like they really believed that we were accomplishing nothing by it."

"Oh." Duryea was getting upset. "They're funny animals, all right. Uh, you better get back to Dobrovich."

"Yes, sir." The younger man brightened. "Hey, speaking of centaurs, the funniest thing happened over at Labour Housing Facility Seven."

Duryea took a deep breath. "Really? What happened?"

"Sort of amusing. The veterinarians have supposedly been keeping their females in isolation for over a year, you know. Well, one of them's pregnant." He snickered. "Vets are embarrassed as hell. They still can't figure out how the male got in."

"That's pretty good." Duryea forced a chuckle. "Hey, why don't you run along to Dobrovich." He grinned. "I've got some packing to do."

Peters returned the smile. "Right, Chuck. See you tonight."

The older man turned to the wall, heard the door hiss shut. Going home, he thought. Tonight we listen to the pre-recorded message from Earth that establishes the radio link; that means our job is done. Tomorrow we get into those damned freezers on the ship, and the next thing I know, they'll be unpacking me on Earth; maybe Jean will be there when I wake up . . . Duryea lit a cigarette, and coughed painfully. It's this miserable cold, he thought, not the cigarette. On Earth I'll have real tobacco again, none of this synthetic garbage. He put out the cigarette in disgust and paced to the window. Miserable, cold, God-damned - well, *somebody* must have damned it; it would take a creative intelligence to make such a hell-hole. Maybe . . .

By this time Duryea was on the couch, and he gradually meditated himself into a deep sleep. It was the first time he had really rested since he had awakened from a frozen coma to find himself on Beta Tet. The next time he slept, it would be under those same circumstances, and he would awaken on Earth. That pleasant thought lingered, and he dreamt happily.

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"Sir? It's twenty-three thirty, sir."

"Huh?" Duryea looked up at the face of Victor Peters, materialising where he had hoped to see that of his wife.

"Twenty-three thirty. The radio linkup is ready. Ceremonies are about to start. You'd better get ready, sir."

"Oh. Yeah." Duryea rose, put on his overcoat, turned towards the door. "Well, this is it, Vic. We're going home."

The walk to the station seemed shorter than usual. There, outside the building, twenty-six men were standing at attention. Scientists, engineers, electricians, craftsmen were waiting to hear the signal that would mean the culmination of their labours. Dobrovich, the chief engineer, was just coming out of the building. He alone showed no excitement; he was a dark, gaunt giant of a man, and always appeared withdrawn into himself.

"Good evening, Colonel," he said, "I have just finished setting the controls. Within a few seconds we should be receiving the recorded message from our home. It would be even more interesting, I think, if we could converse with them, but I am afraid that what we will hear will be at least forty years old. A pity."

"That's true," Duryea agreed, "but I'm going to be glad to hear it, just the same." The twenty-nine men stood together, silent, expectant.

Finally the loudspeakers outside the building crackled, came to life. A murmur of elation rose and fell silent, to hear the message . . .

"... recording. Urgent, Beta Tet Outpost . . . Martian Revolution has ended in the thermonuclear disaster . . . most dead . . . fusion explosions have upset solar balance . . . sun will supernova soon . . . you're on your own . . . this is a recording. Urgent . . ." The transmission ended in an ominous explosion of static, that faded away, leaving a deathly silence.

Twenty-six men stood still in unspeakable horror. Peters was quivering spasmodically, his face a picture of disaster. Dobrovich appeared calm, looking even more corpse-like than usual, muttering something in Russian.

Duryea was swaying unsteadily; he felt as though he were floating in a void. His mind was whirling irrationally: Cut off, like a branch from a tree. Rootless. I have no past, no future. A head without a body. Exile. Earth is gone . . . it's *all* . . . gone. Jean . . . she is gone, too . . . Thoughts flashed like dying stars, burned out. Duryea swooned.

"Look!" somebody shouted, pointed. Twenty-seven heads turned. There. In the eastern sky a new star blazed, brighter than the rest, like a macabre jack-o-lantern. It was horrible, like looking into Hell.

Somebody screamed. A gun went off, a man fell. More screams of despair, more gunshots.

Duryea struggled back into consciousness. He was in a cold sweat, pale as a spectre, but with a resolute gleam in his eyes. For *he knew what is meant* . . . !

"Sir?" Peters' bleak face appeared. He was nearly hysterical, but still trying to maintain his military bearing. "Will you . . . please . . . shoot me? I - I don't have a gun."

Duryea could not quite grasp this. "Shoot you? What for?"

"Don't you understand, sir? It's all over. The human race is dead . . . and we must join it . . . there is no place for us."

His superior maintained his unearthly calm. "Yes. Mankind is finished. But *we* . . . we are not. There is something here for us to live for, something new - and very much alive!"

"What? What are talking about? Are you mad?"

"No. Now, think," Duryea sort of smiled, "What religion were your grandparents? Do you remember?"

"I remember," murmured Dobrovich..

Peters was furious. "Religion? You *are* mad!"

Duryea, too, became angry. "Dammit, Vic, think, for once! Use your mind! The Army is gone; you can do your own thinking." The older man turned. "Now, you can kill yourself, if you want, or you can follow me." And he walked off, followed by the silent Dobrovich.

Peters stood dumb for a moment, then he understood. He ran to catch up with his companions. And the three wise men walked together into the East, to where the ghost of their long-dead world hung over Labour Housing Facility Seven, where a young female centaur had just given impossible birth to a most remarkable child.

Puppets and Puppetmasters

Somewhere, a man in a grey coat sits on a hill. Surrounding him are his junior officers, also in grey uniforms though somewhat less adorned. These men are congratulating him on how well his defense is set up. But he is not listening; he is just watching a huge mass of men, their weapons gleaming - bristling in the cruel sun, and thinking, "*They* had better win this for me; I'm finished if *they* don't."

On a different hill, a different man in a red coat is surrounded by different junior officers in simpler looking red uniforms. These officers compliment his offensive strategy. But he is not listening either; he too is watching one mass move towards another, and thinking more or less the same thing as the other man: "*They* had better win for me. I will be killed if *they* are defeated." Then, suddenly inspired, he gives the command to move the cavalry to the front. Several aids jump at the chance to win their commander's favor, and the message is delivered promptly. The cavalry moves quickly to the front.

The other man sees this move and knows he must counter it. He ponders a while and orders the pikemen up front. The order is sent and soon carried out. The defense is ready for the battle.

In the midst of the pikemen, a soldier is thinking how thin his pike is as he jabs it into the hard ground to anchor it. The enemy cavalry starts its charge. The soldier looks at the huge war horses and then at his thin pike, tipped with a tiny, gleaming point. "How can this stick withstand such pressure?" he thinks. "We can't hold this line. And when the others run so will I."

In the midst of the advancing cavalry, a trooper looks at the wall of pikes facing him: indestructable. He wonders how his horse can ever get through such a forest of pikes. "It is sheer suicide!" He thinks, "We really should retreat," but no one hesitates; the charge moves on relentlessly, picking up momentum, speed, and power.

Those seconds are like years to each army, delicately balanced, ready to run at the first cry. But no one does. They meet: the irresistible force and the immovable object. Both sides shuddering with the terrific

shock of the impact. The first row of horses is down, trampled by the second, but the third throws itself against the quickly thinning row of pikes; again, and again, and again, until the line breaks and runs. The cavalry, with a yell of triumph, runs furiously amidst the other army's infantry, creating havoc. The result is carnage; trampled dead, both red and grey, cover the field.

Somewhere behind the victorious army's line on a hill, is a man. He is leaping up and down and shouting for joy. "I have won! I have won! I'll be rich for life and I'll never have to worry again." His aids, anxious to agree, congratulate him.

Somewhere on another hill, in the remnant chaos of another army, is another man, throwing his gloves on the ground and muttering, "Those fools have lost the battle for me. They have killed me by *their* stupidity. Those fools."

Withering Pines

Beyond the hedge a figure was pacing furiously, clasping his hands in self-chastisement. "What a stupid fool," he muttered. "Armus, you should have known better - the potted plant - no, that's no reason for the tears. "The figure stopped for a moment, watching a child chase after a ball down the road. "Movement," he cried, slamming fist in palm. "The steam engine. Why on earth did I bring the steam engine? This will certainly mean dismissal if he tells his mother." He moved further along the hedge, interrupted by a large, ungovernable flurry of leaves pouring out of an opening, followed by a gardener more or less directing. "Good afternoon, Willy." Armus said absently, nodding to the man.

"Afternoon, doctor. Hold on." The gardener drove his obstinate charges into the street. "That's about the last of it, right there," he panted, nodding at the pile. "No more work till the snow, eh?"

"Fine, Willy, fine." the doctor's voice trailed off, eyeing something among the leaves. "What's this?" he asked, stooping down to pick up a fragment of clay.

"That? Part of a flower pot, I reckon. To be sure, found it under Titus' window, I did. He tossed it out after you left. Nearly hit me it did." Willy brushed at his shoulders.

"Did he say anything?" the doctor asked. "You seem to be the only person he'll talk to."

"To be sure, sir, like me he do. He takes a fancy for the plants and all, and I'm sort of the baby sitter for his friends, you know." He eyed the doctor warily. "I don't mean no harm, sir, being the boy's friend and all. A lad like that needs a friend, you know."

"Of course I don't mind your liking Titus," the doctor said defensively. "No harm, but did he say anything to you when he threw this pot out the window?"

"Well," Willy scratched his head, "he could have told me to replant it. Aye, to be sure, that he said. And I did, too, right by those pine trees he likes so."

"And anything else?"

"Well, he shut the window right quick, although I heard him say something."

"And?"

"Very strange, it was, sir. He was talking about dogs. Putting dogs in cages, it was. To be sure, it made no sense, but the boy rarely does." Doctor Armus nodded knowingly and was about to leave when the gardener added, "About them pine trees, sir. Do the boy want them badly? I know his mum don't fancy them, but I've got some binding here anyway. It helps them in the winter. Do ask the boy if he wants me to bind the trees."

"Certainly," the doctor said, making his way up the drive. "Perhaps a good gesture would absolve this morning's stupidity. But . . . 'Mummy' would prefer them removed," he rationalized, gazing back at the gardener who was by now futilely attempting to corral the leaves once more incited by a gust of wind. A lone mourning dove paused in its requiem, scrutinizing the intruder below, until a nurse admitted the stranger inside, whereupon the melancholy strains could be heard once more.

Dr. Armus followed the nurse up the back stairs, dismissed her with short bow, and watched as she disappeared into the deepening shades of chairs and tables, becoming just another of the many spectral silhouettes which haunted the house. There was no mistake about it; there was a shadow, or maybe it was a shroud, but something was definitely enveloping this house, strangling all life and colour. Standing before the door, Dr. Armus could feel the life within; the presence of some force, warped by sickness and incapacitation. A life force that, because of the uselessness of its body, has turned within to the mind, where it sits, sulking and conniving.

"What clever devices will you have for me this time, Titus, my boy?" the doctor mused, gently tapping his umbrella against the door. Silence. He tapped again more forcefully than before; this time being answered by a faint grunt, as from one occupied and annoyed by extraneous disturbance. "Rudeness," muttered the doctor. "Rudeness and total lack of breeding." For the past few months, Armus had acquired the habit of mumbling to himself, verbally lashing his unseen patient. In fact, his wife had noticed the increased frequency with which her husband would lock himself in his study; planning his therapy for the boy she often thought.

He drew himself up and nearly struck the door the third time when a voice inside announced, "Come in, doctor. It's your turn." Dr. Armus entered and shut the door firmly behind him, chuckling over some unspoken joke, thinking of the gardener. He shaded his eyes from the late-afternoon sun streaming through the dusty panes, surveying the garish and absurd atmosphere before him.

The room appeared ravaged at first glance, yet there was a very clear sense of symmetry and order. The chaos was confined to the objects in the room, themselves, and regardless of how orderly they were arranged, the furtive and conscientious punishment inflicted on them was self-evident. A toy fort rested beside the bolster bed, surrounded with siege towers, each tiny hinge and every wood ship meticulously hand-fashioned, polished and oiled to retain an Old World lustre, illustrating

the expertise of their maker. The battle was obviously decided, as the courtyard was covered by long rows of tin bodies, and from each parapet hung rows of tin heads still helmeted, the fierce, lean look of battle still caught on each face. Numerous other diversions were scattered about the room: shelves of miniature cars, each with its specific imperfection; cars without wheels, roofs, or engines. All these missing pieces were arranged and catalogued in a box, the Transport Box, so that whoever possessed this box would ultimately control all transit in the room. Titus, presently controlling the box with a key he hid under his pillow, often boasted of his iron-fisted stifling of all traffic. Above an antique highboy hung a crucifix, suspended from the ceiling, perpetually knocking the head of a sculptured man painting. Titus himself was sitting in a high-backed stuffed chair, gazing out the window. He was not a small boy, yet he appeared dwarfed when huddled in the chair, wrapped in a comforter. Often he would sit motionless for hours, becoming in a sense just another of the room's possessions, although to look in his eyes, one could see something still very much alive; something not necessarily curious, but very aware of his surroundings.

Without turning, the boy suddenly declared in an annoyed tone, "Look at this device." He pointed to his side at what must have once been a model steam engine. "You brought it to me broken. Broken, do you hear me?"

"Titus, I assure you the engine worked fine when I -"

"Precisely, doctor, that's the very point. I've spent hours, literally hours, fixing it. Look at it now; it sits there, quite useless and stupid, as it should. And look at those pines, outside there." he went on. "They're withering from the drought. It will get cold soon, so cold they can't live. You have not tended to them, doctor, against my express wishes."

The doctor habitually traded retorts with Titus, taking delight in seeing the fire flare in the boy's eyes; yet this afternoon, he felt backed into a corner and merely shifted from foot to foot. Finally, he managed to stammer, "Titus, your mother, think of your mother. This rudeness shows no progress whatsoever. I'm not the object of your frustrations and I resent your interpreting my presence as such. If your mother ever found out what happened this morning she'd -"

"Mummy? Oh don't worry about her; she won't dismiss you - at least not now. She won't have to." Titus snorted in obvious contempt for his mother.

"Now listen here, young man," the doctor was angered now. "If you think for one minute that that is why -"

"Silence," shrieked the boy as he spun around, facing his adversary with a cold grimace. "I'm sorry, doctor, but I know why and what you are. Do you think I'm helpless! Dependent?" he sneered, pointing to the wheel chair in the corner. "I will never sit there again. Never! And these braces, a foolish gesture, doctor; they are useless." He flung one at the bed and pushed his chair around with the other. "You bring me potted plants," he continued, his temper rising. "Cruel, very cruel. And that -" he gestured once more at the engine. "It was just like you: perfect motion. So precise, so . . . fluid. The best of mechanisms is not invulnerable, doctor, even you must understand that." He paused, rubbing

his forehead. "Can't you see what you have forced me into doing? You think I'm sick, strapping me in that chair, potted like a plant? We will see, doctor, won't we?" He clasped his hands, the passion fading as his mouth curled up.

Titus fumbled underneath the cushion, producing a large lump of purple cloth, which he unfolded with great flourish and tossed aside, yielding a small, shining pistol in his lap. Dr. Armus swallowed nervously, making a motion towards the boy, but baulked at the wave of a hand. They both remained stationary for several seconds, the doctor's eyes transfixed on the figure of the boy toying with the gun.

"Where - where did you get that?" choked the doctor hoarsely.

"This? Mummy gave it to me. She gives me anything I want. It's a simple process, simple but . . . effective. I say to her, with a twinkle in my eye, 'Mummy, will you ever leave me?' Naturally she says no and we drop it, but when she leaves, the whimpering starts. I shout, 'Mummy, you promised.' If she turns, I've got her." Titus snatched at the air, and then continued, contemplating his clenched fist. "Then I say, 'Mummy, can I have a gun? It will make me happier when you're not here.' It's a bit selfish, I know, but then the ends justify the means. Oh, but you needn't worry, doctor; I'm not going to use it on myself." He looked down again at the gun, and then grasped it resolutely. ". . . Most certainly not myself . . ."

The doctor simply shut his eyes.

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"Those pines are withering from the drought. It will get cold, so cold they can't live. They will not die, they can not - I wish the doctor could have told the gardener to bind them."

Strings Attached

The figure lay on the water, limp, lifeless; the cold, frothy water which bore him, surging and ebbing over his body. His clothes were wafted in the swells; his outstretched arms and legs rose and fell helplessly while his body tossed and arched.

He was a fisherman, once, a man whose life was tied inexorably to the sea, and the present consequence of his state was no less tied so. It was not strange. A relationship still existed but its terms had been altered subtly. The man had stalked the sea in his natural life, pulling his very existence from it, the fish shuddering, spinning and dying on his line. The sea, in turn, relentlessly baited and drew him to it. The sea had turned the tables on the hunter. The eternity of the sea had overcome the finity of man and now controlled him; the man and the sea equal in soulessness. Perpetual.

Still the body remains limp, cold; but the sea coaxes it to life, once more to revive the old bargain. Arms swaying, reeling, legs buckling, head bobbing; living - in the way that a puppeteer makes a puppet live.

The very strings which tied the man to the seas are pulled, clumsily and randomly, by an eternal force of surge and flow.

The sea carried its burden carelessly, jostling it lightly on the surf until it was snatched by the land. And the body grew still, the arms edged in the sand, the clothes clotted with algae and bound by thin streamers of kelp - stiff and cold. The strings were broken. The puppet had fallen to the floor. And there it remained without even the sun to provide a spotlight. The sole dividend of an existence: vulnerable, lifeless, dead.

Winter Song

The winter night is very cold
and damp
and still

But for the lonely calls of a wild goose
somewhere
far away

The cacophony of planes screaming
and distant trucks whining
on a distant highway

Trying to rhyme
but failing



