

“My Queen!”

Arthur Compton took the Duties of the Cart more seriously than most *cèilidh* participants realized.

Even Betty, his long-time personal secretary back at Reticular Medicinals, who knew her boss better than anyone, could never have guessed that he would accept such a servile position so readily. Betty knew that Arthur always preferred to be waited on, to be the recipient of fawning and coddling by his various servants, flunkies, interns, aides.

But something had changed. Compton had gone off the rails, so to speak. After playing the wild-man for a while—terrifying large swaths of London as the “Creature of the Deep”—suddenly he was falling over himself to *be-of-service*.

What happened?

Compton’s eagerness vis-à-vis the cart had reached a high pitch. And when Xhactu’s shrill bagpipe blast roused Arthur from his slumber, he practically flew out of the beanbag chair where he’d been dozing, and ran off to the kitchen.

The kitchen staff were ready for him, accustomed as they were to the predictable effects of “highland hospitality” on any Scottish *cèilidh*—the slow, sleepy aftermath; the early morning recounting of fresh dreams for the Morning Round, the calls for “Coffee! And make it snappy!”—and so forth. The staff had already prepared the cart for Arthur, who was “*a right good bloke,*” according to *Don Luis Borbón de Malfíntenga-Parrondo*, the skillful *lavaplatos*—or dishwasher—originally from Extremadura, an aristocrat fallen on hard times, as suggested by his doleful, Melvillian eye.

Following a hyper-quick stop at the loo, followed by an equally quick “rinse-n-go,” Arthur could already *see himself* pushing the Morning Cart around, dispensing mostly-

caffeinated drinks and things. That's what the Cart was designed for—liquid hospitality—for which insulated carafes of coffee and hot water, a selection of tea-bags, a tray for napkins, racks of cups, and so forth, were mandatory in the morning. Arthur was almost starting to feel that *he* was designed for liquid hospitality, because his vision of himself pushing the cart rose to the level of a visionary experience!

As for actual food *per se*, the staff had arranged three long serving-tables along one entire wall, under a hand-painted banner that read: "Full English Breakfast." The tables groaned under a grand assortment of pastries, as well as several immaculate, polished chafing dishes with scrambled eggs and bacon, trays of bangers and mash, bowls of fresh fruits. In Compton's *imaginatio paradiso*, the Cart was also provided with little sample bottles of single-malt, in the medicinal, homeopathic spirit of "*a hair of the dog that bit you.*" Arthur believed it was true, and had tested the hypothesis many times, always finding it to be factual, realistic and helpful. But was the Cart thus provided? Faced with this vision, Compton's mouth watered in antsy anticipation of the tiny bottles.

And yet he was torn.

He dearly wanted to wheel the cart around and among the slack, blanketed and pillowed bodies, while he diligently sampled the goodies of the cart. But he also was dying to recount his dream. And since he and Sally had stood up simultaneously, both having dreamed during the night, he bought himself some time by invoking the "ladies-first" rule. That way, Sally could be the first to tell her dream to the gathering, which gave Compton time to review the details of his own dream, and to ponder—drooling—which pastry he would select first. Donut? Bear claw? Apple tart? Croissant?

But the dreams, though puzzling, were so interesting that he temporarily forgot the cart and its delights.

So—Sally told her dream, Arthur followed suit, and then, as if to crown the Queen herself as a *super-dreamer*—watched over all night long by Owl Man—Her Majesty told her own fascinating dream. Once these three dreams had been recounted, Arthur Compton, in a surprising outburst, began clapping vigorously, as though applauding Sally, himself, and the Queen, incidentally giving the participants a strong impetus to continue the applause on their own.

“Just a little push to get them going,” said Compton unapologetically.

This *jump-starting, auto-applause* quirk was a leftover habit from his days as CEO of Reticular Medicinals. Every time he finished delivering the “State of the Union” speech at the annual shareholders’ meeting, for example, he liked to jump-start the closing round of applause from his own audience.

That was the “old” Compton, from the pre-DCL days—the days of the spotless Bentley, whose last chauffeur was a slick Frenchman named *Jérôme Bonbon du Fleur*. The list includes Arthur’s personal dresser *Helmut von Sapperstein*, formerly from Lichtenstein; plus assorted other corporate flunkies.

Like many CEOs, Compton was a certified bully, which is why his courteous comportment with respect to the Cart would have raised so many eyebrows, had those eyebrows known a little more history than eyebrows usually do.

The cart that Arthur wheeled back into the party was indeed loaded to the gunwales with liquids—mostly coffee, tea, ice water, ice cubes with tongs, and single-malt Scotch for the impatient, vodka for the squeamish. As for goodies with protein—namely, scrambled eggs, bacon, yogurt, pork sausages for the traditionally-minded, and blood-sausage for the adventurous, etc.—the kitchen staff had ferried these treats into the party room, and now, having arrayed several food-warmers along the length of the side-table, the chafing dishes resembled a steam-ship convoy running a blockade by Nazi subs. The ocean surface

consisted of stainless steel ruffled by whitecaps realistically rendered by a white tablecloth. The pastries making up the rest of the feast were the first to disappear.

* * *

Once the first three intrepid dreamers—Arthur, Sally and the Queen—had finished recounting their dreams to the Morning Round, the effect on the other participants was electrifying, a strange but familiar result which Owl Man sometimes referred to as “stirring the *pot-au-feu*.” That’s how he imagined the effects of the dream contents on the *cèilidh* participants—enlivening, electrifying, stimulating.

At first, nobody spoke, because nobody knew what to say. Then suddenly, people began chattering, laughing, exclaiming, yelping, and so on. Fex’s voice could be heard over the crowd, as he roared at one of his own jokes. A stalwart few cracked open the tiny whiskey bottles from the cart, not so much to chug the spirits wholesale, as in, “Down the hatch!”—but more to provision themselves for the inevitable toasts to follow. After all, the Queen’s presence at this most private, even secret, event, was an honor for all, and Owl Man had worked up a few kind words of gratitude to the Queen. It had something to do with “Her Majesty’s sacrifice.” The Owl normally spoke extemporaneously, but he carried his notes in his pocket—at the ready, just in case.

Meanwhile, the tumult swirled around the room like weather, and began to mount. Arthur Compton practically sprinted into the kitchen for refills, double-checked the cart’s offerings, grabbed the handle again, and trundled the whole thing back out to the *cèilidh*. He made the rounds briskly and diligently, making sure that everyone present had been offered “refreshments.” He felt obliged to distribute the goods before any further dreams re-entered the conscious memory-field and made it into Heron Man’s Recording of the Log.

* * *

“What was that?” shouted Xhactu, after the Queen’s dream recitation.

“What was what?” said Owl Man.

“That ... *squeaky* ... sound!” replied Xhactu, pausing to consult his *universal translator* yet again. He could never be quite sure; but fortunately, recent improvements in *translator technology* had enabled Xhactu to translate the most recalcitrant screeches of the galaxy—this one, at least—and come out smelling like a rose.

All heads turned in the direction of Xhactu’s shout, and every eye in those heads was wide open. But it was the Queen herself who was most responsive to Xhactu’s cry.

“Why, what *is* it, my dear Xhactu?” she said. “*Are you alright?*” she implored.

“Oh, my Queen. Thank you for your kindness,” said Xhactu softly, almost in a courtly manner. The *universal translator*— still on his neck—crackled, as if from a great distance, which was true enough, though the “crackle” could also have been interpreted as some kind of local electro-magnetic static. Or even as a bird-call.

As noted, Xhactu had slept in his piper’s outfit, the full regalia: Cap, kilt, vest, stockings with the little holster for the little knife, the *sgain-dubh*—pronounced “skin-do”—the knife that pipers have traditionally carried stuffed into their stockings, from days of yore. Also, keep in mind that the highland-wool fibers that went into that costume fell somewhere on the Toughness Scale between heather, briar-root and granite.

Her Majesty seemed to be in an unusually chirpy mood this morning, which got Xhactu’s attention. With alacrity, the shadow that haunted him after Sally’s dream-recounting, passed from his visage; and a sudden sunrise of delight began flashing across the galactic real estate, the peaks and plains, of his alien’s face. In fact, ever since Her Majesty

had told her dream—which, if you recall, ended with the appearance and the squeaky speech of a little dream-bird that had landed on her hand—Xhactu had moved very close to the Queen, as though wrestling with an obsession. He couldn't take his froggish eyes off of her.

But that wasn't all.

Xhactu was not *ogling* the Queen. Far from it.

He was *seeing into her*.

Or was he *seeing through her*?

No, wait. It was something else. Xhactu was *seeing into the Queen's dream!* There must have been some added emanation, some sparkle, in her presence, something visible anyway. And the other *cèilidh* revelers were rapt. They knew that something dramatic was definitely taking place, something dramatic and dreamy—but no one could name it. They'd never seen such a phenomenon before.

What was it?

“Why, what is it, Mr. Xhactu?” said the Queen, full of sovereign concern for Xhactu, whom she regarded as her finest subject—after Owl Man, of course.

That's when Xhactu's full-sized bagpipe suddenly began making a sound, a feeble wheezing, like an old church organ. While standing behind the Queen, Xhactu had been quietly pumping air into the bags, and soon the tones of the drones began to rise into audibility, almost imperceptibly, like loaves of bread. But in this case, it was not rise and bake, nor even rise and shine: it was *rise and whine!*

Then, with surprising ease, and his eyes closed, Xhactu began running his fingers up and down the chanter, but with odd little flitting motions, as if he were flicking away houseflies. Not only were the manual gestures strange, but the melody as well. It sounded like Xhactu had re-written a passage from *The Magic Flute*, with Papageno traipsing through the woods looking for songbirds to catch and sell, the birds flitting and chirping through the

branches, and so on. We know that Mozart made good use of the flute. We also know that a flute is not a bagpipe. But whoever said that bagpipes cannot reproduce—or at least imitate—birdsong, as well as any flute can?

Anyway, that was exactly the same sound the Queen’s bird was making in her dream. And that’s exactly the sound Xhactu was making on the pipes. In effect, he had heard and understood the songbird’s speech, and was *talking to the dream-bird!* Not just *imitating the birdsong, but communicating with the creature itself.*

The bagpipe’s bird-music took on a more devotional tone, like a forest-hymn. Had there been an organ available, it would have had to be a pipe-organ, thrumbling in the dark forest like Bach’s Mass in D Minor.

But, take note.

The Queen was awake.

She was not dreaming

Yet here was Xhactu, addressing Her Majesty’s dream-bird in its own native, avian tongue, the dream-bird responding in kind.

By this time, everyone had gathered around Xhactu, Her Majesty, and the pipes, and people wanted to know, “What did the dream-bird say?”

At first Xhactu did not reply, but finally he relented.

“She say: ‘I call her My Queen because she is the leader of my heaven.’”

Most likely the word *fealty* was not in the bird’s vocabulary, but it was no matter. The *universal translator* took care of that, with the kind of “software patch” Bill Gates liked to send out to his subscribers, like Halloween candy.

Upon hearing Sally’s voice, gasps of awe flooded the room like surging waves in a sea-lion cave. Xhactu resumed his melodifying. And the faint sound of the chirping dream-bird was actually audible to all. That marked a supreme moment, for Sally had also moved

closer to the Queen and Xhactu, and she let out her wondrous, single *note*, in harmony with the bird and the pipes.

No one present had ever heard a dream-bird singing and speaking before. No one had ever heard bagpipes authentically imitating birdsong. And no one had ever heard Sally's incomparable, soulful note before, let alone the music that poured from her magnificent musical "instrument"—her voice.

Heron Man's Question

Owl Man could not help but notice the fast approach of Heron Man, looking serious and intent, his laptop tucked under his arm, and making a beeline, as much as such was possible among the bodies, beanbags and assorted detritus from last night's cèilidh.

When Heron Man made it through to Owl Man, he leaned in close and whispered, "I need to speak to you outside, where no one can overhear."

"Out back, then, would be the safest place. What can be so delicate?"

"Wait 'til we are outside."

They carefully stepped their way through the assembled crowd, still in awe of the piping and Sally's wondrous notes. Carts were blocking the exit, no doubt violating various fire safety codes. Finally, a path was cleared, and the two men proceeded through to the stairs as murmuring voices and following eyes wondered what was up. They reached the center of the garden and could see a multitude of faces peering down on them through the windows. But no one followed.

Heron Man continued to whisper. "Did you write those dreams, Owl?"

"No, Heron. I thought you must have."

"I wrote them in the log, but I did not write them in the narrative. You know what that means?" Heron Man's expression was as serious as Owl had ever seen.

"It has only one possible meaning: someone or something has gained entry into the narrative cloud as well as the psyche of our characters."

"But Owl, when we are writing, we are not just making up stuff. We are scribing what *comes to us*. Is that not so?"

"Aye, but then we know that it is happening, even if we don't know the who, what, why, when, or where of what comes to us. Were you aware of this in any way?"

“No Owl, I became aware only when Sally and Arthur and The Queen told their dreams. I noted them in the log, but I had no awareness of them earlier. Did you?”

“None at all. A complete blank.”

“This must mean Owl, that we have lost control of the narrative. Or at least some aspects. Do you have any ideas about this?”

“I’m starting to think that dreams, when they are deep enough, begin to come from some source that links with some dimensions of the quantum world. Clearly, the quantum world works in ways that are ‘strange’ by any measure. If this is linked with the deeper aspects of mind, then what happens in that deep mind could surely include intelligences of some form that could be writing in ways we have not yet grasped. But I know one thing. We are about to find out. Recall what Jung said: *We would do well, therefore, to think of the creative process as a living thing implanted in the human psyche.* That is what we are dealing with here. A *living* thing. Heron, I don’t think we are dealing with dream theory, but with some reality that is coming, like Jung’s *coming guest* into our midst. For this reason, I believe we must *welcome* whatever this is, no matter how it may intrude on our authorial intentions. The dreams we have heard so far, are extraordinary because they are manifesting in ways we would not have been able to do. This is something *new* Heron, something utterly *different*. Don’t you agree?”

“I’m wondering Owl how we navigate what’s happening with our cèilidh guests. And how we change our own plans considering what’s happening. This feels like a tricky road at best.”

“We have no choice but to continue as we have been doing and seeing what comes to us from this visitor—or visitors. I would be most interested in hearing more dreams and see if this visitor has been at work in the dreams of others. I think we need to take the attitude that we have something to *learn* from what has happened and what *will be* happening. Given

what we have seen so far, we must be prepared for the dreams to become *real* in ways neither of us have yet imagined.”

The two men were startled when a shout out from the balcony interrupted their conversation.

“Owl Man, come up please. Xhactu has just told a most frightful dream.”

It was The Queen herself who summoned the men and they hurried to follow the royal command, each carrying deep and dark expressions on their faces.