

James Beach

“A Time Traveler Meets a Donor”

PEARL arrived 2000 years from her past into a neo-civilization, a crude quasi-society. The calendar was gone from view and its people fell back on the old paganistic 13 cycles per annum, 28 days a cycle (plus a leap month here and there to keep the seasons consistent). Solstices, equinoxes became again integral, all the planting and toiling of the fields, the harvest and hence: mere survival.

To get to this future, Pearl had sewn herself into an egg-like latch-hook pod and envisioned getting out of the insane hoopla of 1003 and to a utopian place. She cast various spells, drowned her sense(s) in incantations. Utopian idealism ran as a submerged current. Everything she was doing, in her limited consciousness, began to groove. Soon enough the pod rose, and she rumbled and arrived ahead, feeling giddy with nerve, verve. She departed her pod with hopes of winning friends and influencing people.

Pearl was very smart, but ugly. She had a big posterior, squinty eyes, a profusion of freckles, tall irritated gums, flaky scalp and a deformity in her spine gave her a limp; for income she had spent her days oozing enough optimism to entice her premediaeval muses to pose for her canvases.

How exactly she'd witched a pod of yarn and jute to fly-up-and-away remained slightly beyond her intellectual reach; she did grasp the general concept. “Anyone could do this,” she told herself as she roamed the warm hillside; “anyone with imagination.”

The warm hillside soon gave way to a valley of gardens and sunset, the inevitable dark. She hid in a patch of cabbage for awhile, decided the moonlight was brilliant enough, and resumed her canvassing.

Upon discovery by several female barbarians investigating a strange odor, Pearl was bound and gagged and dragged back to their camp. There she was stripped of her habit and thoroughly examined physically. The wild women terrified and paralyzed Pearl with awe. Towering at ten feet, coated in a light dark fuzz, eyes recessed, nails like talons, these females were less like her than an ogre might've been! Perhaps they saw her as an infant, smooth, small, premature, desperate? Surely they recognized a link between them, a sameness in her physicality, a primal connection.

Pearl was verified by them as a breedable woman, and was accepted as one of the reeking, hirsute, clit-fingering clan. They dressed her in their garb of woven fronds, offered her a platter of purplish round raw meats (she declined, however hungry; the meat looked like testicles). Before long a smaller, less menacing version of the adult females, a very young “girl,” barely hairy and about her height, took her hand and gave her a tour of the land.

First thing she noticed: the males were confined to individual cells underground, kept apart from each other even by sight. She was allowed to view empty cells, then peek down at a man asleep through a ceiling window. Each of them might believe he was the only man in the world... Pearl thought much of trying to liberate one of them but was too frightened to do anything more than obediently follow the girl leading the tour of camp.

Of note, as a consequence of womankind rising to power, the male of the species shrank, physically and spiritually. There was nothing more to a man than his ejaculate, as far as Pearl could see. She felt ill, a bit exhilarated. The world had flipped on its axis.

Where were the libraries, the judicial halls, the castles of the ruling elite? Gone. It took Pearl only an hour to realize that the entire race had shrunk mentally. Little more than predators, the ability of humankind to rationalize, to pontificate, to produce science and art, vanished. Written language reverted to pictograms.

Certainly the “people” she met in 3003 were questionable as human beings. “People” were hardly people anymore; more like, aliens, or bugs. Womankind lost its nurturing asset while mankind had already been subdued to the point of inefficacy. Tribes of brutal females? Enslavement of sperm-donor males? Yes!

Females had somehow gotten the upper hand. Womankind (or, as some men, while still able to muster a sense of humor, labeled it: “womanevil”,) had grown to absurd, gangling proportions. This increase in stature happened after they extracted and ingested the male sex from most of their human counterparts. A secret ritual, set usually during a night raid, and often during cataclysm, such as a fire or thunderstorm, this act eventually became too easy, what with all the men ludicrously dependent on technology and blindly trusting of their wives and mothers —

Yet how did Pearl learn of this? Rather than analyzing right away, she did so during the months after this story takes place, after studying in 2003 the whole of an elementary school’s library and making an hypothesis...

÷

A sperm donor shivered on straw that had been thrown in its cage and pulled its legs close to its torso for warmth. It spent entire nights this way, usually awake, sometimes sleeping. Though unshackled, it had only a body-length by a body-length in which to maneuver, to eat, to sleep. Its bent, distorted frame had stopped growing due to this lifelong constriction, the constriction of its forefathers.

The donor did notice a few facts. One, its body was much smaller than *their* bodies. Two, *they* stood twice as tall, *their* long limbs and torsos and thick hair, fatty orbs on *their* chests swinging rhythmically as *they* raked out the straw-bed. Three, corpulent creases between the pelted crux of *their* lower limbs emitted a dank odor unlike anything else.

The donor was animal. It based its assumptions about living in the world mainly on tactile stuff in the cell — most interesting were the bitter beetles and stinging ants, which the donor

sometimes ate. Spiders out of reach spun webs beyond the donor's comprehension, to catch the flies. The straw below him had a homey, musty odor. Sometimes distant clanging sounds or carts being rolled across the uneven stone halls caught its attention. At night sometimes, as seen through the window in the roof, the moon would shift shape and size.

Usually it spent some amount of time wondering why the stones comprising the floors and the three joining walls were always cold, the straw somewhat warmer although no consolation in cold season. It did notice an accumulation of clumps of its hair and feces and other cell debris if they left it in his pen for more than a few days.

Once in a while it contemplated the shape of the ceiling and the hole up there letting in breezes. The donor occasionally mulled *their* language, barely comprehending the strings of sing-song syllables *they* spoke. Blah-blah-juice! meant that the donor could drink from the ladles that *they* inserted through the bars. Blah-rinse-blah-blah-clean! meant that the donor should stand upright, because *they* were going to blast its cage and its body with a violent stream of tepid water. Blah-blah-blah-blah-sleeve-blah! meant that the donor should make its soft dangly parts stiff by rubbing them on the moist bag until a hot white goo came out, at which point he would ejaculate in the "sleeve," and hand the bag back to *them* through the bars.

One sunlit day during the summer, a few new moons before the arrival of Pearl, the donor caught a glimpse of another donor through the bars of its cage. Pressing against the steel, it watched as *they* led the look-alike down the corridor by its upper limbs, which were bound behind its neck.

Wanting to make contact, the caged donor grated with what was left of its vocal chords (viscerally but not consciously aware that a brutal surgical procedure had dislocated his voice), stroking with its cramped up fingers the round concave scar on its throat. The clone in the hall, perhaps sensing primitive memories of camaraderie in his chromosomes, sniffed the air, recognizing a vague sameness, yet out of forced captivity kept its eyes on the path ahead.

x

SPERMATAZOA were plunged deep inside Pearl a dozen times before she lost count. Almost immediately insemination occurred; she could sense this. Her first child would be an ogre or a dwarf! Both genders of the future gave her the heebie-jeebies, the male being a bit easier to envision herself holding and raising, as it was much more docile and smooth, albeit hunched up and malnourished, like it had rickets. She cringed at the thought of the female newborn chewing off her teats if she breastfed it. Such was their violent nature! Perhaps she'd have fraternal twins? Fraternal, in her nightmares, with the girl eating the boy and cooing for praise; a twist on Cain and Abel, yet the same lesson, the same killer instinct, these siblings opposite gendered yet the girl was even more brutal as Cain. It took on biblical proportions despite her wiccan thrust.

The sky above, the woodsy scent in the breeze if she shut her eyes, reminded Pearl of her homeland. She'd traveled from a serfdom where men ostensibly ruled, yet women got their way; the sexism there was balanced and seemed to work out for most everyone of age. Children were the blissfully shamed, their energies wasted on play and mirage, the lies and sins of their parents, the truth kept far from them and hence they were objects of speculation and mystique. To Pearl,

this division by age only exacerbated the problems in the village — could not a child see and learn, aspire and think, assume to assist and apprentice? Unanswered, her solution to finding solutions — to “use” the young rather than to “baby” them — fell on deaf and dumb ears, which contributed to why she left her Earthly time span in search of another. Seek, being her progressive label.

In the serfdom, in 1003, a coven of nonpracticing witches had invited her to peruse their books and parchments at her leisure; Pearl got their magick. Their gemstones, powder sifts and tinctures remained off limits, as they held some sort of residual value to the ex-witches, which consequently left Pearl to either hunt for the odd newt or bat, or rely entirely on the energy flows she could discern in the chaos round the village and outskirts. (Being a pacifist, Pearl left the eyes of newt within the newts she caught, never chancing upon a dead one yet somehow extracting newt tears; the bats were more difficult to deal with, as their wings did not secrete.) Her immediate family, small and law-abiding, innocuous in the eyes of the ruling class, were best kept in the dark re her latest tricks, she decided; they were simple folk. They all loved her, for her genes, her painting ability.

Here, in the future of the present, with the she-things of 3003 pawing and clawing, cooing and gobbling, dragging at her, here sprang the stuff of nightmare. Her emotive core shook in defiance at the thought of painting a portrait of any one of them, of doing any one of them any artistic justice. A muse was a muse, a devil was a devil! She’d sooner give up her painting talent than capture their demented spirits, embody their sick omnivorous souls on canvas. (To their credit, the women of 3003 did feed and clothe her, appreciate and assuage her dementia.) After awhile Pearl deciphered their language, elapsed (perhaps) from English; it was comprised of hissing and warbling, simple cries and diphthongs, plenty of me-statements of comfort and superiority. Their banter was intriguing, invigorating for a full week, before it began to wear her down. “No better than talking turkeys,” she decided at last.

At nightfall after a week of sperm douches, Pearl got her chance to wander. Her insomnia led her across the fields, which were nearing harvest, and skirting past the woodlands and a body of water that appeared large enough to be a gigantic lake or a coastline; in the humidity, green was exploding.

She did care enough about herself to make the decision to move on to the next destination in her travels and she ventured that night toward where she thought she’d left her latch-hook pod; perhaps she’d already lost her pod to the elements? In her search for the pod, sounds of whimpering, emitting from seeming air, disoriented and unnerved her. She took a moment to get naked of the frond-dress and investigate in the glow of moonlight. Pearl discovered that the whimpering originated in a hole, about the width of her shoulders, in the ground.

-

MUCH of the donor’s day consisted of nothing more or less than the donor could think to do in its cell. It sometimes picked its nose or its anus for fun. An opening in the ceiling, beyond reach on tiptoe, let in sunlight and heat, other times it was moonlight and a chill. The window was large enough to crawl through, if only the donor could think of a way to climb up in there and

out. It was unused to thinking. All it thought was all it knew. All it knew for certain was what *they* told it: blah-rinse-blah-blah-clean! felt like a cold punishment, and blah-blah-juice! tasted good, and blah-blah-blah-sleeve-blah! was heaven for a moment.

Yet the donor grew restless after seeing the other donor, the clone of itself. Everything in its brain turned upside-down. The donor saw how to reach that window and crawl through! First it began to bounce on the straw, a compactor. Then it scooped the straw into a pile, defecated in it twice to increase the density, and found that it could reach even higher. A tragic slip in its sticky feces and the donor crumpled to the stones and began to whimper, loud, in a cycle. It felt a new pain, a physical hurt, its ankle swelling and turning blue... Was that a muscle torn?

Just then, above, appeared a hand, about the same size and color and shape as its own. To whose body did it belong? What was the hand doing in its cell? "Hurry," came the hissing, the soprano voice, freakishly, from the grasping hand. Unsure, of everything, (yet following some primitive adrenaline rush,) the donor stood, reached. Its fingers touched the fingers of the strange hand. As the donor strained to touch the strange hand again, the hand vanished momentarily, only to reappear a few inches closer, deeper, the whole arm showing. Their fingertips touched, the creatures tingled; the donor snortled, became alive.

As if by magick the upper hand locked onto the donor's forearm and hoisted the male up, up and away... Breathless, the donor simply allowed itself to be raised. The coarse edges of the stone gouged at abdomen and ribcage and yet... wait! Rather than feeling an ouch, the donor was elated. The scrape across its flesh meant, it was going off somewhere! Here at last the donor found what it'd always longed for, and kept secret even from itself — escape! freedom! ventilation! The absence of walls...

As the body with the helping hand darted away into the dark (the hand belonged to one of *them*, and yet, somehow, was completely unique of *their* stench and wiles,) the donor watched. Stilted, crippled, is how the donor would some day describe the good-soul rescuer — Face dotted with pigments of the earth, skin fair as the heavens.

Later that night the donor would realize that he too could be a helping hand, that he too could lift donors from their cells and raise them onto the prison roofs to breathe. Breathe! All of them. Only, for the next few moments, the donor was unaware; the donor woke up, blinking at a tiny lightshow happening in the sky.

+

THE way time travel worked this time (and she supposed the way it worked last time, despite totally losing her memory of that trip) was divine: her latch-hook pod a gyroscope on invisible string, straddling the time-space continuum. This, Pearl could feel, as she zipped up and down, round and round, through and over and beneath or above. Her stomach rose in her throat and became her throat, while her throat became her gimp leg, her nose became her anus, her forehead her lungs... She ceased to exist while tripping from here to there or wherever she'd come from and was heading off to, became instead a filament.

Implausible and impossible to hold onto, her donor, had she carried him aboard her craft after the rescue. He would've squirmed, being unable to comprehend time-travel. Not that he was incapable (she hoped) of learning, more that his years of residing in that single cell had so squelched his brains that a decade of tutelage would've been necessary before he understood the concepts of time and teleportation, matter and energy. Beyond any of that learning he would balk at the physical sensation, probably panic, and tear through the jute of the latch-hook hull and plummet out into the mess of time-space, possibly hauling Pearl along with him to an unfathomable nexus.

As it was the vessel barely managed to hold together for its second voyage — when it landed, an exact millennium backward from last point of origin, it split apart, the hull separating into mathematically squared sections, each piece laid out evenly on the ground. Or... what was this? Was this “ground,” as Pearl knew ground to be? More like stone, a gigantic smooth floor, covered with a peculiar nubby cloth.

The room was cavernous, dark. A red luminescence came from down the hall, as if someone had found a way to steadily maintain a torch aglow with clays or tinctures or liquid. Rows of shelving, several tables and chairs, a sturdy ceiling overhead jutting with what might be roots of an ancient tree — very metal to the touch, ordered and symmetrical — roots — perhaps, then, Pearl was underground?

Steady on her feet already, Pearl located a torch, which lit via a metallic pull-chain! How she knew to pull that chain welled from the same mystery as that of how she knew initially how to use her witching craft. “Yes,” she thought, “here I can birth my any wretched offspring. In this cave, this underground chamber, this... athenaeum? a lair of edification!” For each of many shelves was strung with books, the spines teaching and preaching all variety of subject, every fact a body would or could want to know. She selected a book of fables, seated herself on the yarn-patch nearest the strange torch, and began to read the allegories.

Before Pearl knew much of anything, Miss Shagryne rang the first class bell of the day. As was her custom, the fat lady hurried through the library bookstacks, shelving any odd materials left out by the children. Some chore, being a librarian in this digital age; the boys and girls rarely picked up after themselves, entranced as they were in their e-gadgets. She did not immediately notice Pearl, staring at her from a new pile of latch-hook mats. Instead she noticed the mess of mats.

Pearl told her of the future, an incredulous tale of how she'd traveled from premediaeval days to the present. She inquired the year and Miss Shagryne mockingly told her it was 2003, the Year of the Spoiled Child. Pearl merely grimaced. It was all too unbelievable.