

THE HOMI:
A DYSTOPIA

by

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PREFACE

The following story is a fable about a dystopia, a society in which something has gone awfully wrong. But most people in the depicted society don't realize that anything is wrong because they have been socialized and educated in such a manner that they think everything is the way it ought to be. Just a few people come to see what is really going on, and for some time they try to think of what to do about it and they try different ways to deal with the situation, but without much effect. After various twists of the plot, public consciousness is finally aroused and an end to this particular sort of dystopia is brought about.

On one level this is a story about the things that are done to nonhuman animals for the sake of human use. With apologies to the sensibilities of the reader, to make this point vivid the device is used of showing a dystopia in which a certain class of human beings is labeled as nonhuman animals and these are treated as animals are in our society ... e.g., raised for food on factory farms where there is no possibility for a natural, fulfilling animal life to take place, slaughtered for food, experimented upon -- often for trivial purposes, and bred under inhumane conditions that prevent emotional and instinctual fulfillment. The theme of cannibalism is the horrid substratum of this part of the story line, albeit in a society that does not recognize that it is really cannibalism that is going on. The ways that people in this dystopia think about and explain all this to themselves in order to feel morally and emotionally and mentally all right about it are explored.

The story can be thought about in a larger way too as raising questions about the ways that people think and feel and try to justify other sorts of oppressive conditions under which much of humanity lives and has lived. Dehumanization of the Other, followed by a withdrawal of moral

considerability from the Other, as devices often used to help try to justify what people do to other dehumanized people, are themes explored by the story. "Moral considerability" of the Other means that the Other's vital needs and interests are deemed morally relevant and important when we are making decisions that will affect those interests and needs. Western society has traditionally counted only human beings as having moral considerability. Thus, to see the Other as nonhuman or in some way as less than human has been deemed sufficient for not granting the Other moral considerability. The story of the Homi brings these assumptions under question by showing the Other (the Homi) as having many vital interests and needs that are not seen or recognized as important in the dystopia in which the Homi live.

And this is where the issue of the difference between ignorance and wilful ignorance enters in ... what sort of a moral/intellectual obligation are we under to find out more about what our comforts depend upon in the way of exploiting and oppressing others? It is very convenient to our comfort *not* to see the vital interests and needs of the Other when our comfort is at stake. There are examples both past and present of this. For example, the world has since antiquity had the institution of slavery, and slavery still exists in some places in the world today; the slave has usually been seen in a dehumanized way. To give another example, the people of the First World exist in relative comfort at the expense of the people of the Third World, the latter being seen as somehow not on our own level of moral considerability. We "eat" and "experiment on" the existences of other humans, metaphorically, without sufficient thought and knowledge about what we are doing. The story makes this point.

Information about factory farming of food animals, methods of slaughtering animals, and the not uncommonly frivolous, cruel, and unnecessary experimentation on animals, can be found

factually presented and ethically appraised in Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation*.

Newsletters are obtainable from various organizations, constantly updating information on these topics. Examples of such organizations are: Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights (AVAR), Physicians' Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). There are others. The practices done to the Homi in the story are practices actually done to various sorts of animals. Even the phrase "rape rack" as a facet of the breeding process has been used. (See Singer's book.)

The theme of cannibalism is not new in the arts. One thinks of the film "Soylent Green," and another film "Sweeney Todd," and of the essay "A Modest Proposal" by Jonathan Swift. The film "Amistad" isn't about cannibalism but brings to our attention the theme of dehumanization and lack of moral/considerability of the slave class of humans in America during the slavery period. There are many slave narratives also that tell about these things, for example Harriet A. Jacobs' memoir, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Black writer bell hooks has a lot to tell us about these things too in her *Aint I A Woman*. And I won't even try to say anything here about Holocaust narratives of unspeakable practices and what these narratives tell us about the dehumanization of and withdrawal of moral considerability from a huge group of human beings. Roger Gottlieb's *Thinking the Unthinkable* is a remarkable source of Holocaust narratives and analysis. The story about a dystopic society depicted in *The Homi* is not a didactic philosophical essay about all these themes, but explores these themes in social/political philosophy and moral philosophy in a narrative form.

We have something of a model for this method of presentation in a philosophical classic, not about a dystopia (at least not in the view of its author) but a utopia, in Plato's *Republic*. I

think that part of the reason why people have been reading this book for over two thousand years is its presentation of ideas in narrative form with a great deal of dialogue. This method of showing ideas as a part of our lived lives helps us to see ideas afresh. Without endorsing Plato's conclusions, I like his method of presentation, and *The Homi* owes a stylistic debt to Plato.

Marilyn Holly, November, 2001

THE BOBBY

The bobby was very little, maybe a day old, and -- so Pierre Toutmonde, the sorter, thought -- rather pretty if you were looking for a pet. Once in a while sorters could rent a bobby from the Matron, to take home as a pet. You'd have to put down a substantial deposit and also pay for its health shots and for an I.D. collar, of course, in order to get a State Pet Rental License, and a sorter's salary had to stretch pretty far at best, but some of them did manage to rent a pet for their kids. But although tempted, Pierre didn't think he could afford to do this right now. He wasn't married and had no kids, but he'd love some day to have the loan of a pet just like this, this cute little bobby with his blonde wisps, blue eyes, a white pelt, and a nice birth weight of eight pounds. A nicely shaped little thing, something that would make a borrower proud at a pet show. But ... Pierre sighed... not the right time to splurge on luxuries like a pet, right now.

Grimacing, Pierre put the bobby in the last vacant niche in the multilevel bobby transporter rack in his van. A lot of the bobbies were making wailing sounds as he closed the van door. This was the part of a sorter's job that he didn't like. The easier part came before this, the part where he visited the breeding installation and inserted his electronic picture I.D. card, with its imprimatur of a facsimile of Matron's signature on it, in the scanning device at the entrance to the installation. All he had to do then was to go through the several wards of the breeding installation and sort out the newly born males from the females, and take the males, called bobbies, with him on a multilevel wheeled gurney to his van. At the van he'd fill up the niches available with this load of bobbies. Usually he had to stop at several breeding installations in a single morning to get the van filled up. There were other sorters working other routes, of course, sorting out and transporting bobbies from diverse installations in this region.

Luckily, the driver's seat in the van was a sound proof unit, and Pierre didn't have to listen to the wailing of his cargo. He knew, of course, that the wailing was nothing at all to worry about, but he still didn't really like to have to hear it ... something too ... emotional, somehow, in the sound, even though he knew in the rational part of his mind that this was only illusory. After all, a cello or a saxophone can make emotional sorts of sounds, and one scarcely worries about that. Pierre decided to eat his lunchtime sandwich while on his way to the regional central bobbypen to deliver his morning haul. Then he'd begin his afternoon job of crating each bobby and filling and turning on the automatic teat in each crate, checking each automatic teat for cleanliness and smooth functioning as he went along, and also making sure the air temperature was correct. He really should check the slatted wooden floor of each crate too, to see if it was relatively free from the urine and droppings of the previous bobby. Supposedly urine and droppings should fall down between the slats to a pit below that got emptied and scrubbed on a regular maintenance schedule, but everyone knew that absenteeism among sorters was a problem and that cleanliness standards for both the slatted floors of crates and the pits below were not adequately adhered to. The ammonia smell could get overpowering, and could cause problems for a bobby's lungs. A certain percent of the bobbies died during the penning period, from lung disease or other causes, although a cost-benefit analysis had shown that profits exceeded losses nevertheless. But truth to tell, this regional central bobbypen had been cited for infractions of State policy not that long ago, and Pierre's boss had warned all the sorters to get their act together fast. But, Pierre thought, "What can you do?" There wasn't enough help to get it all done up to standard, even when absenteeism wasn't too bad ... and it was usually pretty bad.

Being a sorter was an entry level job that nobody who wanted to get anywhere in life

would stay with for long, and the turnover of these employees was rapid and constant. He, Pierre, wanted to be upwardly mobile. He was a good natured, hard working young man, who hoped to get married and start a family one of these days, and maybe buy a nice little house in the suburbs. If he did this present job well, he could be eligible for a grad student work-study fellowship at the local university, a fellowship sponsored by this State-regulated regional central bobbypen as an incentive to employees. Output on the job, while meeting State standards as much as possible, counted toward one's eligibility. These requirements were a little self-contradictory. Output referred to how many living bobbies that met weight and tenderness and tint requirements a sorter could raise during a sixteen week time unit, while meeting sanitation and dietary requirements. Diet consisted of a liquid mix of high-fat milk powder, vitamins, and minerals delivered in a constant, persistent flow from an automatic teat into each bobby's mouth to a degree short of choking. The diet was iron-free, of course, to help maintain the pale color of the bobby's flesh. And the crate, topless to permit easy access by a sorter, was small enough to prevent the bobby from turning around or moving back and forth, in order to keep his flesh tender. It was simply impossible for Pierre to meet sanitation standards if he were also to meet dietary standards and the dietary delivery schedule enough to meet his output quota.

Pierre sighed a second time as he lowered into a crate the pretty, blue-eyed bobby he'd like so much to borrow as a pet.. This one was wailing hard, and sucked greedily as Pierre put the automatic teat into his mouth. "You'd almost think they have feelings like we do," mused Pierre, looking at the little being. He felt like giving this one a name, but that was strictly against regulations; the training session for sorters had stressed that a sorter should avoid forming any sort of bond with a bobby, and this even included squashing any inclination one

might have to give some favorite bobby a name. The training manual had made it very clear that a bobby's destination was the slaughterhouse, after four months of fattening up indoors in a small crate designed to produce meat of the desired type. The occasional bobbies that got borrowed as pets were exceptions to the naming rule. They /could be named by the borrower pro tem, but they were destined for slaughter at the age of two, when they had to be returned to the bobbypen. You got your deposit back at that time. Such older bobbies, though their flesh was darker and tougher, could still be slaughtered and sold for potroasts and burger meat. But after that time the meat became too sinewy and gamey to attract any market, and also, according to serious State warnings, bobbies who were retained as house pets after the age of two grew quite large and unruly and dangerous and undomesticatable after a time, and could not adapt to the obedient life of a house pet or even be used as reliable working pets such as can be done with dogs who serve as seeing eye dogs or hunting dogs. Of course, a few of these very dangerous creatures were allowed to reach the age of fertility, at which time they were used as artificial insemination donors as long as their output reached standards; after that they were killed and their hides were used for cushion covers or other gewgaws.

Occasionally, sorters who had grown attached to some particular borrowed bobby and who did not want to return it to the pen at age two had been known to comitt the felony of kidnapping a corporation-owned bobby. Such persons were subjected to the fullest prosecution by the law, bringing a prison sentence for life down upon themselves and disgrace on their regional central bobbypen. Not a pretty fate, not the sort of thing that an upwardly mobile young man would want to bring down upon himself and his associates. There were rumors, of rather a Robin Hood genre, of there being a Kung Fu expert who had actually formed a

"bobbynapper gang" (this was the current expression) that professed some sort of odd belief system that no one else could quite figure out, but Pierre put no credibility in such rumors. Probably some sort of a weird New Age cult, if such a gang existed at all, probably all of them brainwashed. "Kids today!" Pierre thought. He was pretty young himself, but thank goodness he'd had a decent upbringing and didn't fall for ideological fads nor would he have dreamed of committing a felony.

After work that day, eating his supper alone in the kitchen of his small apartment, Pierre looked at a copy of the university catalog. If he did make the cut, if he did get picked for a graduate work-study fellowship sponsored by his corporation-owned regional central bobbypen, what sort of career should he head for in the long run? "I'd really like to get out of the meat business," he thought. "I don't want to move on to a slaughterhouse job, certainly, nor a sorter supervisory job nor a slaughter supervisory job. And I don't really want to own a supermarket chain that specializes in the sale of government approved meats, nor do I want to be on the State Meat Regulatory Board. What then? A scientist, a medical experimenter, a professional academic, a corporate executive?" Lots to think about. His mother's cousin Anikka wanted him to study architecture or garden design, or both, with the thought that they might go into business together eventually. She herself was a garden designer, and a very successful one at that. Her methods of applying the principles of Feng Shui to garden design, along with the use of some original and unique principles of combining plant species, colors, scents, water, rocks, statuary, paths, and live butterfly displays, had made her sought out by many celebrities and many of the Beautiful People in fashionable areas. Pierre was very proud of Anikka, and he could picture an aesthetically and intellectually satisfying future if he did in fact take up

architecture or garden design. A far cry from the meat business! He'd have to give this some serious thought.

He sighed still once again. An image had come into his mind, of a little bobby ... the one he'd liked so much today ... gamboling about in a garden. "Pretty little things, some of those bobbies! Imagine one of them outdoors, playing ... if I had kids, my kids could play with the bobby" No. He must put away such thoughts for now. Maybe some day, when he could afford to borrow a pet.

He'd better call Anikka to find out what time this coming Saturday afternoon she was having a showing of the garden she'd just finished on a posh suburban estate in a very, very rich neighborhood on the outskirts of town. It was, he realized, a high point in her career, something she'd been working on for some months and had finally more or less completed with a feeling of very deep satisfaction. The guy she'd designed the garden for, a Buck Wells, was a big honcho in the corporate world, he knew. He bet there'd be some great eats at the garden showing.

FÊTE AT BUCK'S AND JOLIE'S

Chase Wells decided to do it up right and go in one of his nicest outfits, the cream colored blazer and white duck pants, with a tastefully casual light blue, lavender, and cream striped band color shirt open at the neck. Just right! In good taste, suitable for interacting with muckety mucks, yet with a touch of artistic insouciance that showed his independence. He hadn't met the garden designer Anikka before, but when his uncle Buck invited him to this opening ceremony for the newly designed garden on his posh estate, Chase thought it would be well to show up. Uncle Buck Wells was in a position to have some influence about Federal grants for the arts, and Chase was an actor/playwright/director who could use a little monetary assist about now in his career. No point in riling the golden goose. He had an odd premonition that he was at a cusp in his psyche as well as in his career; his stomach chakra was telling him things his mind couldn't quite read. He wondered for the thousandth time what had become of his Aunt Ruby, who had re-taken the last name Glidden. After her divorce from Uncle Buck eleven and a half years ago, she had disappeared and nobody had heard a word from her since then. Chase didn't really dislike Buck's second wife, Jolie. She was indeed pretty. She was also a shopping addict with no serious interests other than playing hostess on Buck's huge estate. She did the latter very well, to be sure, and was probably actually a smart woman. But she had no views, as far as anybody could tell, preferring rather to facilitate and smooth over any rifts in social situations, and Chase found it hard to converse with her.

Should he eat something before going to this gathering? An invitation for four o'clock suggested light refreshments, rather than a serious lunch or even a light supper, but knowing

Buck and Jolie, he figured the refreshments would probably be substantial. Probably best to classify this as dinner, and wait to eat until after he got there. His stomach felt queasy, actually, as it had often been feeling lately since he had started writing his latest play, and something odd seemed to be going on with his vision. It was as if one part of his head were seeing something the other part of his head didn't see. The darnedest thing; his doctor could make nothing of it, and an oculist had, after careful examination of his eyes, told him nothing was wrong there. Other medical tests involving brain scans had turned up nothing abnormal. But this split vision, as he decided to call it, was bringing on headaches. "Maybe I'm just neurotic," he decided. "Like Aunt Ruby. They say she was wacko ... worse than neurotic. I didn't think so, myself, but I was just a kid when she and I talked so much, and maybe I wasn't in any position to judge."

He and Ruby had had a lot of interests in common and had had an ongoing conversation for years when he was a kid, and they'd thought similarly about a lot of things. In Chase's childhood, after working for some time to earn money to help Buck get established in business, she'd gotten a PhD in philosophy, and Chase's bright mind had quickly caught the drift of a lot that she talked about. Much of it made sense to him, and he soon conducted himself as a peer in their conversations, much to his Uncle Buck's annoyance. "Oh, you two are such bores!" Buck used to tell them. "Nobody wants to listen to you two go on and on like that." They talked about values and goals in life for individuals and societies, and about a variety of economic and political systems, about our relations with nature and with animals, and lots of moral problems and ethical analyses. As time went on, Buck's annoyance had turned to resentment and then to anger, as Ruby and Chase began to question a number of received beliefs. He began to sneer at Ruby, "You're not a wife, you're nothing! You're crazy!" Things got very grim as time went

by, and Ruby got badly depressed and talked with a psychotherapist for some time. Then she divorced Buck. Chase didn't mention to Buck any more about his own ideas after that. He'd been only thirteen and a half when Ruby got a divorce and disappeared. He didn't tell Buck that he was writing existential plays nowadays in which a lot of the ideas that he and Ruby had discussed some years ago were being dramatized in the dialogue. He figured that he'd better lie low about this for now, because he didn't want to aggravate Buck who might be in a position to nix his eligibility for some sort of Federal arts grant.

Buck, in the meanwhile, had concluded that time and better influences had by now corrected Chase's earlier cuckoo vein of thought, that he'd no doubt fallen into under the influence of Buck's nutcake ex-wife. But Buck didn't know Chase and didn't know that the latter's thoughts had arisen within him from his own depths and not because of any influence from Ruby; he and Ruby had simply shared ideas that had occurred to both of them independently. But Chase had felt quite shaken by Ruby's depression and her subsequent divorce and disappearance, and he now had moments when he questioned his own ideas as nutty, and other moments when he saw them as promising. "Maybe Ruby and I were both crazy," he thought as he walked over to Buck and Jolie's house. "But it sure was a wonderful *folie à deux*. I'd rather be crazy like that than sane the way most people are." He'd solved his problem about whether to classify his ideas as sane or crazy by writing dramas in which various characters spoke about and disputed issues and ideas, examining them from various perspectives, with ambiguous endings that readers and/or viewers could chew on for some time.

At Buck's and Jolie's house, Chase -- who hadn't gone over there for quite some time

although he lived within walking distance -- saw an amazing expanse of acreage that Buck and Jolie called their "yard." It was at least twenty acres, and he saw that it had now been given a garden design that his consciousness simply couldn't take in visually in any sort of a non-discursive way. Something about it ... it seemed to tug at him ... he was going to have to walk in it, and slowly too, and sniff it and meditate in it and turn down its many serpentine paths, and experience it. This was not a garden like any other he had seen, and he knew it had been done by the growingly touted garden designer Anikka ... so distinguished by now that she used only this one name, her first name, professionally.

A number of the guests were wandering in the garden, but he was hungry, so hungry at this point, and he entered the house and then discovered that some of the guests had gone out to the back patio next the swimming pool, where a number of tables were laden with splendid refreshments brought by a catering firm. There were about forty guests altogether, Chase judged, most of them probably business acquaintances of Buck's, important men and their wives, men who were Amhound executives or else executives in the various subsidiaries of the Amhound Corporation of which Buck was CEO. These were some of the most important people in the country, politically and economically. Amhound -- which had initially built and held its reputation as the corporation running all cross-country public ground transportation --was one of the small number of corporations that now also owned the meat industry, including the bobby branch. There were other branches of the meat industry of course -- the usual ... pork, beef, chicken, lamb, turkey, and so on. Raising bobby meat was the most lucrative branch, providing gourmets and celebrities and the rich with their most desired, prestigious, and delicious source of protein. A whole school of Cordon Bleu cookery had prospered over the

years turning out chefs who specialized in a vast repertoire of bobby dishes.

The refreshments today featured several bobby dishes; Buck figured he may as well advertise Amhound's investment in the meat industry in this way. Several roast suckling bobbies were on platters, with a cute little apple in each mouth and cherry tomatoes for eyes, and a caterer's assistant stood ready with an electric carving knife to serve guests. There was also bobby paté in pastry puffs, and little bobby cutlets mozzarella. Of course there were also heaps of crab legs, jumbo shrimp with shrimp sauce, small roasted chicken legs, salads, fruit cup, fresh strawberries, white wine, Napoleon brandy, and any kind of cocktail you wanted.

Chase looked at the food and felt that dizzy double vision sort of feeling coming over him. He swayed for a second, and the fellow next to him said, "You o.k.?"

"Yeah, guess so," Chase answered woozily. He pointed to the roast suckling bobby platter near him, and said, "I don't like to look at them when they leave the heads on them. They look a little ... human-like, somehow." He paused, and then took stock of the situation and said in a low tone, "I know I sound weird."

"It's o.k.," the other fellow said. He was dressed quite simply in jeans and t-shirt, unlike most of the other guests who were regular fashion plates. "I'm Evan Blake. I'm doing graduate work in journalism and I'm a research assistant to Professor Rip Richards at the university -- he's a journalism professor and he's the editor of *Journalism and Humane Values*, and we're thinking of doing an article on garden design as exemplifying various sorts of values. Professor Richards got the actual invitation to come today but he couldn't make it so he sent me instead. I'm supposed to take notes and try writing up an article about this, and maybe my article will be used."

Chase liked Jason immediately and would have enjoyed talking with him some more, but his Uncle Buck cut into the conversation irritably, objecting to what Chase had just said about the roast suckling bobbies looking a little human-like with their heads left on. "Young man," he said angrily to Chase, "I'd like to whup those ideas right out of your a--. Roast suckling bobbies don't look human in the least little bitty bit. What a notion."

"Sorry, Buck," Chase said deferentially. He decided to go for broke. "You know, I like to write plays. Right now I'm thinking of writing one about a bobby who escapes slaughter and later goes to college and gets a PhD in philosophy."

Buck, and Pierre who was standing nearby and overheard everything, both roared with laughter. Buck said, "Son, why the hell get into this science fiction stuff. Why don't you go into something serious? My ex-wife used to talk about ideas like yours, and you know she was from Nut City, Arizona."

Chase asked, "Where is she now?"

Buck said, "I don't know and I could care less. Ruby was always the wacko one in the family. I sent her to a shrink but it didn't help. And then the damned bitch up and divorced me, I swear I'll never know why, and then she took off somewhere, and I haven't seen hide nor hair since. And good riddance to her."

Pierre, who had been listening hard, turned to Chase and said earnestly, "I studied some philosophy at college, and I take a Cartesian attitude toward bobbies, even though I get a little feeling for them sometimes while I'm on my job." And he explained his job. "But," he continued, "I always remember that they are extremely different from us, and I have trained myself to take a rational, non-emotional stance about all this. I recommend taking this attitude;

you'll feel a lot better, I promise."

Anikka had come up while Pierre was speaking and had heard him say these words. She'd been about to greet Pierre, who after all was her relative and whom she and her husband had taken under their wing when Pierre moved to this region eighteen months ago knowing nobody at the time. But she seemed to change her mind after hearing what Pierre told Chase, and she simply cast a rather odd glance (Chase thought) on Pierre instead of speaking. She drifted off.

Chase ignored Pierre and began to chat with Evan about a rumor he'd heard about a Kung Fu expert and his gang of bobbypappers. "I'd like to write a play about this -- the archetypal hero, of a new type. Of course, I know this Kung Fu guy is just the latest example of humanity's long history of archetypal hero legends. But I like these legends even if they're just myths."

Evan said, "You think the Kung Fu guy is a myth?"

Chase replied, "Probably. I don't really care. It's the idea I'm interested in examining conceptually and emotionally in a drama ... it's a little intellectual, I'm afraid ... I'm interested in mapping the human imagination."

Evan made no reply, just taking notes. Chase went on, "Some say bobbies are as intelligent as pigs, and we know pigs are more intelligent than dogs, and dogs can be trained to serve in several ways -- as K-9 forces in the military, or as sniffer dogs for drugs, or as seeing-eye dogs, and so on. Some bobbies could be trained to be like this ... and why not stretch our imagination and picture some of them getting PhDs?"

"Not the females, god save us," Buck bellowed, jumping back into the conversation. Several guests standing nearby, who knew Buck's marital history, snickered.

Pierre, earnestly and informatively, said, "Females aren't used as bobbies, you know. A

lot of them are used for experimentation, and the healthiest are used for breeding after their fertility begins. The females are called babettes. When you want to refer to both males and females collectively, you refer to them as Homi. They're a genetically altered form of chimp."

"Not in my play!" Chase burst in. "In my play they're a genetically engineered form of human."

"That's disgusting!" Buck roared. "Not in my house, young man, you won't talk like that. And watch it. My ex-wife Ruby used to come out with delusional crap like this -- excuse my French -- and one of you nutcases is already one too many for me.. So watch it, my boy. Just because you fancy yourself a playwright, don't think you can write anything you like no matter how traitorous."

Chase wasn't a boy, he was a young man of twenty-five, and more stubborn than Buck realized. "Traitorous?" he said quietly. "I know your corporation, Amhound, gives huge campaign funds to whichever political party backs your vested interests, and I know you help fund Federal grants for the arts. But this is a democracy, and I can say what I want. And you can't muzzle art like this."

"You damn well better bet I can," Buck yelled. "People like you won't get any Federal funding to support your so-called 'art.' What you're writing is obscene, an attack on fundamental values, a blasphemy."

Buck's wife Jolie came along and said jocularly, "Now guys, enough of this intellectual talk. We're here to celebrate." And turning to her husband she said, "Come along with me, honey, there's somebody I'd like you to meet...." Buck walked away with her grumpily, but soon got absorbed in another conversation with a new neighbor, an international banker.

Chase turned to Pierre and asked, with some delicacy, "These female breeders ... uh ... where do their mates come from?"

Pierre, proud of his knowledge, said, "The bobbypen administrators save out a few of the biggest and healthiest bobbies and let them live until they reach fertility age, when they're used as donors for the artificial insemination process the Matrons run at the breeding installations. Those babettes who've been allowed to reach fertility age are placed on a 'rape rack' -- sort of a conveyer belt thing -- and inseminated in groups.

Chase took a step back, a little uncertainly. "Rape rack?" he exclaimed. "Why call it that?"

"Oh," laughed Pierre, "that's a term animal experimenters use when they inseminate small animals to breed them .. and breeders now use the same term in referring to the artificial insemination of other larger animals too, such as female Homi. They keep careful records, by the way, to make sure a wide enough gene pool is available to keep the stock quality up, over time."

Evan closed his notebook now and said, "Guys, I have to go. I'm meeting my fiancée. Chase, I'd like to get together with you again."

Pierre, affronted, said, "What about me?"

Evan, starting to walk away, said over his shoulder, "Oh ... um. Pierre, why don't you walk in the garden? Your relative Anikka has done something really important here."

So Pierre and Chase set forth into the garden, Pierre taking a few bobby pastry puffs with him. He'd noticed that Anikka and Chase and Evan had not eaten anything other than a bit of fruit. How rude, Pierre thought. To come to a party and not eat hardly anything. He

supposed the guys ate before they came, and maybe Anikka was too excited to eat.

"I feel sick," Chase said suddenly as they rounded a corner in the garden path and suddenly came upon a little group of charming statuary consisting of three marble bobbies gamboling on the lawn. They were adorable. Anikka had suggested the idea, and had put golden pendants around their necks marked with the word "Amhound." Chase had just noticed that the pendants looked like the very sharp, curved golden hand axes used by ancient Peruvian priests in human sacrifice; he'd seen something about this in an anthropology book. This design, in a miniature size, was quite popular right now as a jewelry motif for earrings and necklaces. But the ones on the gamboling marble bobbies were full sized and looked authentic; they were probably imported castings made directly from originals in a Peruvian museum. Few people would know their actual historical use. They gleamed fascinatingly in the sunlight. "Why did Anikka use those pendants for this statuary?" he asked Pierre.

"Oh, I don't know. Probably a fashion statement ... Anikka loves fashion," Pierre said lightly. "Or maybe it's because of some Feng Shui principle ... something about balance ... the softness of the contours of the bobby statues, and the sharpness of the curved edges of the pendants."

Chase reflected that this wasn't balance, it was a *memento mori*. His consciousness reeled a little. Something odd about this garden, something about the scents, the colors, the shapes of things, the sudden turn in the path just now ... he couldn't say what. "I feel really strange," he told Pierre.

Pierre took him to Anikka, saying that Chase felt strange. Anikka, who hadn't met Chase before today, gazed shrewdly into his eyes and face. After reading him closely she didn't seem

at all alarmed. "Chase is all right," she said to both of them. "Chase, you're fine." He believed her, though he didn't know how she could tell. She looked like a charming flower herself, with sunstreaked hair about her face like a marigold flower, wearing an elegant designer V-neck peridot cardigan over a simple A-line black skirt.

"Thanks," he told her simply. And he made courteous farewells, avoiding the still irascible Buck. Anikka looked darkly at Pierre, and he wondered if something was wrong.

"Nice event," he commented tentatively.

"Yes," she said. "And I hope it will get me a lot more commissions. Most of the guests here are high echelon corporate executives with huge estates. I'd like to do gardens for all their estates, I'd like to crisscross the country with a network of my gardens."

"Ambitious," Pierre remarked, laughing.

"Yes," she said.

RUBY

Chase didn't know it, but his Aunt Ruby had just this past week started working at the breeding installation in his area. She was on a research grant from the Comparative Language Association, to study proto-language behavior in breeder babettes. The vocal cords of all babettes were cut at birth, and so, strictly speaking, they did not have language and could make no vocalizations. This made it easier for scientists to do painful experiments on them, undisturbed by cries, and also made the breeder wards quiet during parturition. The assumption was, of course, that babettes are not capable of true language, and that their cries and sounds are purely emotive, or maybe even just mechanical. Thus, the reason for cutting the babettes' vocal cords (using sanitary surgical procedures) was to eliminate cries that could disturb experimenters and breeders in the focussed performance of their jobs. There had been reports from some pet borrowers of bobbies that during the months preceding their return to the bobbypen they made sounds that were mimetic of human sounds, but these reports were taken lightly by the scientific establishment. "Sure, and I've heard dogs 'sing,'" one scientist had joked. "And I could swear my cat said 'mama' to me the other day." The scientific consensus was that doting pet borrowers and owners will say things like this out of pride and fondness, and it's a human weakness to make such claims. But serious people don't take such notions seriously.

There was another unquestioned assumption too, namely that the life of a bobby or babette doesn't mean anything to the animal itself, since such animals have no awareness of a self that continues over time and that remembers, hopes, plans, and so on, as we do. "They are conscious," scientists said, "but not self conscious. And without self-consciousness there is no

self there, as the subject of a life." Some went so far as to say that the use of language is necessary for the development as well as the expression of self-consciousness, and since Homi, both male and female, do not have language, there is no point in postulating that a Homi has a self ... there's no evidence for it, and why multiply postulates beyond necessity. Parsimony is a virtue in scientific explanation. Some critics pointed out that cutting vocal cords would account for the lack of language in female Homi, and the slaughter of most male Homi at four months would account for their lack of language, but this objection was brushed aside as merely a subjective and obstructionistic and anthropocentric intrusion into objective scientific reasoning. The view that Homi, or any animals, have a self and could have language was called "the Disney syndrome," and was a source of irritation and/or spoofing to most scientists.

Ruby was quite familiar with this way of thinking and it had been one of the things she and Chase had discussed with each other years ago. They had both questioned the logic and the alleged 'facts' that fed into the negative views about the Disney syndrome, and this was one of the things that had so riled Ruby's then husband, Buck. Buck's rejection of such questioning was by no means unusual, it was just more highly charged than it would have been for most people because of his personal interest in the raising and marketing of bobby meat. He had seen an opportunity here that was personally very important to him, and Ruby's and Chase's discussion of the ethics and the logic involved in the rejection by scientists of the so-called Disney Syndrome was infuriating. Buck had seen this as an act of sabotage toward his getting where he wanted to get in life.

She remembered how much it had meant personally to Buck to develop the bobby meat subsidiary of Amhound. Bobby meat was the "caviar" of the meat industry. It was awfully

expensive per pound, and was much sought after by celebrities, the Beautiful People, and would-be Beautiful People. For upwardly mobile people, serving bobby meat at dinner parties or as appetizers at cocktail parties was the outward and visible sign that you'd made it into the big time. Buck had come from an extremely poor family that he was ashamed of as a child, and when he grew up he felt quite driven to impress the world with his money and success, to make it look as though he was Old Money instead of the offspring of very poor folks.

As it turned out, Old Money people never really accepted him but he attracted hordes of New Money social companions to his wonderful fêtes, at which the conspicuous consumption of Cordon Bleu bobby meat dishes was a trademark and soon caught on as the way to be really "in" socially. Truth to tell, he didn't make that huge a profit from direct sales by the bobby meat subsidiary of Amhound. The maintenance of breeder babettes up to their breeding years was costly, what with their food bills, vet bills, housing, and wages for a minimal staff. This was why bobby meat was so expensive, and cost-benefit analyses showed the profits from direct sales to be unspectacular. But rumor had it that Buck really made a terrific indirect financial success of his Homi enterprises by virtue of a somewhat mysterious funding via government grants and subsidies, possibly having to do with the use of pre-breeder babettes by the military for various experiments and researches, and possibly also by NASA in its rocket experiments and researches. This was in addition to the regular scientific experimental use of pre-breeder babettes. All this about government subsidies was quite hush hush, but the rumors may well have been true. Buck, with his lavish donations to political campaigns, was well known in D.C., and some favors with respect to government grants and subsidies may well have come his way as a result.

Buck's involvement in the bobby meat industry was personal and emotional, and meant more to him than the making of a profit. It meant self-worth coming from longed-for social acceptance and prestige, plus recognition of his political clout. In retrospect, Ruby could see more clearly why he had felt so threatened by her growing concern in past years about the Homi as possibly human, a concern that threatened the legitimacy of his meat business that helped make him the darling of the New Money crowd.

When Ruby divorced Buck she felt at a low point in her life. She had little money. Buck had been so mad at her that his slick lawyers had pretty much taken her to the cleaners financially, finding ways for him to wiggle out of any community property settlement. She needed a job and jobs in her field were few and far between. She'd finally found a job in D.C. teaching philosophy to hearing- and speech-impaired students at a special school. The job required that she learn signing using the American Sign Language method, which she had found quite fascinating. She soon loved her students and loved exchanging ideas with them by the use of signing with the hands. It was wonderful to see how the students grew and grew mentally in her classrooms, wonderful to see how a light came into their eyes and faces and how they gained in personal self confidence and empowerment as they learned to develop their latent abilities to reason and to question and evaluate arguments.

Ruby felt fulfilled in doing this work, although it could not make up for the pain of her divorce from Buck. She'd cared for him once, and wouldn't have minded if he'd engaged her in lively disagreement about her ideas. But it was his growing dismissal of a lot of what she thought about as crazy, and of her as "wacko," and a "nutcase," that had gotten to her and eroded her feeling. She felt like something she'd once seen the French mime Marcel Marceau depict in

one of his most famous skits. In this skit he at first strides freely about the stage, then becomes increasingly hemmed in by invisible walls on all sides and on top of him too, until at the end he becomes a small huddled form unable to stir in any direction. This was how her relationship with Buck was making her feel more and more, and it was so depressing that she finally had to leave. It was all killing her by inches. But she could remember earlier days when she'd been quite attracted by his zest for life, his confidence and entrepreneurial spirit, his quickness of mind and his decisiveness about practical matters. His physical being had attracted her too. --Alas, Buck and Ruby had proved over time to be ill-suited for marriage to each other. Their natures were incommensurable, even though he couldn't see or believe this for quite a while. He said, "I'll pay for you to see a shrink -- it's an investment. I know it'll help you to adjust to reality, and then things between us will go better." He meant, he expected she'd see during psychotherapy that her way of thinking was neurotic, and she'd give it up and become more like him. But his "investment" didn't pay off, or at least not in his eyes. Ruby's psychotherapy experience had helped her to see that the marriage was a major source of her depression and that Buck wasn't going to change and that she really couldn't stop being the person she was in order to please him ... to choose this would be to choose existential death. And so she had to make the heart wrenching and terrible choice of leaving Buck. She still loved what was lovable in him, but saw that they had truly come to the end of their path together.

She'd missed Chase all these years, missed their talks. Buck had been so mad at her about her leaving him that he'd threatened that if she tried to contact the boy he'd tell the parents that she was crazy, with dangerous ideas, and that the boy must be protected from any contact with her. She knew Buck could and would carry out this threat if she didn't heed it, and so she'd

stayed out of touch with Chase ... hoping that somehow, sometime they'd find a way to resume their friendship and their talks.

It was all so long ago, now. Eleven and a half years ago she'd walked away, and had been in D.C. all this time. "But now," she thought, moving into her newly rented apartment back in the same city she'd left eleven and a half years ago, "now I'm going to take up my life again here in my home town." She'd been born and raised here and had her taproots deep in this region that she dearly loved. If she met anybody she used to know here, they'd not recognize her, she reckoned. She'd had below shoulder length naturally dark brown hair in the past, and now had very short bottle-blond "gamine" hair. The change was a big one, evidently; friends to whom she'd showed past photos of herself remarked that they'd not have recognized the person in the pictures as her. "What do you bet Buck wouldn't know I'm me, if I ran into him," she mused as she unpacked her clothes and put them away in her newly rented furnished place. It didn't matter much any more. She knew Buck had remarried. "Will I run into Chase?" she wondered. "Would we recognize each other any more? He was a kid when we last got together, and I was a lot younger," she reflected ruefully, glancing at her face as she looked in the mirror over the bedroom bureau. "Time has been writing some lines on my face." Would Chase be mad at her, not understanding the lack of any contact? Would Buck have defamed her to the boy as "wacko" and undermined the relationship in that way? She wouldn't put it past him. And indeed, she was right. "Yesterday's shadows are cast over today's path," she thought.

It was about supper time and she decided to stop at a little café downtown, where she and Chase had had a few conversations on early Saturday evenings in the past. It was called Café Bibliophile, and was inside a used book store. You ordered at a counter in the front part of the

café, and could then sit at any one of a number of little tables located in various little rooms whose walls were lined with books. A server would bring your order to you when it was ready. This time, after ordering a salad and a Chai tea, she went directly to the same little table where she and Chase had once met a few times. She found herself thinking about him as she sat there.

In the meanwhile, Chase, who had walked back to his apartment, got into his head a sudden obsessive thought of Ruby and of the Café Bibliophile. It was terribly odd, but he felt very much like going there for a bite of supper. He sometimes believed in ESP, and he wondered if this sudden feeling of wanting a lot to go there right now might mean something. What could it hurt to find out? He'd only eaten fruit at the garden showing and was by now even more hungry than he'd been earlier but was in no mood to cook anything. They made a very good hommus sandwich at this café, he remembered, and a good Spanish potato salad, and marvelous Thai noodles. Yes. He hopped on a bus headed downtown and presently got off and walked into the Café Bibliophile and ordered a meal.

Wandering into the next room he glanced briefly at a woman who sat at one of the little tables. She looked a little dreamy and a little melancholy. Nobody he knew ... or ... something slightly familiar about her ... he looked again, and tentatively moved closer. "Excuse me," he said very politely, "have we met ... do I know you ...?"

She glanced at him and knew him at once, even though he'd grown a lot since she'd last seen him when he was thirteen and a half. "Hello, Chase," she said quietly. "I'm Ruby."

He suddenly sat down, or, rather, collapsed into a seat as he stared at her, speechless with anger, love, compassion, resentment. All hurtling through him at once. "Why didn't you get in touch with me!" he demanded in a gasp with overtones of fierceness.

Ruby's face showed pain. "I wanted to, so much. I missed talking with you so much. But Buck made a threat ... I'll explain later ... it was for your sake that I didn't, Chase. Please believe me. Later on, when I figured you'd be twenty-one I thought of contacting you ... but ... I can't explain ... I was afraid. Afraid of what you might think about me by then."

"I think I can guess...", Chase said softly. "Oh god, I'm so glad you're o.k. ... You are o.k, aren't you?"

She shrugged wearily. "Yeah, I guess. How about you?"

He filled her in about his work with the theater, and she filled him in about her work in D.C. teaching philosophy to speech- and hearing-impaired students, using American Sign Language. It was surprising how quickly they fell back into their old, easy, spontaneous and companionable style of talking. "What brought you back to town now?" Chase asked.

She told him about her Comparative Language Association grant to study proto-language in babettes. "I'm going to teach them to communicate by signs in American sign Language," she said. "The breeding installations have been having trouble getting the breeder babettes to follow simple commands. Of course, the Homi can't read or write, you know, and the very idea of teaching them how to communicate in any way has seemed to be preposterous to most people. But I've proposed to find out if commands could be given them and understood by them, using sign language, while also teaching them to recognize the sound of the appropriate English words. Nobody has tried out either idea so far. Maybe they could be taught to understand commands given them in English, and to respond when needed using sign language."

Chase gave her a subtle glance, remembering some of their speculations of the past. "That all you're up to?" he enquired.

"Don't ask," she parried, but her eyes answered him.

Some strange, long forgotten energy rushed through him. "Ruby!" he said with a firmness in his voice, "Ruby ... you're not wacko."

"Thanks," she told him wryly. "You're not wacko either, by the way."

"Thanks. I've wondered about myself sometimes." They both laughed long and hard.

"Don't tell Buck about me," she advised him.

"Not a word," he promised, pretending to zip up his lips. "Buck's so busy with his enterprises nowadays, his appointment book is filled up to bursting. And he never comes in here."

Just before they paid the cashier they exchanged addresses and e-mail addresses and agreed to stay in touch. Ruby walked back to her place which was in a downtown apartment house, thinking about her plans for Monday. She was going to start out with a small group of six pre-breeders, females of not quite twelve years old. Hormone injections would start their fertility fairly early, at shortly after the age of twelve; she'd have maybe six months to work with them before their first breeding. "...I'll need to set aside a few days to get acquainted with them first," she mused. This was all unexplored territory, this sort of research, with no guidelines established. She'd have to play it by ear. Six babettes whose lives she might change for good, "... though nobody would believe that!" she thought. Would they be hostile? Threatening? Docile? Restless? Quiet?

Matron was going to be a big problem. She and Ruby hadn't taken to each other at all in the preliminary interview, and Matron had voted against her. But this formidable woman had been overruled by the Comparative Language Association's grant selection committee, who

pointed out that Ruby's qualifications included some years of experience teaching American Sign Language. This is exactly what Matron had objected to; she claimed that Ruby was overqualified. But the committee had picked Ruby over the other candidates for this slot. A sweetener was given to Matron in the form of a matching grant for use in the breeding installation. "She could be difficult, maybe even an enemy," Ruby reflected. Matron had a fixed and unshakable view that breeder babettes were animals who were beyond the reach of any real communication, and must be trained to obedience by operant conditioning ... mild electric shocks for unwanted responses, and food pellets for desired responses. She'd always done it this way, and so had everyone, and these newfangled research ideas were a waste of taxpayers' money, in Matron's view. "She'll be watching my every move," Ruby thought, "hoping to catch me out in some mistake." She wouldn't like to have Matron, an authoritarian, heavy-handed person, as her enemy. "Hope this isn't a collision just waiting to happen," she said to herself. "Maybe I really am daft to be getting into this." Ruby lay down and watched some Saturday evening Public Television comedies. At that same time, Evan was entering the room where his Kung Fu students were waiting for their weekend workout. He and his fiancée had decided to have a late evening supper afterward. They'd done a little food shopping a bit earlier on when he'd returned from the garden showing. Chase had gone back to his place and resumed work on his latest play, and Anikka had gone home to dinner with her professor husband. Pierre was feeling lonely at a second-rate neighborhood movie, wishing he had somewhere better to go.

HELLO, DEIRDRE

#927 cowered in a corner of the play space, holding her arms around her body and not moving around. She had been kept as a good potential breeder despite the experiment that had been done on her and some other babettes when they were little. Each of them had been put in an individual isolation chamber with inward-sloping vertical sides that ended in a rounded bottom. She had been confined there alone as an infant for 45 days (fed with an automatic teat), for the experimenters to find out what the effects would be. They predicted hopelessness and despair and helplessness, and the results seemed to bear this out. The experiment was to be replicated in further research. Since that time, #927 had been allowed to join other breeder babettes in the play space, in minimal accord with the improved Animal Welfare Act that mandated that laboratory animals be provided with adequate exercise and housing, although little effort was being made to supervise actual practice. Of course the mandate did not apply to animals during the course of the experiment itself. The play space was a 12 foot by 16 foot room that contained a couple of jungle gyms and a sandbox and some large nesting blocks and a couple of short tunnels, and it was painted green with a green concrete floor. The dozen breeder babettes that this installation was keeping at the present time were put in there much of the day, because it was believed that they had sociability needs that would be met in this manner. Since they could not talk or make sounds, their conjoint play was very limited and oddly quiet. A lot of them were, like #927, prone to cower quietly in corners even though the isolation experiment had been done a long time ago. The length of the after effects was one of the things that was being studied. In the interests of scientific clarity, these particular babettes had not been

experimented on in other ways since the isolation experiment, and in order not to waste them it had been decided to keep them for breeding even though this would require extra food and more work for the maintenance staff.

There were differences among theoreticians as to whether babettes felt anything like our emotions at all; if they did not, then the putatively emotional effects of the isolation experiments would tell us nothing about humans. One important group of researchers experimented under the claim that there were proto-emotions something like ours going on in babettes. These people thought that the isolation experiments might tell us something about depression in humans, even though critics pointed out that many variables present in human situations were absent in the experimental situation, and hence such experiments would be useless. A few researchers believed that animals do not have any feelings at all, being just little mechanisms -- these were the strict Cartesians and their disciples. They claimed that the experiments would be just a waste of money, period, unless something other than information about depression could be ascertained. This coterie killed their experimental babette infants after the 45 days and dissected them to see if the isolation had produced any physical changes in comparison with nonexperimental babette infants. Of course, an adequate number of each type of infant babette had had to be killed and dissected, and interpretations of the results differed between different observers. Much replication would have to be done. Replications had by now been done and done and done, over and over, with always the claim that results were still inconclusive and more research would be needed. Some critics said that whether or not babettes do feel anything like what we feel, or anything at all, none of these experiments had any usefulness at all to anyone, and hence all these experiments were a waste of money. But various researchers had based their

careers on doing research under the banner of one or another of the schools of thought on whether babettes feel anything like our emotions, had become influential in their branch of work and wanted to defend it, and had guided many PhD students through a training designed to perpetuate the assumptions and methodology of one of the schools of thought on whether babettes feel anything like our emotions. Therefore, no change of experimental direction was likely to come about any time soon. #927 was one of a group of babettes that had been experimented on by an experimenter who thought that babettes do have proto-emotions somewhat like ours, so that results of the isolation experimentation on those babettes might be useful in understanding human depression -- despite serious and unanswered objections of critics. She and the others in her experimental group were therefore not among those babettes that were killed and dissected.

#927 stirred in her corner and looked around briefly. There was now a stranger in the room whom #927 hadn't seen before, and she pulled her body as much as she could even farther into the corner. The stranger approached her and stopped carefully several feet away. "Hello," said Ruby to #927. She signed a hello with her hands. #927 just stared. Very, very gently Ruby took #927's hands ("Oops, should I call them hands," Ruby wondered) and molded them into a hello sign. #927 just looked confused. "Good, good," said Ruby, and gave her a sweet, eating one herself to show what it was for. #927 cautiously put the sweet in her mouth and ate it, and seemed to like it. She was eleven years old, Matron had said, and was to be one of the six breeder babettes with whom Ruby was to work during the next six months. This babette was dressed in a loose jumper, and wasn't wearing diapers, Ruby observed; presumably the babettes who were allowed to live to fertility age were housebroken. "That's a mercy," Ruby thought.

And she noticed an open toilet, none too clean and a bit odorous, standing on one wall of the play space. A babette was using it at the moment. Well ... privacy presumably had no purpose or value in this setting. Ruby observed some grooming behavior among a few of the babettes, but only a very little. They all looked pretty dispirited ... if one could permit oneself such an anthropomorphic term.

"I'm going to call you Deirdre," Ruby said to #927, and made a sign with her hands for this name, pointed to #927, and made the sign again. She molded Deidre's hands into this sign and then quickly pointed to her, repeating this several times.. Then Ruby made the sign for "Ruby," and pointed to herself several times, and molded Deidre's hands into this sign too. It was impossible to tell if Deirdre was getting the idea of naming. Ruby gave her another sweet anyway, to build good will. Deirdre had shaggy dark hair and bangs hanging over her face, and she was about five feet tall and about 85 pounds. They'd have to fatten her up a bit more before the breeding. Risky business, this, giving #927 a name. This was, as Ruby well knew, strictly against regulations. No bonding was to take place; Matron had made that very clear. But calling somebody ... oops! ... calling any creature by a number didn't feel comfortable. And Matron would never know, if Ruby were careful.

Ruby made the sign for "Goodbye," had Deirdre copy it, and turned away to leave the room. She doubted that anything had gotten through. With her back turned she didn't see Deirdre practicing pointing to herself and signing "Deirdre," and pointing at Ruby's retreating figure and signing "Ruby." And she didn't see how Deirdre, during the following hours, practiced the whole four word repertoire over and over, "Hello," "Goodbye," "Deirdre," and "Ruby." Nor did she see several of the other breeder babettes gathering around to watch this,

and trying to copy it. A little ripple of excitement was going on in the play space about this new thing that had happened.

Ruby met the other five breeder babettes with whom she was to work, the next day, and, in secrecy, taught each of them how to sign her new name: Mary, Anne, Jane, Alice, Grace. She also taught them how to sign hello and goodbye and Ruby. She spent more time with Deirdre, and was quite thrilled to find that when Deirdre first saw her the next day she immediately signed Hello Ruby, pointed to Ruby, and then signed Deirdre, pointing to herself. "Good, good!" Ruby said excitedly, and showed her the sign for Good. Deirdre got another sweet when she copied it correctly. "Good Deirdre," Ruby said to Deirdre, articulating carefully while signing the words, knowing that the breeder babettes weren't hearing impaired and presumably could be taught to understand at least some English words if somebody took the trouble. Now Deirdre had a new word to sign and to combine with other words. What a clever babette she was ... she immediately signed Good Ruby, and pointed to Ruby's mouth and then to the bag of sweets, seeming to say that Ruby should give herself a sweet. Ruby popped one into her own mouth, and Deirdre got terrifically excited, and momentarily came out of her seemingly dispirited state. Ruby had the impression that this excitement was about the experience of communication, that was new and evidently thrilling to Deirdre.

The babettes were not strangers to some experiences and observations of communication, even though Deirdre and her companions were individually withdrawn and rather solitary though physically together in the play space. They had seen and heard Matron talking and gesturing with the day caretaker and the night watchman. Also, they had heard short, simple commands coming at them from these people now and then, followed by food pellets or mild electric shocks

depending on the babettes' responses. All of this had been sporadic, none of it prolonged or instructive or conducive to the building up of vocabulary and concepts. Nevertheless, the important fact that there is such a thing as communication by means of word and gesture was known to the babettes. So it wasn't difficult for Deirdre to grasp that Ruby was communicating with her by means of words and hand gestures, and this made it possible for Deirdre, and presently the others, to learn signing fairly easily.

"I think you're going to be teacher's pet, Deirdre," Ruby told her pupil, smiling warmly, knowing that Deirdre wouldn't understand the sentence. But Deirdre clearly did understand that the sentence was some sort of communication, and she started to make random motions with her hands as if looking for how to sign the sentence. Ruby helped her out by saying the sentence slowly several times more, signing as she spoke, and Deirdre tried to keep up. Even though she didn't understand what the words and signs were about she was smiling back at Ruby as if she felt something pleasant. "Of course they have feelings, and like ours," Ruby thought to herself. "I knew it. And this girl is smart. Oops! I mean, this babette is smart." Mustn't get into anthropocentric ways of talking, even to oneself. Could be dangerous. She'd have to watch what she said, even what she said to herself. This whole situation was very, very risky. For instance, Deirdre was already showing signs of bonding with Ruby, and shouldn't this be stopped from happening? Such bonding would put a new variable into Deirdre's life that could have longstanding consequences, and in view of the fate that was going to lie ahead for Deirdre, would those consequences be for her best good?

"What am I doing?" Ruby asked herself. "Do I have any moral right to interfere with Deirdre's life?" She really hadn't thought through all this beforehand, not knowing what sorts of

things might take place. Of course, there were reports in the literature about chimps and gorillas being taught American Sign Language for quite some time now, and Ruby knew that bonding could and did take place between trainer and primate in those situations. But this present situation was different. Deirdre had been in an exceedingly taxing isolation experiment in infancy, that had effects all this long time, and had been bred in an indoors cooped-up environment unlike the rather more natural habitat setting in which the chimps and gorillas lived who had been taught signing. And those chimps and gorillas had been allowed normal intimacy with their mothers from birth on, which was not the case for babettes. "They do have feelings and emotions like ours, I'm certain of it," Ruby thought. "I have to be very careful not to create a situation I don't know how to deal with." She stood up straight and said to herself with some considerable resolution, "I'm going to see this through, and do it right, and I'm not going to abandon these gir ... these babettes." Maybe she'd have to find some way to take care of them, afterward ... could she really let them be put on the "rape rack" and be artificially inseminated, and bred again after six weeks, and again, and again, for a decade at least?

"Oh, god, why didn't I think of all this before?" she groaned. But how could she have? This whole thing was entirely new, nobody had done it before, nothing was known about it. She hadn't anticipated how quickly Deirdre and the others could get the idea of signing and learn words as fast as ... as fast as ... as Ruby didn't finish that thought.

What if ... what if She and Chase, in their past conversations, had finished that thought and had been scared when they did.

She went into the staff lounge to think and to collect herself. Luckily nobody was in there at the moment. The lounge was fairly large and pleasantly furnished with sofas and armchairs

and coffee table and end tables, a Mr. Coffee coffeemaker and cups, and magazines. There was a nice wall-to-wall carpet, and lamps. It was a striking contrast with the small, bleak babette play space. Ruby sat back in an armchair, and thought hard about Deirdre, Mary, Anne, Jane, Alice, and Grace. She said to herself, "I'll have to get a couple of assistants, and we'll take turns teaching signing so the 'girls' won't develop an exclusive bond with me. Oh god, I can't keep thinking of my subjects as 'girls.' I must think of them as subjects. O.k., well then, what sort of assistants ... young women, I think, not men. My subjects have never in their lives seen any males ... supposedly to prevent any sexual attachments from developing. They're going to be artificially inseminated and they'll have their babes taken away right after birth. No bonding of any kind. I have to keep this in mind; I have to avoid starting up cravings in them that can't be fulfilled."

She remembered the epigraph in Stefan Zweig's novel, *Beware of Pity*, something about how if you're not prepared to walk the last mile with your brother, do not begin the first mile. "I can't give these subjects a good life, single-handedly," she thought. "They should have it a lot better, but I don't know yet how to bring that about. I have to go very slowly in this, and use my head. So ... a couple of assistants ... young women that I can train in American Sign Language. Maybe three of them. How about three grad students, maybe in the humanities ... grad students in English. Not psychology ... they'd have too many pre-set ideas. Yes, grad students in English. How'll I pay them ... my grant won't cover that. I'll call the Comparative Language Association and tell them I have to have funds to pay three grad student assistants and I'll tell them why ... explain I have to avoid exclusive bonding with the subjects."

She went to her small office and called immediately, and explained the situation to the

Comparative Language Association's director. Luckily the director was a sympathetic woman who'd been on Ruby's side in getting her this grant. She said the Association did have some grad student work-study grants available, and if Ruby would fax her the request at once, the Association would then fax a notice of the availability of three such grants, together with a job description, to the university's English Department chairman, requesting that candidates should apply as soon as possible since the jobs needed filling as soon as possible. And she said she'd get right on it.

It was fortunate that Ruby had built into her grant structure a period of time to get acquainted with the subjects. She'd now have to get this extended to a month, to allow time for the assistants to get picked and to teach them the rudiments of signing. She'd have to play it a bit by ear, probably teaching the assistants the signing they'd teach the subjects just a step or two ahead of time. In the meanwhile, hard as it was going to be, she must not resume contact with the subjects for now. The next time she saw them she would have to be accompanied by her three assistants. Until then she would work on a program for her subjects. The signing they would learn would have to refer to what was in their environment, and their environment was narrow and bleak, with few stimuli. What about taking the subjects outdoors? No. That would be too stressful. They'd never been outdoors, and would probably just cover in confusion and fear because of being flooded with new stimuli.

She'd have to tell Matron that the program would need to be extended about a month beyond what was initially proposed, postponing the artificial insemination of the subjects for a month. Matron wasn't going to like that. She had her eye on profits, and breeding babettes was a very profitable business and that was really the central focus of this whole breeding installation

enterprise. Well, there was nothing for it, Ruby would have to tell Matron that it was now clear that it would be impossible to proceed without the help of three assistants. She'd have to remind Matron that the terms of the matching grant to the breeding installation stipulated cooperation with Ruby's program.

Just as anticipated, Matron got into an ugly mood when Ruby went to talk with her about adding the three new assistants to the program. "Look," said Matron, "I never liked your program proposal in the first place and I like it even less now."

"I appreciate your frankness," said Ruby in a reassuring and diplomatic tone. "I'd like to work together smoothly." She smiled very pleasantly. Her familiarity with her nephew Chase's experiences in theater since young childhood had empowered Ruby with some histrionic skills. "I'll instruct the assistants to conduct themselves with the greatest professional courtesy," she promised. Matron visibly melted a tiny bit.

"Oh, all right, go ahead," she said gruffly, and stood up to indicate that the colloquy was finished.

Over in the English Department at the university an interesting fax had just been received, about the offer of three grad student work-study grants funded by the Comparative Language Association, applications to be submitted at once to the English Department chairman, and the jobs to commence as soon as three candidates were selected. The English Department chairman and Ruby would conjointly do the selecting.

Ruby called the English Department chairman, Dr. James Goodfellow, right away, and introduced herself on the phone, and said she'd like to meet him as soon as possible to discuss the selection criteria. The chairman sounded like a nice guy, and they set up an appointment for the

next day.

When Dr. James Goodfellow got home that evening he told his wife, Anikka, all about the three new work-study grants that had now become available. Anikka was very excited about it and said she liked the sound of Ruby's project, at least as much of it as she could get the drift of right now.

During the following month while Ruby waited for her new assistants to be picked and to start work, and while she worked on the specifics of her signing program for the babettes, she also gathered more information about the breeding installation and what went on there. Fertility drugs, she learned, were given breeders to produce multiple births and increase stock faster. There were a number of breeding installations in this region, with gestation periods in each installation timed in such a way as to produce several births a week all year long in each region. Thus, each region had many breeding installations within it, and each breeding installation had several breeding units under its roof; altogether, it was indeed a big business. Ruby's forthcoming work with six breeder babettes would be just a little pilot study. Experimental researches were done in an enormous wing of each breeding installation. Infant and little babettes were infected with diseases and new medications were tried on them, or performance-affecting drugs were tried on them to see what performance effects resulted. A number of the subjects died during experimental trials. Also, many of the infant and little babettes were killed after experimentation, to permit dissection to detect neuromuscular and skeletal effects of the experimentation. The experimental babettes who hadn't been killed during or after experiments, or hadn't been too physically disabled by the experiments, were kept for breeding.

Breeder babettes hadn't been taught to understand English; they were put together in play space rooms, a dozen per room, and taught minimal commands by conditioning with mild electric shocks. The staff had no time for individual contact with breeder babettes; each breeding installation had several groups of twelve each, and several play spaces. To keep costs down and profits high, the barest minimum of staff were hired

There was beginning to be just a tiny stir in the literature about there being more humane and evolved ways of teaching babettes commands, other than a very little bit of conditioning by means of the use of electric shock for undesired responses and food pellets for desired responses. But cost-benefit analyses failed to show any increase in profit as a projected result, and actually showed a likely loss of profit, since a lot more staff-- and skilled staff at that -- would need to be hired to teach the understanding of commands in spoken language, although it was admitted that the present method of teaching commands was limited to only the most rudimentary things. Such commands were in addition often useless to the breeder babettes during their post-insemination months of gestation when the vet had to examine them fairly often and needed to get some more complex commands across during the examinations and also for purposes of their post-examination routines. Some vets privately admitted that it would be handy if the breeder babettes could understand commands in spoken English. But Ruby's project of teaching babettes to sign as well as to understand spoken English was flying in the face of accepted economics, accepted practice, and accepted theory. "At a time like this!" a lot of people said. "At a time when there are serious things going on in the world, why on earth would anybody be interested in obscure research on the possibility of communication with Homi?" Homi, after all, were said in textbooks and classrooms to be biologically classifiable as genetically altered

chimps, altered in such a way as to produce a largely hairless, pale skin that marketed well to gourmets who used bobbies for food and to experimenters who found it easier to keep largely hairless babettes sanitary for experimentation purposes. A little pilot study such as Ruby's would make a journal article or two and would then fall by the wayside, since it had no relevance to the increase of profits. --Considerations such as these were in Matron's mind when she expressed disapproval of Ruby's project ... plus, it must be admitted, she didn't want to be upstaged by some academic.

DAVID AND DEIRDRE

As luck would have it, one of the three best-qualified candidates for the grad student work-study grant to assist Ruby turned out to be a guy, David Hartman. He was a very warm, likeable, and bright fellow of twenty-three, who already knew something about signing and who had a simple, empathic manner that quite engaged Ruby's interest, enough to convince her to hire him although at first she'd not intended to hire any males. She talked to David about how it would be important not to bond with the six babettes, and how important it would be not to sexualize the interaction at all since the babettes were destined for repeated breeding by artificial insemination, and no emotional and/or sexual ties were to be allowed between trainers and subjects. She stated that these six breeder babettes were not quite twelve and not quite yet fertile, and had never seen any males before, and were very prone to cowering in corners if anything startled them. She also stated that she'd have to have a little booth built right away around the toilet on one wall of the play space, for the sake of discretion. --The other two assistants, Jean and Caroline, were nice, bright young women of twenty-two and twenty-three respectively, and Ruby felt confident that they now had a good team and could start serious work with the six subject babettes.

It was nearly a month since she had last seen the six when Ruby walked into the play space with David, Jean, and Caroline. Deirdre was standing against a wall when the four came in the room, and she recognized Ruby at once and rushed up to her and hit her hard on the face and shoulders. David started to restrain Deirdre, but Ruby said, "No, let her be. She's angry with me." She signed and said Angry, and pointed to Deirdre, and folded Deirdre's hands into the

sign for Angry. Then Ruby signed Angry Deirdre, while saying the words, and had Deirdre copy this. And now Ruby pretended to slap Deirdre, but stopped short of touching her, frowned, shook her head, and said and signed No. She had Deirdre copy this. Following this she signed the names of David, Jean, and Caroline, to Deirdre, pointing to each in turn and saying their names aloud, and had Deirdre copy this.

"Why did she hit you?" David asked, very puzzled.

"She was mad at me because I haven't been to see her for a month, after I saw her briefly two days in a row almost a month ago. She feels hurt."

The three assistants were startled. "How do you know that?" several of them said.

"I intuit it," Ruby replied. "It's what I would feel if I were in her shoes." She gave Deirdre a sweet, and gave all the other babettes in the room a sweet. The six subjects were to come with the trainers into a little seminar room down the hall ... an odd sight, this, the four trainers luring the six timid and frightened babettes down the hall with the bribe of more sweets. Would the babettes know how to sit in chairs? There were none in the play space, but they got the idea right away when they saw the trainers do it. Ruby and the three assistants had brought a number of common objects into the room, to begin the training.

Ruby noticed that Deirdre seemed quite taken with David, touching his hair and face and clothes and body all over. David seemed a bit uncomfortable, but Ruby said, "It's all right. She hasn't seen a man before." She signed and said Man to Deirdre, and pointed to David. Deirdre copied this, and then Deirdre said David Man. "Yes David Man," Ruby said aloud, and nodded and said Yes again, and signed Yes. Deirdre copied this, and Ruby gave her another sweet. The five other babettes, less familiar with Ruby, sat more quietly, taking everything in

and practicing signing David Man, and Yes.

Then they had their first training session, learning to sign the names of Tray, Meat, Water, Dish. Each babette was encouraged to touch the relevant thing, and to eat some meat and drink some water, learning to sign Eat and Drink. This was enough for the first time, Ruby thought ... maybe too much. Hard to tell how much or how little could and should be done in one session. The idea was at first to try an hour a day to see how it went. Ruby and the three assistants were each to take notes during each training session and type up their notes immediately afterwards, e-mailing their notes to each other to compare. Ruby was to be responsible for composing the final notes for each session, as a composite, to be sent back to each trainer for an accuracy check.

There was no help for it; Deirdre clearly considered herself the head babette in the little group of six babettes, probably because she had had two personal and special encounters with Ruby before the others entered the training. Deirdre also took possession of David from the first training session on, continuing to touch his hair and face and clothes and body each time and getting a little menacing if one or another of the other babettes tried to relate to David. "What to do?" Ruby wondered. She talked it over with David.

"I feel strange about her touching me a lot the way she does," David told her. "She's cute ... sort of ... I mean ... well ... I don't know what I mean."

"Yes, you do. And so do I," Ruby said. "Why don't you say and sign No when she starts touching you again. She already knows No. Better you should say it than I."

So David said and signed No the next time. Deirdre didn't like it and she hit him. Both David and Ruby said and signed No to this, and Deirdre retreated to a corner of the seminar room and sulked and hit the wall. Ruby signed and said Angry Deirdre to her, and Deirdre

signed Yes Angry Deirdre David Good Good.

"She thinks Good means 'sweet,'" Ruby remarked. David smiled and gave Deirdre a sweet, and Deirdre came out of her corner and seemed less sulky. Suddenly Ruby said, "My god, do you realize what just happened! Deirdre made a whole sentence by herself! And when she says David Good Good, it looks to me as if she's applying the idea of "sweet" to both a piece of candy and to a person ... the birth of metaphor." There was a little buzz of excitement in the seminar room as the four trainers took this in.

"David, she's got a crush on you," Jean said.

"We can't have that," Ruby said.

"I know it," David said.

"See that you do," Ruby said, "or I'll sack you."

"What if Jean or Caroline puts her arms around me for a couple of minutes," David suggested. "To make it clear that I have a female."

"Oh brave new world that has such creatures in it," Ruby declaimed histrionically. "O.k., heads it's Jean, tails it's Caroline." She tossed a coin. "It's Caroline."

Caroline put her arms around David for a couple of minutes, and Deirdre started to hit Caroline, but Ruby said and signed Angry Deirdre No, with her voice extra forceful. She said and signed several more times No No No, and said and signed Sit -- a command that had been introduced in that session. Would Deirdre obey, when it went against her own will? They could all see conflict raging on Deirdre's face and in her posture ... love, hate, a desire to please and to get more sweets and a counter desire to hit. Ruby quietly repeated and signed Sit, and with a loving smile held a sweet out to Deirdre just a little to the far side of the chair Ruby

wanted her to sit in, and Deirdre suddenly acceded and was given the sweet. Ruby said and signed Deirdre Good Good.

They all came out of the seminar room at this point, the six babettes going back to the play space and the four trainers into Ruby's little office. "Dramatic session today!" said Ruby. "Frankly guys, I think we're just going to have to play it by ear and do the best we can one day to the next. One thing is clear. Deirdre is really talking now, and the others are not far behind. Deirdre both understands spoken words and can make her own sentences now. This whole thing has pretty dazzling implications. Let's not talk about it outside this office, at present. This little project seems a real sleeper to a lot of people, and let them go on thinking so for the time being. If there's a leak right now, about what's going on, there could be trouble."

"What kind of trouble?" Jean asked.

"The project could get closed down, I suppose, on some sort of pretext. I don't want to take that risk." They all agreed to keep silent about the situation, just telling people if they asked that the training was coming along o.k.

The next session was a little unnerving. The babettes were taught the word and sign Bad, among other things. Deirdre at one point accidentally stepped on and broke a wicker basket that Ruby had brought in filled with a few objects that she'd placed on the table, setting the basket aside on the floor. When Deirdre saw she'd broken the basket she signed Caroline Bad.

"Oh, oh," exclaimed Ruby. "Deirdre is telling a lie! Deirdre is jealous and is telling a lie to make it look like Caroline broke the basket." She said and signed No Caroline Good Good to Dierdre, who, caught out in her lie, retreated a bit shamefacedly into a corner. "Gang," Ruby said excitedly, "this really blows my mind. Lieing is a sign of pretty high intelligence. Koko

the gorilla after she learned signing told a lie something like this, one time, and her trainer got very excited about it, and now I can see why. Deirdre is one very bright babette! But not a word of this to anybody." They all promised there'd be no leaks.

That night David worked late in Ruby's office, putting together his notes and logging all their notes into the computer, to have things ready to go for Ruby the next day. At about 11:30 p.m. he felt sleepy and lay down on the cot on one wall of this very small cramped office. He must have dropped off ... and was he dreaming ... somebody was holding him, rubbing against him. He opened his eyes. There was Deirdre, lying next him close. "Deirdre!" he roared. "What the hell?"

His mind worked fast. There was a sort of very small Babette "dorm" next the play space, where each babette had a bunk and was supposed to spend the night. Deirdre must have gotten up and sneaked out and made her way here to Ruby's office, at first just out of restlessness and then attracted by the light coming out of the open office door. Oh lord, this was awful. Deirdre No No, he said and signed with some agitation. She laughed! David had never seen any babette laugh before and had assumed it wasn't a part of their repertoire. He could swear this wasn't just a laugh, it was a naughty laugh, a laugh of mischief, albeit a silent laugh.

Caroline Bad Bad Ruby Bad Bad David Good Good, signed Deirdre. And then, David Good Good Kiss Kiss Hello, she signed. "'Kiss' was another word the babettes had learned in the training session today. Deirdre made a kiss on David's cheek, laughing some more and signing Kiss Kiss Hello.

David knew he'd be sacked for sure if this went on for even another second. He stood up and backed away from Deirdre, and said and signed No No No Deirdre Bad Bad Deirdre

Goodbye. She didn't budge. He said and signed it all again, this time with some real anger in his voice. The anger seemed to get through to Deirdre and she cowered back into a corner. He took her very firmly by the hand and led her back to the babette bunk room and gave her just the slightest gentle shove into the room saying No No No Deirdre Bad Deirdre Goodbye.

He went back to Ruby's office and finished up his work quickly and went home. This was serious, he realized. He'd have to talk it over with Ruby right away, and maybe leave the program. He hated to have to leave; it was terrifically interesting and he maybe could get an article or two out of it. But Ruby would hit the ceiling when she found out what had just happened, and he couldn't blame her. But ... "It's not my fault," he told himself. "I know I didn't bring this on by anything I did." And he was right. His conduct really had been impeccable.

The next day he said to Ruby they'd have to have a long talk about something pretty serious, and he told her all about what had happened. Ruby was very grave. "I don't know what do, Dave," she admitted. "I can only blame myself. Initially I felt pretty strongly that I should have only female assistants in order to avoid any possibility of sexual bonding on the part of the subject babettes. You know, they're to be artificially inseminated, and bonding is forbidden, including sexual bonding. But your credentials are so good, and I like you, and I started thinking my reservations were excessive. So I hired you. And I am really glad to have you here; your work is topnotch. And I know that you didn't do anything to evoke this situation. It's just Mother Nature. Deirdre is about to come into her fertility period, and I think she wants to mate with you. She can't help it. She's really emotionally attached to you too, and I feel for her because you know she was in an isolation experiment for 45 days as an infant, fed by an

automatic teat, and the long-run effect it seems to have had on her is to create extra strong cravings for emotional bonding and a lot of anger if she's thwarted. Add a burgeoning sexual instinct to this, and you get ... Mount Vesuvius! I really was dumb not to foresee this. It's my fault."

David said, "Nobody ... none of us ... foresaw this. It's nobody's fault. But the question is, what can we do? What should we do? Do you want me to quit? I hate to, I've loved doing this, but I'll quit if it will help resolve this mess."

"No ...," Ruby mused. "I don't think that's the answer. It might just plunge her back into terrible depressiveness, the sort she probably experienced when she was made to stay in the isolation chamber a long time ago. Lets stay with this situation. I wonder if ... well ... maybe if she saw that there are more males in the world ... maybe her fixation on you could be dispersed.... I don't know. We could give it a try. There aren't any books or even articles on babette psychology. We have to figure this out ourselves."

David pondered. "I could bring in four or five male grad students, and you and Deirdre and the grads and I could all sit together in the seminar room and have sweets. That way, Deirdre would feel special as the only babette present with all the men. And we could repeat this sort of session every now and then."

So that is what they did, and Deirdre ended up by making kisses on the faces of a total of six males, and getting sweets from all of them. "Boy crazy!" said Ruby, after seeing this go on for a while. She couldn't tell if this made the situation better or worse, but it let David off the hook and allowed him to maintain something more of a brotherly behavior toward Deirdre, while maintaining the fiction that he had a female, Caroline. Deirdre now felt she had several males

of her own, and she didn't pester David any more, or at least not very much. The other subjects, Mary, Anne, Jane, Alice, and Grace, seemed to be less highly sexed than Deirdre, and although they all made eyes at David now and then, none of them went after him the way Deirdre had. Ruby kept wondering if she'd made a mistake in hiring David, but she felt that if he left, things would probably get out of hand since all the subjects had been in an isolation experiment some years ago and all were at risk with respect to feelings of depression.

THE ABDUCTION OF AMIGO

Pierre Toutmonde tossed restlessly in his sleep, woke from his recurring troubling dream, and dreamed the dream all over again. In it the little blue-eyed bobby he'd liked so much a month ago kept saying things to Pierre with his eyes, awful things, suffering things. The little bobby in the dream let go the automatic teat and wailed and wailed, and Pierre, in the dream, wailed too, his heart breaking with longing, loss, anguish. He awoke again and found himself crying hard and crying out "Help!"

For a little over six weeks now, ever since Anikka's garden showing at Buck's and Jolie's house, Pierre had been getting this dream several times a week, and he was becoming obsessed with it. Ordinarily, in the past, he'd not been aware of dreaming much, or if he did dream he remembered very little of it. But something had changed in him since that afternoon when he and Chase Wells had strolled in a leisurely way in Buck's and Jolie's newly designed garden, the garden in which Chase had suddenly said he felt strange. Other dream fragments that Pierre could remember from these past six weeks showed curving paths in that garden, disturbingly unsuspected vistas and statuary, disturbing mixes of colors; even disturbing dream scents seemed to flow through these dreamlets. Sometimes such a dreamlet would simply focus briefly on the bobby statuary and the gleaming gold pendants, on which -- in the dream vista -- the sun shone so bright that it hurt Pierre's dream eyes, as it were. He'd close his dream eyes, dream of taking the pendants off the bobbies, and then dream of feeling filled with such peace, such a suffusion of joy throughout his whole being, and the paths, the statuary, the colors, the scents became sources of the deepest delight ... as if the removal of the gleaming axe-sharp golden pendants

from the bobby statuaries' necks had completed a Feng Shui process that the actual walk in the garden had begun. These garden dreams, that ended so happily, were followed by the other awful dream that made Pierre cry and cry out, the one in which the blue-eyed bobby he liked so much spoke with his eyes of suffering, loss, and anguish.

Pierre felt he couldn't go on like this. He sprang out of bed and said out loud, "I'll borrow him! Today! I'll bring him home and raise him as my pet. But ... I can't afford the deposit. What'll I do?" The deposit was big, one thousand dollars ... refundable in about two years, but that was no help now. "I'll steal him," Pierre muttered, surprising himself. What was happening to him? Here he was, considering doing a "grand theft, bobby."

"I'll need to get the equipment to take care of him" Pierre thought. It was listed in the pet borrower's manual. He could easily pick up a copy of the manual at work. "But who'll look after him when I'm at work?" The manual said that bobbies brought home as pets need feeding, cleaning up, and so on. Pierre for some reason he didn't really understand wanted to provide his pet bobby something better than that. He'd had the image in his mind ever since he first saw this little being, of a sweet bobby gamboling about, moving freely. It felt good to think about that.

He felt so confused. He called Anikka, even though it was only 8 a.m., and he blurted out his thoughts and feelings and confusions to her. "You need some help in thinking about this," Anikka told him on the phone. She seemed oddly glad to hear what he had to say.

"You mean ... a shrink?" Pierre asked despondently. He'd feared that maybe he was losing it.

"No," Anikka said firmly. "Not a shrink. But somebody to talk with who shares your concerns. Can you make it over for dinner this evening, at six? There's somebody I'd like you

to meet, if he's available. Can you make it?

Pierre said he could. She said, "Good. Don't do anything about the problem yet. Just go to work as usual. I'll call back if the person I want you to meet isn't available, and we'll reschedule." They said goodbye, and hung up.

Anikka immediately called Evan Blake, hoping to catch him at home before he left for his morning graduate school classes. "Hi,," he said, recognizing her voice at once. "I'm just leaving."

"O.k., I'll hurry with this," Anikka promised. "Can you make it over to dinner at six this evening? There's somebody who needs you, fast ... it's Pierre Toutmonde. I think you met him at the garden showing at the Wells's awhile back. He needs you badly, Evan, though he doesn't know it's you he needs."

Evan grimaced, remembering that he hadn't liked Pierre. But he and Anikka had been friends for some months now, and they trusted each other. "O.k.," he answered. "Frankly, I didn't like him. But I'll come if you think I can help. Want me to come alone ... or ...?" Anikka knew he had a fiancée and knew that he kept no secrets from her.

Anikka hesitated, and then said, "Better come alone this time."

That evening Pierre was very startled to see Evan waiting in Anikka Goodfellow's living room at about six. She was in the kitchen preparing the meal. Her husband was away for a few days at a convention. "You!" Pierre exclaimed, when he saw Evan. "Why are you here?"

"Anikka wanted me to meet you."

"I thought you only met her for the first time, by chance, at the garden showing," Pierre blurted out in puzzlement.

"That was just a little deception," Evan told him. "I pretended I met her for the first time there, but we've really known each other for a year. We first met each other at Professor Rip Richard's garden nursery when Anikka came out there to get some advice about plants and I'd gone out there to talk with Rip about applying to be his assistant this year."

Pierre's brain felt as if it were whirling around inside his head. Anikka came in just then and invited them to come into the dining room. "We can talk at table, if you don't mind," she told them. "Time is running short."

"Look," Evan said intensely, leaning forward to look Pierre right in the eyes. "I'll level with you. There's been an underground railroad sort of thing going on for close to thirty years. We rescue a few bobbies when we can ... and it's very risky ... and we take them up to Canada where we have a few connections at a Boys' Ranch. The bobbies have a chance to grow up there."

"Why Canada?" Pierre gasped, his head spinning even faster at this news.

"Canada has had a law against raising and selling bobby meat for the whole time this industry has gone on ... about sixty years now. This was before anybody started talking about the Homi being a genetic alteration of chimps. The Canadian courts argued that Homi bear such a resemblance to humans that raising and slaughtering them for meat would lead to a callous disregard for human life in the public. It was a close call, but the people who were in favor of making all aspects of the Homi meat industry illegal, including importing it into Canada, won out. So we manage to send a few bobbies up there when we can."

"What's your interest in this?" Pierre demanded, feeling suspicious. It all sounded too weird. Could Anikka and Evan just be setting him up to make a fool of him?"

"I'm an ex-bobby," said Evan in a calm, even tone.

Pierre spluttered half of the food out of his mouth, in his astonishment, and dribbles of half-chewed new red potatoes in garlic sauce dribbled down his chin. He wiped his face, then stared hard at Evan, in a state of enormous suspicion.

"It's true," Evan assured him. "I have the papers. Twenty-six years ago my mother worked at the same bobbypen you work at now, and when I was brought in as a day-old newborn she felt she just had to take me home with her. She and my father were childless and she thought a pet would help them. I have the receipt for her deposit, and the papers for my shots, and even the little ID collar that was put on me. After two years, when she was supposed to return me to the bobbypen and get her deposit back, she and my father realized they just couldn't go through with that. So they had a fake human birth certificate made up for me with the name they gave me, and they quietly went up to Canada and settled there and became Canadian citizens."

"You're Canadian," Pierre repeated. "And you think you're a human being."

"Yes, and yes," Evan answered.

Pierre pondered, scared almost silly by this unexpected turn, feeling it must all be some weird joke at his expense. "You can prove all this," he said, now feeling resentful and thinking why me, why me.

"Yes."

Pierre persisted, "Well ... if ... and I'm not saying I believe you, but even if some awful mistake was made and you were put in with the real bobbies, I don't see what concern you'd have now about rescuing other bobbies to send them up to Canada on this ... this underground

railroad, as you call it. And any way, you can't prove you're human."

Evan laughed. "Yes I can. I had a DNA test done, and I'm definitely human."

"That doesn't prove the others are," Pierre said irritably. "Just a fluke, a mistake in your particular case."

"The few other bobbies we've managed to rescue and send up to the Canadian Boys' Ranch test human too," Evan countered. "They're growing up in a cottage system setup, with a housemother and housefather for each six, and they'll go to school when they're old enough. We've been doing this for five years now. But I didn't grow up that way myself. My mother and father after awhile became convinced I was human and had gotten into the bobbypen by mistake, and they raised me as a human. Five years ago when I found out that a DNA test showed me to be truly human, I began to suspect that something fishy is going on in the bobby meat industry, and for a couple of years now a few of us have been rescuing a bobby now and then, when we can, to send up to Canada. And, as I just told you, they've all tested human."

Pierre's mind was reeling more and more. He felt as if the whole foundation of his life was being pulled out from under him. The fall of a house of falsehood. Why oh why had fate given him this strange turn of events ... if these things were true ... what then? What then?

"Sorry to interrupt this dream," said Evan insistently. "If we're going to act we have to do it within the next day or two. The bobby you want for a pet, as you put it, is already about six weeks old and already mentally and emotionally damaged. Soon this will have reached a point of no return. Are you in, or not?"

"I'm in," said Pierre in a low tone that seemed to come directly from his stomach chakra. Everything in his organism was resonating now with what Evan had said, and everything meshed

too with his dreams of the last six weeks.

"Good." Evan now spoke simply and efficiently about the exact arrangements, Pierre would report his bobby as needing a vet tomorrow, and Evan would arrive first thing the following morning in vet clothes and would put the bobby in a little animal carrier and drive off with the carrier, bobby inside. Pierre was to unlock the door to the bobbypen to let Evan in, as soon as the security guard was in another part of the big room.

"What if the security guard tries to stop you?" Pierre asked

"I have a non-violent Kung Fu move, the sleeper move, that usually puts a stop to that," said Evan quietly.

Pierre stared at him once again. "You're ... you're the Kung Fu guy the press has had a few articles about sometimes?"

"Yes," Evan told him. His manner was modest.

"Why haven't you been recognized?"

"I wear vet clothes and a wig and a cap with a long visor for my rescue operations," Evan answered.

"Are all your ... bobbynapping jobs inside jobs like this?" Pierre asked. "I mean ... with an employee cooperating with you?"

"No. This is the first case like that."

"I don't like it. We'll be breaking the law," Pierre demurred.

"Yes."

Pierre pondered. "Why not go to the media ... the Washington Post ... and be a whistle blower? Get the police, the government, to close down this whole bobby business?"

"I hope we'll be doing that soon," Evan said. "But it has to go by stages. The whole scientific establishment likes things just as they are, because little female Homi are used for experimentation. It's not just corporate profits at stake here. Too much money, too much vested interest, too widely and deeply entrenched a mindset! And any evidence offered could be dismissed as faked. But we do have a plan to go public."

"What about doing civil disobedience? Non-violent resistance?"

"Bobbies can't perform acts of civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance," said Evan drily. "And we don't have enough public basis for protesting on the bobbies' behalf at present. By the way, Anikka has been working on peoples' consciousness in her own way, little by little. It worked on you."

Poor Pierre's head was sent spinning once again. "I haven't had any discussions with Anikka about ideas ... or about anything much." He looked at her for corroboration and she smiled a bit mischievously.

"Remember those dreams you told me about in your phone call this morning?" she asked.

"Yes. But what has ...?"

"When did the dreams start?" she pressed him.

Pierre reflected and then said slowly, "Right after I walked through the garden at the Wells's house ... and ... you designed the garden. ...Oh." Then he erupted into sudden anger. "Was there some funny stuff, some psychedelic pollens from those flowers ... did you do that?"

Anikka straightened up in her chair and said icily, "No. I would hate anything like that. I'm interested in promoting people's spiritual growth, not in playing with their heads." She calmed down and rested back against her chair again. "Pierre," look at me." When he did, into

her eyes, she continued, "My garden designs are based on Feng Shui principles, on Buddhist philosophy, on Zen garden design principles, on information available in aromatherapy books, on studies of the emotional effects of various colors -- and all of this information is available to anybody who can read and gather some cross-cultural experiences in gardening. Of course I have my own personal talents that I add to all this. But everything I do is based on Buddhist spirituality, especially Tibetan Buddhism. I've studied with a great *rinpoche*, and I have had the benefit of hearing and talking with the Dalai Lama. I admire their commitment to compassion, to doing no harm, to right livelihood. And I especially revere Kwan Yin, the Goddess of Compassion, who is one of Buddha's incarnations."

Pierre was silenced. He realized he'd scarcely gotten to know Anikka at all before now. "I'm sorry," he mumbled. "All these things this evening have turned my world upside down and I'm very confused." He paused, then asked, "Are you involved with Evan's underground railroad?"

"No," she told him. "I prefer to work within the system. But I understand where Evan is coming from."

After a little more discussion, Evan agreed that he'd come by the bobbypen the morning of the day after tomorrow at opening time to pick up the special little bobby. "His name is Amigo," Pierre said shyly.

"You do know that you won't see Amigo for a while, probably, after I take him the day after tomorrow, in the morning," Evan said to Pierre, gently. "Amigo will be driven up to Canada at once, driven by two good Kung Fu people in my bunch who'll take good care of him. He'll be taken to the Boys' Ranch. You can come up there to visit, you know. And as Amigo

gets bigger you can get to know each other. You're doing this for him, you know ... not for yourself."

"I know" Pierre said rather glumly. This was hard. He'd started out by wanting a pet, and now he had to become an altruist. "I could be like his father," he said hopefully.

"Yes," Evan told him warmly.

"Who pays for the upkeep at the Boys' Ranch?"

Evan explained that his "parents" had by now passed away, and -- having had good success in their livelihoods in Canada -- had left him a sum for the endowment of a Boys' Ranch.

Pierre looked at Evan hard before leaving "Evan," he said, "I don't like to see you breaking the law. For any reason."

Evan said, very soberly, "I hate it. I believe in law and order and in nonviolence. I've agonized over this thing for the last five years. If I'm caught I'll pay the price; I know I'll be sent to prison. But I believe that the bobbies I help are having terrible violence done to them here, and they'd be dead if I didn't help. This whole thing has been the most terrible moral ordeal of my life. I take some inspiration from those who ran the underground railroad during the slavery period."

"I see," said Pierre, thinking hard. "What'll I report about the missing bobby, after you've taken him the day after tomorrow?"

"Tell them you think the Kung Fu guy took him."

Evan felt some of the old stress coming over him now, and a need to talk about it. He told them, "I've asked myself so many times, where do you draw the line? When do you have the moral right to break a law? Where are you standing morally, when you do it? I'm not

religious, but I'm not sure what religion could tell me if I urgently felt that an accepted law is deeply wrong, and when it doesn't seem possible at the time to work within the system to change it ... and when nonviolent resistance isn't applicable. Gandhi ... a great thinker, a noble thinker ... but he didn't envision something like this; he was able to appeal to some sort of ideal of fair play ideal among the British. But the situation with the bobbies is different. The general public doesn't think ideals of fair play are relevant in this instance."

Pierre looked at Anikka carefully, appraisingly. "We'd be in collusion with Evan's breaking the law. At least, we know about it and we aren't trying to stop him."

Anikka said, "Some of us have agonized over this, Pierre. We hate it. But I know I personally feel, after searching my conscience as hard as I can, that I feel all right about not trying to stop Evan. And Evan's professor that he's assisting, Rip Richards, feels all right about it too. Rip and I are part of a movement that has a little lobby in Congress right now, to change the laws that assume that Homi are not human. We believe that Homi are in fact human. We'd have to get permission to get them all DNA tested, and there are very powerful counter-lobbies that are trying to prevent this."

Evan chimed in, "Yes. And Rip Richards, the professor I assist, is running a forthcoming issues of his journal, *Journalism and Humane Values*, on the topic "The Homi: Is Justice Being Done?" Some prominent philosophers and lawyers and journalists and factfinders are contributing articles, and some of the articles recommend amnesty for people who are involved directly or indirectly in the underground railroad. Anikka and I are both contributing position papers in favor of changing the law."

Pierre said thoughtfully, "So ... some people are trying to get a public forum going to

debate the whole thing ... trying to expose the facts and arouse the public conscience."

"Yes." Evan gazed hard at Pierre. "After that journal issue comes out we are planning to have some people in the BWABI speak at a number of public meetings ... Bobby Workers Against the Bobby Industry ... stating what they know is going on. I may go public with my personal story, then. You could take part in that ... or not, as you like. And there will be teach-ins and panels and demonstrations."

"Ah ...," pondered Pierre, "so you are trying as much as you can to work within the system, to change the system."

"I'll work within the system as soon as I can," Evan said. "But not yet. I'm a radical. Anikka and Rip are liberals."

"This is all pretty morally sticky," Pierre said. "What's the difference between you and some cuckoo cult that does awful things because they think God spoke to them, or whatever?"

Evan said with utmost seriousness, "I and my underground railroad connections don't hurt anybody and we're trying to save life, not to take life or hurt life. And we're going to help bring the issues to a public forum for a public debate very shortly."

"Why do classrooms and textbooks all teach that Homi aren't human, if they are?"

Evan said, a bit fiercely, "sixty years ago, when the bobby meat industry got going, DNA tests weren't in use. Some shrewd entrepreneurs got the industry going. It was very lucrative and they claimed the Homi were special chimps bred by Mendelian methods for white, relatively hairless pelts. Later on they claimed the Homi were genetically altered chimps. Enough was known about genetics by then to make this sound plausible. These entrepreneurs lavishly bribed some anthropologists and psychologist and sociologists who were willing to

write books and articles allegedly 'finding' that Homi are nonhuman. The public believed it, thinking it was the view of the experts."

"You can ... buy ... scholars?" gasped Pierre.

"It's not the first time," Evan told him.

"My head, my head!" groaned Pierre. "You are dismantling my world again."

"Well," Evan demanded a little impatiently, "I have to go. Do you want to go through with this or not, Pierre?"

"Yes. Do it," Pierre replied faintly, his eyes tearing up. "Oh god, I wish I didn't know what I know now."

"Yeah," said Evan. "Me too."

They said goodnight.

THE DISAPPEARANCE

Ruby and Chase met for lunch at the Café Bibliophile, and she told him about Deirdre and the other babettes and how the signing was coming along. Chase paid close attention, and said, "Sounds like they're human."

"I think they are," Ruby said.

Chase's face showed a mix of pain and triumph. "I hate it that they're being used the way they are," he burst out. "But remember ... this is just the sort of thing you and I speculated about when we talked years ago, when Buck got so furious at the questions we were raising."

Ruby was silent, remembering.

"What'll we do, Ruby?" he asked.

"I don't know."

He pondered. "Well, that's it, then. I'm going to go ahead with the revision of a script I once began in which a Homi turns out to be human. I've been wanting to do a low-budget film, using grad students, ever since "Blair Witch" came out and was such a hit. You know, they acted and filmed and wrote it themselves ... a couple of grad students. I've got a couple of friends who'll help me. I'll bring in babette characters, in some way."

"Don't get me into trouble, as some sort of informant."

"I won't, Ruby," he promised. "There was a guy, Pierre Toutmonde, at a garden showing I went to over six weeks ago, who was openly talking about the Homi. He works at the regional bobbypen, but he also knows a lot about what goes on with the babettes, and he openly talks about it. I'd guess something about it all must have been written up. I'll look it up on the

Internet, and then I can honestly say that I got info from there. And your request for assistants was posted in the university English Department, stating something about your project. All of this is public information. And I'm going to take some artistic license with characters and with the scenario. You won't get into any trouble. ... I want to change my original idea to a new screenplay scenario where a human male trainer falls in love with a breeder babette, and ... and ... there'll be a tragic separation because other people in the story will oppose an interspecies love affair on grounds that a breeder babette is just good for producing male bobbies for meat. So the interspecies couple finally commits suicide. I'll call the screenplay ... I have it ... "Meat."

Ruby made a face. "That's not the sort of interaction that's really going on," she said. "One of my babettes, Deirdre, took a shine to David, my assistant trainer, but he scolded Deirdre, and he's now in a relationship with another of my assistants, Caroline ... it started as a way of discouraging Deirdre, and then they realized they really dug each other."

Chase said, "That's nice. But my scenario will be different ... more of an interspecies Romeo and Juliet plot, in part, with the disclosure at the end that they didn't really have to kill themselves because DNA reports, delayed in arriving, showed they were both human."

"Oh," said Ruby "Well. Break a leg."

Chase was very taken with this new Romeo and Juliet twist on his screenplay plot, that he'd just thought of, and he went home and got to work on it at once. He ditched the scenario he'd earlier started to write on a male Homi turning out to be human and getting a PhD, feeling that the tragic love angle was more colorful and exciting.

But Ruby was heavyhearted with worry. More and more she couldn't bear to think of the

future that Deirdre, Mary, Anne, Jane, Alice, and Grace would have to go on to. Or to the future of the other six babettes in their twelve-babette unit, who by now had learned everything the subject group had learned. The subjects were teaching the others! The whole group of twelve now had an eagerness and a life in them that hadn't been there when Ruby first came. How could she let them be put to breeding use for the next ten years, one artificial insemination after another after another until they were too weak to go on and were killed? And all this without the emotional comfort of being with any of their babes, for the newborns were removed at once to prevent bonding. To awake these young babettes from their clouded and unknowing minds and emotions, to hold out to them hope and the joy of learning, and then to plunge them back into such a life ... how could she let this happen?

She couldn't. She didn't know what she'd do, but it would have to be something. Maybe Chase could get his screenplay finished and filmed and distributed fast. It could help evoke public interest and sympathy if it caught on, and she rather thought it might. She e-mailed him as soon as she got home: "Hi Chase, your idea may be a winner. Go for it. Could you do it all PDQ ... within six months? It could help my friends." --He'd know that 'friends' referred to her breeder babette subjects.

She got an e-mail reply in minutes, saying, "Hi, I'm already at work on it. And I think we can get it done and start to distribute it within six months. My friends and I have been fooling around with the premise that Homi are human for about a year now, and we already have some general film footage canned that I think we could include in the new scenario, with some editing."

Then the phone rang. It was the weekend caretaker calling from Ruby's breeder babete

unit, very agitated. "#927's gone," the caretaker croaked hoarsely into the phone.

Ruby's heart sank, her stomach churned strangely. "What ... where ...?" she said, almost speechless.

"Gone!" the caretaker repeated, in a wail. "It's not my fault! I was keeping an eye on them all, I swear to god. I left the building at 1 p.m. for my lunch break just like usual. Miss Caroline was there just like she always is for her Saturday shift, and I left her in charge of the babettes like I usually do then. She always sits in your office a couple of doors away and she looks in on the babettes off and on while I'm gone. But today when I got back at 2 p.m. I looked round and #927 wasn't nowhere in sight. She's just not here." Ruby could hear her crying. "And I don't see five more of them, neither."

"Hold on, I'll be right over," Ruby told her. Don't call anybody else. We want to keep calm and quiet about this. #927 will turn up. They'll all turn up." She was continuing to call Deirdre #927 to most people at the breeding installation. In her car, now, she raced to the installation at the top of the speed limit, her heart beating fast. She was nowhere near the calmness level she had displayed on the phone.

At the installation she found more trouble. Her assistant Caroline, who had been in Ruby's office typing up some notes, was found slumped over at the desk. The caretaker was now even more frantic and had called the police who were already there when Ruby arrived. Matron had been called and she was there too. Matron was very upset and angry. "This is what it's led to," she yelled angrily at Ruby. "This is your fault! I should have kept you and your highfalutin academic assistants out of here! You let the babettes have too much freedom. They're savage animals. They've beaten up Caroline and escaped. I hold you responsible."

Ruby felt almost ill from stress. Her head was spinning. A policeman said to Matron, "Hold on there. We don't know who did what. We'll put the whole thing under investigation.

The caretaker said, "I heard the Kung Fu guy took a bobby the other day. Maybe he took the babettes too, and hit Caroline when she tried to stop him ...?"

Ruby pulled herself together. "No," she said firmly, that's not his MO at all, according to what I've read. He's never hit anyone; his moves are said to be warding off moves or moves to stun, every time, but never to hurt. And he's only taken newborn bobbies and only at rather long intervals. I think something else went on here."

"The police will handle this," a policeman told her firmly, and he and a couple of others went around looking for evidence. They didn't find any. Caroline, who had been put on the cot in Ruby's office, stirred and sat up. She wasn't hurt, and it turned out she was just a little dazed.

Ruby sat next to Caroline and held her for a moment. "What happened, Caroline," she asked.

"I don't know. I was sitting at the desk in here, working, as I do every Saturday from noon on, and then ... somebody, I couldn't see who ..., put a cloth over my face and chloroformed me."

"Chloroform!" everyone exclaimed, astonished.

Ruby could scarcely believe it. "Who on earth would do such a thing, and why?" Secretly, she was a bit relieved. For one mad moment she had fantasied that maybe Deirdre had hit Caroline and had escaped to go to try to find David, and had also let out the other five missing babettes. She'd quickly pictured all six babettes terrified and lost and hiding behind bushes outdoors ... and herself, Ruby, hauled up before the breeding installation higher echelon

of management to be blamed. Whew! Whatever had really gone on, it wasn't that. But who on earth would chloroform Caroline, and what on earth for? And who would take away the six breeder babette subjects of Ruby's research, and why? It made no sense at all. Somebody had planned this, and cleverly, and knowledgeably. It couldn't have been an inside job. The caretaker was clearly distraught and totally bewildered as well as so fearful of being blamed that she obviously had nothing to do with it. And Caroline, at 22, was a sweet, smart, trustworthy person who obviously wouldn't have chloroformed herself and endangered her job and her graduate school career by letting six breeder babette subjects escape just beforehand. "No, it had to be an outside job," Ruby muttered to herself.

It was on the local TV news, with some brief film footage of Ruby, her office, Caroline, the caretaker, Matron, and the play space. The commentator said the case was under investigation by the police, but there were no clues and the public was asked to call in anything they could think of that might be a lead.

At the police station during the next week they got a few calls about what people thought were chimps in neighborhood trees, but these turned out to be cats. A hoax call was received about an alleged pimp who, the caller said, brought female chimps to a local house of ill repute at such-and-such an address, but the address turned out to be a playground where a Little League ball game was going on in front of neighborhood parents. Nothing of any use turned up. Ruby was frantic. She wouldn't be able to finish her article for Rip's journal. There were still over three months to go on her research, and she didn't have full enough data yet. It was as if somebody didn't want her to finish her project, or to write about it. Who? Matron? No ... Matron's dislike had been so overt ... everyone knew about it ... it made her an unlikely suspect.

One of the grad student assistants? Hard to believe. Their own careers would be dented if the research weren't finished. Who, then? Was there a mole planted in the breeding installation, somebody who was working for somebody who had some interest in her not finishing her project? Her mind was going round in circles.

She e-mailed Chase: "Hi, help! I need you to help me think."

He replied, "Hi back, o.k., see you soon. He was apt to be a little artistically flaky about anything specific and she e-mailed him back, "No, I need help NOW, ASAP."

He came over for an hour that evening, and he said he wondered if his Uncle Buck had anything to do with the disappearances. He pointed out that Buck had a vested interest in leaving the whole bobby and babette setup unresearched. "I wouldn't put it past him to hire somebody to do the chloroforming and the disappearances," Chase said. And he told Ruby about Buck's temper tantrum at the garden showing some weeks ago now. "Buck's going to have my hide about my screenplay that I'm working on right now and that's already begun to be filmed. I expect there'll be trouble about that."

Well, the Buck factor gave Ruby something new to chew on, she reflected. "I'd like to meet that woman, Anikka," she said. Chase had already told her about the garden Anikka had done for Buck and Jolie, and about the strange feelings he, Chase, had gotten in the garden. He said that he'd heard that Anikka had gotten commissions for several more gardens since then, with bigtime CEOs. "Maybe Anikka can give me some clues about Buck's mindset," Ruby went on. "She arranges gardens uniquely for the specific home owners. Maybe I could rule Buck out ... or in ...with respect to this investigation if I find out more about him.

She was losing time, with her subjects gone and with no knowing when or if they'd be

returned. In the meanwhile she was discovering to her amazement that the six other babettes in the unit knew just as much signing as her official subjects did, and had even invented some new words. They were a little less advanced in associating spoken words with signs, since the official subjects were unable to speak, but these other babettes had picked up some of the voice/sign pairs and proved eager and quick to learn more. Ruby decided she may as well continue her research on these remaining six babettes. Whoever had abducted her original subjects must have been unaware of the literature on primate signing, that described how primates who have learned to sign soon teach the others. ... A clever abductor, but one who didn't do a literature search before the abduction.

Chase arranged a get together of Anikka and Ruby and himself at a Starbuck's, and Ruby quickly got to the point when they met. Basically, she wanted to hear Anikka's and Chase's take on whether Buck had had the foul deeds done by some hireling, to scare Ruby off finishing her research.

Anikka said slowly, "I can't be sure, but as I read him I don't think he did it or had it done for him. I think the initial founders of the bobby meat industry knew the Homi were human, but Buck came into the business some thirty years after it began and at a time when textbooks and classrooms were all teaching that Homi are genetically altered chimps. I know he is completely indifferent to what is done to animals. He thinks they are here on earth for humans to dispose of in any way humans want, and he thinks there is no moral issue about this. It's all just business, to his way of thinking. He wouldn't try to stop your research, because he just thinks it's silly and it won't show anything. I gather you and Chase both believe Homi are human ... and so do I, by the way ... but Buck doesn't believe this, and he doesn't think either of you are a real threat. He

just thinks you are both very annoying anti-capitalist nuts."

"We know," said Ruby and Chase simultaneously. "O.k.," Ruby said. "That seems to remove Buck as a suspect. I'm really stumped. Anikka, why do you think Chase felt strange in the garden you designed for Buck?"

Anikka laughed, and said, "Professional secret. Let's just say I arrange gardens to promote the spiritual growth of anybody who is capable of it. My sister's nephew Pierre, for example ... he's grown a lot, spiritually, since walking in the garden. And Chase here was just on the cusp of more growth, and the garden nudged him, so to speak."

"I don't know if I like that," he protested.

"It was your own style of growth, your own inborn path of growth, you were ... let's say ... put in touch with. Sort of like being reminded of something you already know but have forgotten." Chase felt mollified by this.

"Will Buck be changed by the garden?" Ruby asked.

"I don't know," Anikka said. "Depends on whether he's reached a point of no return in his monetary greed. That can happen to people. If he does change, it'll be only very slowly and probably only a little."

"What do people ... rediscover or remember?" Chase asked.

"Something Buddhists know about ... compassion, refraining from doing harm, right livelihood."

They were all silent. Then Ruby said, "Anikka, let's keep in touch. I'm going to continue my research. I'm hoping that whoever chloroformed Caroline and stole my subjects won't strike again. I've got to keep going with my project, and I'll do it with the remaining six

babettes in the unit. I've lost some time, but I'll do the best I can. Thanks, folks, for meeting with me."

They left and went their respective ways. They didn't know that in a woods some miles away there were five new little graves. A month later a little kid and her dog found the site, and the dog pulled at a half-buried arm. The child screamed and ran to tell her mother, and her mother called the police.

They found five little breeder babettes buried there, all just about 12 years old. They'd been shot in the back of the head but Deirdre's body wasn't among the five that were found. They all looked and looked for a sixth grave, and put sniffer dogs on it, but they found nothing more. "Deiedre's alive!" Ruby thought. Just an intuition, a stomach chakra feeling, but a very strong feeling. "Deirdre was the cleverest," she thought. "Maybe she figured out a way to get free and to hide out somewhere. Maybe she's around here somewhere, hiding." Shd didn't say this to the police, though. If the abductor/killer knew Deirdre might still be alive and around there, he ... she ... might return. Or did the abductor keep Deirdre, and take her away somewhere? And why? And where were the I.D. bracelets that she'd had her subjects wear? The bracelets were not on the bodies.

The five little babettes were cremated. Regular graveyards wouldn't accept them, but Ruby demurred at their being trashed as the breeder installation would have done. She had the ashes placed in five little urns with the contained babette's number on each, and put the urns in her office on a shelf.

Days went by, and nothing more turned up. Ruby went on with her research, Chase filmed his now completed scenario, Rip worked on the special issue of his Journal. Up in

Canada at the Boys' Ranch, Amigo looked to be pretty developmentally retarded as a result of his first six weeks in the bobbypen ... at least according to the usual human developmental charts. Pierre wrote to the Boys' Ranch to have Amigo DNA tested, and the test confirmed that Amigo was in fact a human. Pierre cried when he heard it, and decided to quit the bobby pen and work full time at the Boys' Ranch in Canada. He wanted to give as much love, time, and attention to Amigo as he could, to try to restore the little fellow's development. And he decided to help with the underground railroad runs when he could. He was becoming as radical as Evan. Wanting to vanish without a trace, he didn't get in touch with his mother's cousin Anikka, or with anybody at all back home. His parents were divorced and the whole family was estranged from each other at present, so nobody would fret much if he didn't get in touch for awhile. But when Evan came up briefly one weekend, Pierre gave him a token to give Anikka ... a little lock of Amigo's blonde hair. "Just give it to her, and tell her it's from somebody who loves her," he told Evan. Evan went back home and gave Anikka the gift and repeated the message.

She smiled and put the lock of hair in a handkerchief, and put the handkerchief in her jewelry box.

DEIRDRE AND PAT

Deirdre ran and ran and ran that day, to get away from the two men who had taken her and her five babette companions away from everything familiar. She didn't even know she could run so fast; her exercise on the jungle gyms in the play space and her racing laps around that small place hadn't given much scope for serious running. But her legs were strong and she was strong, and she ran hard. Her mind was full of fear and confusion.

"I'm lonesome," said the man who finally picked her up in his RV. Deirdre looked very warily at him, but he didn't look at all like the ones she was running from. This new man went on chattily, "I'd like to have a rider. Or a pet." He noticed she didn't say anything. "What's your name?" he asked.

She understood, but couldn't answer in words, so she signed Deirdre. He didn't get it, so she repeated signing it several times, pointing to herself, and then pointing to her mouth and shaking her head as people do to mean "No." She also signed No. Then he saw what she meant.

"Oh," he said, "you can't talk but you can hear?"

She nodded a yes, and signed Yes.

"O.k., he said, "I didn't get your name, but I got yes and no, and that's a start. I'm Pat O'Hare. I'm going to call you Kitty."

She understood Kitty. Ruby had brought in a kitten one time to show the babettes and had introduced the word "Kitty." Deirdre smiled a tiny bit, still terrified ... of what she'd just been through, of him, of the RV, of the road, of everything in the world. She began to tremble and to

cover into the far right corner of the passenger seat.

Pat said, "Hungry? Food in there," and he pointed to the glove compartment, leaned over and opened it and pulled out some sandwiches. "Eat," he said.

She understood "hungry," and "eat," and she gobbled up two sandwiches very fast. He sighed and said, "Hey, leave something for me," but she didn't understand that, and she ate the last of the three sandwiches that had been there. "Thanks a lot," he said. After a little silence he said, "I'm from Boston and I just quit my computer job, and I don't know where I'm going or where I'll end up or anything. Guess I'll pick up computer jobs here and there when I need to, when I run out of money. I'm fifty-five. You look about twelve. I'm having a mid-life crisis. What's your story?"

He confused her with all these words. She recognized that he was asking her a question, but that was all. She felt a bit better after eating the three sandwiches, but she was now thirsty, and she made a drinking motion with her hands and mouth.

"Thirsty," he said, guessing. And he leaned over again to the glove compartment and pulled out two cartons of chocolate milk and opened them for her. She drank both. After a little while she needed to pee, and she wiggled uncomfortably in her seat.

"I haven't got any kids," he said, "but it looks to me like you're a kid who needs to pee."

Recognizing the word, she signed Yes. He stopped the RV and let her out and she looked around. Now accustomed to using a toilet in an enclosed space, she went into some bushes to relieve herself, and then looked uncertainly back at the RV, wondering whether to return to it. She didn't know where else to go. This place was strange, she was afraid of everything, the RV at least gave her a corner to rest in. She went back and climbed into the

passenger seat again.

Pat drove on, still talking about his whole life history. She fell asleep. They passed a sheriff's car on the road, and Pat gave a friendly wave to the sheriff, who was keeping his eyes open for a twelve-year-old breeder babette who might have been abducted by somebody ... there'd been an APB about it. A babette, in his understanding, was a kind of chimp. So far the sheriff hadn't seen anything suspicious, just an occasional parent with his or her kid, like the folk in the RV just now.

At nightfall Pat pulled into a campsite and, finding Kitty still asleep, he let her be and went into the small living compartment of the RV where he stayed the night. That kid must be exhausted, he thought. A runaway? He wished he had a dog to keep him company on the road, but somebody had told him a dog wouldn't be happy cooped up in a little RV for hours on end, so he hadn't gotten a dog. Where was he going, anyway? He needed to find something, but what? "I'm an ex-hippie," he thought wearily, "an ex-peacenik, a globetrotter. I know lots and lots of people in lots of cities. But I'm getting past it all. But damn it, I have some important things I want to say to the world ... if they could see the ideas I see ... the world might get a little better." He'd have to keep on with his writing. The writing was keeping him going; it was his passion and the culmination of his life. He wanted his writing, that he was putting on his own website, to find and get through to readers.

Deirdre/Kitty, still sleeping up in the front of the RV, often had feelings a little like that about wanting to say a lot to people, to get through to them. When she woke up the next morning she felt o.k. for a few minutes until she realized she didn't know where she was, and then she started to remember what had happened yesterday, and the memories made her silently

cry and shake. There had been two strange men who suddenly grabbed her and the five other breeder babette who together with her comprised Ruby's six subjects. They were easy to distinguish from the non-subject babettes, for Ruby had put I.D. bracelets on them, each bracelet with the individual babette's number. This had made it easier to take notes on the individual learning progress of each babette. The two men quickly rushed the six out the back door at the end of the little back hall, a door that was usually locked. Then she'd heard one of them say, "Chloroform the girl in the office down the front hall; that'll slow her down if she suspects anything." Dierdre didn't understand anything except the word "girl." She and the other five babettes were thrust in a small closed U-Haul truck, and later on when the men let them out they were in a place with a lot of trees. Deirdre had seen pictures of trees in a picture book Ruby had shown her. "Take off their I.D. bracelets," one of the men told the other. "I'll stand guard. If the bodies are found we don't want them easily identifiable."

"Line them up," one man said, "and lets get this over with." Deirdre didn't understand what was happening, and indeed none of the babettes understood in time to get away, but she saw the other man hold a small object in his hand, and he pulled on something on the object and something came out of it, and this happened again and again, and one after another her babette companions fell to the ground and lay still. Terrified, Deirdre managed to slip away and she ran as fast as she could. She didn't know what had been happening, but it seemed very bad. The men chased her but she hid for hours until they finally gave up and she heard the sounds of their truck pulling away. Peeking out at the highway she saw nobody was there now, and then she ran some more, ran and ran, until Pat picked her up.

She had never come across death and hadn't recognized that her companions were now

dead, but she did guess that something horrible had happened, and now she felt sick all over, this day after, remembering it. Pat brought her a bun and some chocolate milk from a small fridge he had in the back of the van, but she felt too sick to eat. "Well, this is a change," he said, puzzled. "You ate up everything I had in the glove compartment yesterday, and now you won't touch a thing."

They freshened up in the campsite rest rooms, and then he said, "O.k., time to move on." He pointed to the passenger seat in the front of the RV. "Climb in," he said, and she did. She was still scared to death. "Don't know what to do with you Kitty," he said as they drove along. "I'd like to keep you, I'm so lonesome you know. You a runaway? But I suppose you should go to school and stuff." He handed her a map, and quickly with his right hand pointed to their location. "See if there's a town within say 100 miles of here where we can stop for gas." She looked totally confused and puzzled and helpless, never having seen a map before. He finally caught on to this, and said, "Can't you read, haven't you ever seen a map?"

She didn't understand a word he said. "I don't think you've ever been to school," he said. "Well, since I wouldn't be taking you away from school, and since you seem to be homeless, maybe I could keep you as my rider." Then he hesitated, and said, "Do you have a mother and father?"

Deirdre/Kitty understood this idea slightly, from a few very easy children's stories in picture books that Ruby had shown her and read to her. She shook her head and signed No.

"O.k.," Pat said. "You're homeless, and I'd like to have a rider, and I'm not taking you away from school or from parents. I'll give you lessons in the evenings." He felt quite cheerful about this change in his circumstances. Kitty could be like his pet.

A year went by. They traveled from city to city and campsite to campsite, stopping at universities here and there where Pat talked with various professors about his ideas. When they ran out of money he got short computer jobs as a temp. He taught Deirdre/Kitty how to read and how to write, and he started her on arithmetic too. She taught him what signs she knew. He bought a book on American Sign Language and she helped him learn the whole system, and together they got communication going between them. They both were quick at the learning, and they both enjoyed it.

Sometimes when they came across a lonely woman at a campsite, Pat would spend time with the new acquaintance for awhile, and then he and Kitty would move on. Kitty's fertility had begun, and Pat had to ask one of the women they met to try to explain it to her and to get her what she needed. "Statutory rape?" this woman said to him, in an ugly tone, pointing to Kitty. "She's way under age."

"Nah," said Pat. "Cut it out. She's just a rider. I was raised a good Catholic. I wouldn't touch a kid. She sleeps in a little nest by herself, nights, up front. I go in back by myself." And it was true. He was eccentric and self-important, but at least it could be said of him that he disliked shoddy behavior. Kitty relaxed into her new life. It was more fun than her life was before, and she was experiencing a lot of new things. But she missed Ruby. --And all the while she was trying to learn the ideas and words to tell Pat what had happened to her on the day when he'd picked her up in his RV. She desperately needed to find a way to say it to somebody; the memory of it, unshared, was making her feel sicker and sicker.

During this year Pat stopped off at various universities to attend conferences as well as to talk with professors about his ideas and his writing that he believed would help the world. He

was a well spoken person and well read, and wore a nice navy blue blazer for these occasions. The ideas he was writing about were the culmination of everything his life was all about, he felt. He got discouraged sometimes because of the failure of the world to see the ideas he saw. He believed that once his ideas caught on they would be taught in the schools everywhere, and the condition of the world would improve widespread and quickly.

He told Kitty all about his ideas during their year of wandering, and she understood bits of it, but not a lot. Their communication was in other respects improving little by little. She herself was feeling an increasingly urgent need to tell about what had happened to her and the other babettes the day she and they were abducted from the breeding installation. She kept trying, but Pat didn't understand. But finally one day she managed to get across to him that two men had killed her five companions and that she had run away. She had grasped the idea of death by now. She had seen road kill as they drove along and Pat had said and signed "kill," and she saw a resemblance between that and what she had seen happen to her five companions.

She was shaking when she told him about it. He said awkwardly, "It's in the past, kid. Get over it." The next day after a little more reflection he said, "Kitty, we have to go back to the city you came from. You have to tell the police what you've told me."

She cried silently and signed No Back.

Pat said gruffly, "You have to. You're too big now to be my pet any more, anyway."

She signed No No You Teacher.

"We'll go back to your city, and I'll try to find you someplace good to live. And you'll talk to the police. I just hope I don't get into bad trouble myself, for taking you in this long." Pat thought hard about this, and finally added, "The law isn't going to look kindly on it, I'm afraid.

But I've fed you and given you a place to stay ... that should count for something."

.....

But now we must backtrack for a time, for much had been going on in that city during the year that Deirdre/Kitty had been traveling with Pat. For one thing, not long after the disappearance of the babettes and the chloroforming of Caroline, the caretaker at the breeding installation mentioned in passing to Ruby that Mrs. Jolie Wells, wife of Buck Wells, the CEO of Amhound, had come by once again for her customary monthly visit. "What customary monthly visit?" Ruby asked in surprise.

"Why ma'am, didn't you know, Mrs. Wells visits one Saturday early afternoon every month, to see how everything is going."

"Why?" asked Ruby.

"I dunno, ma'am," said the caretaker. "Just something she's done for awhile now. If you ask me, she doesn't have much to do. She comes in all dressed up in a silk dress and gold jewelry and diamonds and all, and she walks around and sticks her nose into everything, and asks me questions about procedures and gives me some orders. Matron doesn't like it, but what can she do. Mr. Wells owns this place, you know, and Matron doesn't dare tell Mrs. Wells off about her busybody visits."

"I don't like it either," Ruby commented. "She's no business giving you orders. What sort of thing does she tell you to do?"

"Oh, just to clean the john more often, or to mop the play space floor more often, or to provide the babettes with freshly washed jumpers more often. Stuff like that. I tell her and tell her, we're short on staff and we can't do more on our budget, but she turns off her ears."

Ruby thought that more money for more staff really was needed, and said so to everybody who'd listen, but people just shrugged and said, "Don't hold your breath." After a while she forgot about Mrs. Wells's visits, though she asked Caroline, who was normally on duty Saturday afternoons, if she'd ever seen Mrs. Wells and if she'd been ordered around by her. Caroline said she'd seen Mrs. Wells flitting around a couple of times on her monthly Saturday visits but had been left alone by her. So Ruby dropped the matter and gave it no more thought. As it turned out, the caretaker and Caroline both presently mentioned that Mrs. Wells had discontinued her visits after the disappearance of the six babettes and the chloroforming of Caroline. Ruby heard via the grapevine that Mrs. W. was visiting a posh beauty spa in Thailand and was then going on to Paris for the designer fashion showings, so perhaps these new hobbies would replace her slumming at the breeder installation.

Chase Wells's screenplay, "Meat," had now been filmed and was soon to be shown at a Sundance Film Festival. Chase was ecstatic, feeling sure it would be a hit. And it was. It got rave reviews and became a cult film very quickly, a favorite with college students all over the country. Chase started up a website to accommodate popular demand. Afficionados were enormously taken with the theme of interspecies love, and also stirred by the tragic suicide of the lovers who don't find out in time that both have human DNA.

Rip Richards' journal, *Journalism and Humane Values*, finally came out with its special issue on "The Homi: Is Justice Being Done?" As might be expected, the issue turned out to be largely a case of preaching to the converted -- people who already cared about the topic liked the issue and recommended it to friends, and people who didn't -- and this was the majority of people -- said they had no time for such reading, and why bring up such things "at a time like

this," when there were other serious problems going on in the world. A small coterie of dedicated pro-Homi people had a panel and then a teach-in about just how human are the Homi, and does it matter, since all animals should have their rights respected. This was attended mostly by the local vegetarians and animal rights partisans. The panel and teach-in were briefly written up in the Friday magazine section of the local paper, but largely met with apathy and some ridicule.

Ruby's project hadn't kept up to schedule because of the disappearance of her first subject group, and so she applied for a renewal of her grant for a one-year period. This would see her second subject group, the remaining six breeder babettes who hadn't been abducted, through their first breeding experience, and Ruby would have a chance to find out what this and the immediate separation from their babes did to their consciousness. She could already predict that it would lead to severe depression, and she hated to go through with it, but it would provide evidence that she would use in her further writings. There was no way she could prevent the process from happening, anyway, and perhaps her presence could be of some comfort. The remaining six would be able to express in their signing something about what they felt. Ruby no longer had any doubt in her own mind that Homi were human and the whole bobby meet industry, breeding, and experimentation on babettes, must be brought down. But this bringing down, she knew, would be fought by Buck Wells and the whole cabal of his corporate associates. She knew Buck's mind and she knew he'd hire lawyers, experts, powerful politicians and economists, and old-guard university professors to fight any exposé if any got started. "He may be innocent," she reflected, "innocent in the sense that he's bought into the received view that Homi are genetically altered chimps, for all his life. But ... in the long run ... not so innocent, in the

sense that he totally refuses to rethink any of this, or to consider counterevidence. If we have DNA tests done on some Homi, he'll claim it was rigged. If we ask for it to be done with all present day Homi countrywide, he'll demur, saying it's too expensive and pointless, and if we push it he'll hire counter-experts who report different findings ... I even wouldn't put it past him to replace real Homi with shaved and bleached chimps in some bobbypens and breeder installations." What a headache. She couldn't at present figure out what to do. For now, she'd continue collecting evidence for the series of learned articles she planned to publish.

The Kung Fu guy was reported in the newspaper to have taken another newborn bobby from the bobbypen, and this time a security guard had spotted him and had come at him to stop him, but to no avail. The Kung Fu guy had simply set down the animal carrier he'd been holding, and did a sleeper move on the guard. This move, applying pressure at two points at the base of the guard's neck, immobilized the guard, stunning him a bit painfully but not hurting or killing him. The guard later reported that the assailant was dressed in a vet's smock and had a baseball cap with a long visor pulled on low over his brow. There was a little renewed speculation as to whether the Kung Fu guy was the abductor of the six disappeared babettes, but in the absence of any evidence at all for this, the speculation faded away. Ruby had herself never attached credibility to this theory.

Anikka designed several more gardens of great originality and beauty, and commissions kept on coming. She had a waiting list now of a number of very prominent and powerful would-be clients. Sometimes people who walked in these gardens underwent a spiritual awakening. One client, a CEO of an affiliate of Amhound, after walking in his new garden for some weeks, announced that he was pulling out his investments in the Amhound-owned

industries.

DEIRDRE'S RETURN

R-O-O-B-E-E G-L-I-D-U-N, Deirdre/Kitty spelled with a pencil laboriously in capital letters on a piece of paper Pat gave her as they sat having lunch in a small restaurant in the city she'd come from a year ago. Tired from a Sunday morning of driving hard, they needed a bite to eat while planning what to do next. Pat had said, thinking out loud, "I'd like to take you first to somebody you know here, Kitty, before we go to the police. Can you write for me the name of somebody you know in this city?" Deirdre/Kitty didn't understand all of this but she understood enough to nod and sign Yes, and she tried to write out Ruby Glidden's name. Pat borrowed the phone book from the pay phone booth inside the restaurant. Running his finger down the GL section, he came to the name Ruby Glidden. This must be the name Kitty was trying to spell out.

"I'm going to call up this person," he said to her. And if she's willing, I'll take you to where she lives. And then we'll see what happens.

He called the number listed in the phone book, and got Ruby right away. He said very courteously, "Hello, my name is Pat O'Hare, and we haven't met. But I have a girl with me who is speech impaired but not hearing impaired, and she can talk by signing, and she has given me your name as someone she knows here. May I bring her to your address?"

Ruby thought fast. She had never heard of Pat O'Hare, and although he was describing someone who sounded very like Deirdre, there was no telling who he was or what role he had played in the disappearance of Deirdre a year ago. And no telling what manner of person he was, whether criminal or nut or honorable citizen. "I'll meet the two of you somewhere," she

finally said. "Where are you calling from?" He told her the name and address of the little restaurant, and she said she'd be over shortly.

She brought Chase with her, and they looked around carefully as they entered. Suddenly a young girl of about thirteen came running across the floor and hugged Ruby and kissed her cheek and signed Hello. And Ruby and Deirdre then both burst into tears, they were so glad to see each other. "Deirdre, I always felt I'd see you again! Oh Deirdre, I've missed you so much!" exclaimed Ruby. And she and Deirdre and Chase all went to sit with Pat who had stood up to greet them when he saw Deirdre/Kitty running across the room.

It took a couple of hours for Pat to fill in Ruby and Chase about what he and Deirdre/Kitty had been doing this past year, and Pat ended on a sad note with the recital of what Kitty had finally just recently been able to tell him about the abduction and killings of a year ago. Ruby cried hard when she heard it. "Deirdre, is this true?" she asked, turning to the now shaking and crying survivor.

Deirdre surprised Ruby with how much more signing she had learned during the past year. The story she told with her greatly expanded repertoire of signs bore out everything that Pat had just told them, and more.

"I figured we'd have to go to the police with this," Pat said. "I expect I'm going to get into a lot of trouble myself, now, for keeping the kid this long. But I thought she was homeless and she said she had no parents, and she'd had no schooling, so I took her in and I taught her stuff."

Ruby said, "Pat, your legal status in this will need to be worked out with a lawyer, but there's a twist to this case that you don't know about. Do you think Deirdre/Kitty is a human being?"

"Of course!" said Pat, astonished.

"Well, it's true of course, she is a human being. But in the eyes of the law she was and is classified as a genetically altered chimp ... even if she can communicate with signs. So, legally, you likely wouldn't have any serious charges made against you. You're probably going to be seen legally as just returning stolen property, property that you didn't steal yourself and just found by chance, and that you didn't think belonged to anybody. And you're returning the property in good condition." Indeed, Deirdre looked reasonably healthy and more lively than Ruby had ever seen her before. "If anything, she looks too good. We'll maybe have to get her a little more grubby and put an old jumper on her, so people will be reminded of her status as a breeder babette."

Pat wanted to know what a breeder babette was, and was surprised by what Ruby and Chase told him in some detail. "Like she's a cow," he commented.

Ruby shuddered and said, "Yes. It's horrible, isn't it. People shouldn't be treated like that. Cows shouldn't be treated like that either."

"Oh, I don't know," Pat mused. "Customs differ from place to place and from time to time. People treat other people and animals too in lots of different ways, and there are no absolutes. People in ancient Athens and Sparta practiced infanticide and made slaves out of half the population. I wouldn't call that wrong. If it's the custom, who are we to say something is wrong?"

Ruby and Chase both felt appalled. Finally Ruby said, "After the experiences she's had this past year, there's no way Deirdre could ever be returned to the life of a breeder babette. I am going to make the case that her present advanced knowledge of signing makes her the ideal

subject for my next series of articles, and that I must take her into my home for closer study. I'll have to do some fancy footwork to swing this, but I feel pretty sure I can. Deirdre, do you want to live with me?"

Deirdre hesitated. Finally she signed, Ruby Mother Pat Father.

Ruby said very gently, "Pat and Ruby are Deirdre's teachers."

"Kitty," Pat told her bluntly, "listen to me. I am not your father. Soon I will drive away and travel some more and I am not going to take you with me. You have to stay here with Ruby." Deirdre/Kitty silently cried at this news.

"This is going to hit her hard," Ruby said to Pat. "Her emotions are very, very vulnerable. We have to handle this carefully."

Pat said impatiently, "The hard stuff for Kitty was in the past. You've worked with her a while, and I was with her for a year, and she should be healed by now."

"Pat!" Ruby protested, "don't you realize ... people's emotions don't work like that. Deirdre's been severely traumatized, first when she was little, and then slowly over years in a terribly deprived situation, and now in the happenings of a year ago. People don't just bounce back from all that." She noticed now that Deirdre was visibly upset by the testy tone the conversation was taking on even though she didn't understand the issues. Evidently Deirdre hadn't seen this side of Pat before, but then she'd probably never disagreed with him herself. She was still just a child, mostly, and she'd obeyed him and believed all he told her, and so no conflict had ever come up between them.

Ruby asked Chase if he'd take Deirdre out to her car now, and she, Ruby, would join them in a minute. After Chase and Deirdre were out of earshot, Ruby told Pat about the isolation

experiment Deirdre and others had been put through when they were very little.

Pat continued to insist that those things were in the past and people should get over it. "There are more important things, Big Issues, that people should give priority to," he said in the tone of one who is putting an end to further discussion.

Ruby was feeling extremely indignant by now, and pretty repelled by Pat. "This getting over the past is enormously hard work and it takes years," she countered. She was bothered by what she saw as a sort of power move on Pat's part, a move to cut off discussion of what he didn't like to hear. "And your Big Issues sound to me like ... forgive me ... a self-centered insistence on your own priorities as reflecting the natural and right order of things."

Pat was now visibly annoyed. "I'm arrogant, I'm mean." he announced sarcastically.

And very lacking in the empathic dimension of personality, Ruby thought to herself. Best to steer out of this snarlup, at least long enough to get Pat 's contribution in reporting the situation to the police the next morning, which was a Monday. "Let's not linger on this," she said with a winning smile, although she was thinking that Pat's personality had some similarities to that of her ex-husband Buck Wells ... the quick sarcasm and refusal to discuss or take seriously a deeper view of things. The main difference was that Buck knew how to make lots of money and Pat had nothing. Luckily Pat would be moving on very soon. "Pat, maybe you could write little letters to Deirdre/Kitty now and then. You could be pen pals."

He relaxed a bit, sensing correctly that she was trying to mollify him, although wrongly assuming that this meant she was coming around to his view. "My character does have a lot of fascination for people," he conceded. "There are so many people who want to hold on to me, want me to save them in some way. But I can't take on all those people personally. But I'm

going to help the world with my writing."

"Hmm." Ruby smiled with calculated sweetness. "Isn't this present situation a pretty special case? And it would only involve just a postcard or a Bluemountain.com greeting from you to Deirdre every now and then. That would help her to feel some continuity in her life, and wouldn't cost you more than a couple of minutes every couple of months."

"I'll try," he said a bit loftily.

"Thank you," Ruby said sweetly, thinking to herself that 'trying' sounded pretty distant. But she must attend to Deirdre's needs now, and get them both ready to go to the police station tomorrow.

Ruby took Deirdre home with her, and Pat stayed overnight in his RV in a campsite just outside of town, and Chase went home to his place. Ruby and Pat agreed to meet the following morning, Monday, at 9 a.m. at the main police station, with Deirdre accompanying Ruby. If it came to seem necessary they would get a lawyer for Pat, but they thought that it might not be necessary. What would likely be more necessary would be a few additional sign language interpreters to confirm that Ruby's and Pat's interpretation of what Deirdre/Kitty had to say about the abduction and killings of a year ago was correct. Ruby contacted her three assistants and asked them to show up at the police station at 9 a.m. too; they could all confirm the interpretation.

It was hard for Ruby to sleep that night, for her mind was restlessly turning over scenario after scenario with respect to who the abductors and killers were, and what the motives were, and who else if anyone might have been involved with the case. It had seemed at the time that it must have been an inside job of some sort, must have been done by or in collusion with someone

who knew the layout of the breeder installation and who knew the hours that the caretaker and Caroline were or were not there, and where they would be if there, and who also had known that Ruby's subjects could be identified by the I.D. bracelet each wore on her arm with her number on it. ... If, that is, the abductor/killers had in fact been specifically out to get Ruby's six subjects rather than just six miscellaneous breeder babettes. If Ruby's subjects had been specifically targeted, then why? Had it been an attempt to sabotage her research? Why? She couldn't come up with any answers right now.

This whole thing about the Homi and their status had not made much progress during the past year, despite the efforts of those who cared ... Rip Richard's special journal issue had largely fallen on deaf hearts, Chase's successful film "Meat" had moved hearts rather more, but toward romance more than toward social and political awareness. Anikka's spiritual gardening was having a few results, but very slowly. Evan's bobbynapping efforts were having a few results, but also very slowly. Her own researches, Ruby thought, might in the long run bear fruit if she could show definitively a high capacity for rational thought in some breeder babettes; the Western tradition had long held that man is the rational animal and that animals can't operate on a human level of abstract thought. She was going to put in a request for a special new research grant to study this with Deirdre as the subject of her pilot study. If Deirdre's skill in writing English sentences were to improve to a noticeable extent, that would help a lot since the use of language had long been thought to be a distinctively human way of revealing inner consciousness and inner process. If she could demonstrate such capacities in Deirdre, then submitting a DNA test result would follow naturally from that, although Ruby knew well that this would prove nothing to skeptics who would just claim this was a singular

case and a mixup in classification from birth. But it could make a wedge in the door through which she could demand that more breeder babettes be DNA tested, with some hope of being heard.

At the police station the next morning things went well although painfully. Deirdre told her story of the abduction and killings of a year ago, using signs that Ruby interpreted while her three assistants were out of the room, and that were repeated separately and interpreted separately by each of her three assistants. The interpretations were videotaped, and were soon seen to correlate virtually completely. The police took all of them in a big police car to the woods in which the babette bodies had been found buried a year ago, and Deirdre, trembling and very upset, re-enacted the scene of the killings and pointed to the exact spot where the five little bodies had fallen to the ground after being shot. And the spot she led them to was very close to the burial sites.

The police captain said that this all went a long way towards solving the case, but they would still have to find the two men who did the crime. He asked Pat where he had picked up Deirdre on the highway, and Pat showed them approximately where that had been. Ruby made a strong case for Pat's rectitude in returning the stolen property (#927, or Deirdre) to this city as soon as he had realized it had been stolen, and no charge was made against him. She was not motivated so much by a desire to get him off the hook as to speed him on his way. The police captain said he'd ask Deirdre to come to the station the next day and try to identify the two men from a number of photographs he had on file. Deirdre was too upset and exhausted to go on with the investigation today.

"Well, I'm off," said Pat after they left the station, just before he climbed into the driver's

seat of his RV. "So long, kid," he said to Deirdre. She started to cry.

"Pat," said Ruby diplomatically, "could you give Deirdre a little paper with some of your writing on it, for her to keep and look at? Just a few words to remember you by ... maybe "Pat will think about Kitty. Kitty is a good girl. Love, Pat."

"Oh lord. All right," he said, and he wrote those words on a small pocket pad with a ballpoint pen. He gave the paper to Kitty, and she was able to read it. She smiled tremulously.

"Write her again," Ruby said.

"I'll try," he said, but she doubted he would. He drove off.

On the following day Deirdre went with Ruby back to the police station where she was shown a number of photos of malefactors whom the police were keeping an eye on. Kitty thought she recognized one of the faces, and the police captain said they'd put out an APB on him.

Ruby took Kitty over to the breeder installation afterwards, and there was a big reunion with the remaining six babettes, the caretaker, and even Matron. The caretaker wept when she heard what had happened a year ago, and even Matron looked a bit affected, although of course she did not cry. No one would have expected her to. Ruby told Matron she wanted to get an additional grant to take #927 out of the breeder babette program and take her home to live with her, for the purpose of advanced research. But Matron had a fit when she heard this proposal; she said it was out of the question and that the corporation that owned the breeder installation (a subsidiary of Amhound, Inc.) was in this business to make money and #927 was expected to bear ten or more offspring during the next ten years, at which time she'd be terminated (which meant killed) as of no further use. It was unthinkable, Matron spluttered, to expect the corporation to

forfeit some of #927's valuable breeding time, time that was worth a lot of money especially in view of the fact that each offspring would be used for meat or for experimentation. "You'll have to buy #927," Matron said bluntly. "And the price will have to include #927's value as a breeder as well as the net monetary value of each of the -- let's say -- ten or more offspring she'd bear. That's going to come to some thousands of dollars. You have that kind of money to spend on an animal?"

Ruby was repelled beyond words by this whole transaction. But she mentally reviewed her economic assets. Nothing much to sell ... some savings she'd put by over the years ... an IRA she'd been paying on for some time, that she probably could withdraw something from. She could barely, just very barely, scrape up the money to buy Deirdre. It would leave her living rather hand to mouth. But she felt a deep commitment of the heart to Deirdre, that feeling she'd had from the start about do not begin the first mile with your brother unless you are prepared to walk the last mile with him.

She surprised Matron greatly by saying all right, she'd buy Deirdre, and let's have the papers drawn up right away, today, because she wanted Deirdre to come home with her today. Matron had never expected such an outcome to her proposal, but having made it she proceeded to get a clerk to bring out the papers, and got a notary to witness the signing of the papers. Ruby wrote her a big down payment, drawing it from her checking account, and wrote out a notarized I.O.U. for the remaining payment by two weeks from then, the penalty being forfeiture of "the property" (Deirdre) in case of non-performance, plus an additional forfeiture fee of \$500. It would take her the two weeks to withdraw the needed sum from her IRA account, although she could transfer a big sum from her savings account to her checking account sooner than that.

"I'm nuts, probably," she thought. "Deirdre and I'll have to pull in the belt for quite a while until I get some backlog of money saved up again and repay my IRA." But she knew she could not do otherwise, not morally and not emotionally.

TRACKING THE CULPRIT

Since Ruby had to continue with her research job at the breeder installation weekdays, she found a special school for Deirdre to attend so she could continue developing her skills in signing, reading, writing, numbers, understanding spoken English, and other subjects that would, in time, prepare her for high school. It wasn't possible to guess how long this would take. Deirdre probably had a very high I.Q., and she was hungry to learn. Ruby found her reading the cereal box at the breakfast table, trying to read the newspaper and the funnies, trying to read anything in print she came across, and she bought Deirdre a set of elementary school readers from grades one through six. She soon found that they went quickly through the set, right up to the sixth grade level. Pat had talked nonstop with Deirdre on their travels. That, and the evening lessons she and Pat had done, had been educational for her, albeit gappily. "Odd, odd fellow," Ruby mused. She hated his emotional shallowness and she was repelled by his unreflective assumption that there can be no critique of custom, no matter how heinous the custom. Pat and Evan would have had quite a go-round about that. "Yet, there's a streak of sweetness in Pat, underneath," she thought. "Maybe something or somebody betrayed him emotionally, a long time ago. And maybe he's running away from digging all that up and doing some emotional work on it."

Deirdre was so eager and excited about her new school, that she liked very much, that this helped calm her emotionally, at least on the surface. Ruby was wise enough about life, however, to realize that at most Deirdre was gaining needed time and strength for the years ahead in which, inevitably at some point, she would need to deal with a huge amount of

cumulative anxiety and grief, and anger, too. She would need to have strength built up on every level of herself when the time came. Ruby would do whatever she could to help bring this about but there are unknowns in everyone, and she didn't and couldn't know how Deirdre would fare in the long run.

Ruby badly wanted Deirdre and her present group of breeder babettes to be DNA tested, but this wasn't yet feasible. Any doctor referring her to a lab would be sure to raise questions about why it was being done, and Ruby didn't want to show her hand this soon. Also, since the remaining six babette subjects were owned, ultimately, by Amhound Inc., they could not be removed from the breeder installation for testing without orders from the top ... orders that, of course, would not be forthcoming. Nor could Ruby bring in anyone to do the DNA tests, for Matron would prevent it and no doubt get Ruby kicked out. It occurred to Ruby that possibly she could get the remains of the five murdered babettes tested, if the ashes contained some bone with marrow ... but this also would raise questions, and would lead to her showing her hand too soon. She must have patience. She had no personal doubt at all, by now, about the Homi being human rather than being genetically altered chimps. But she needed more evidence, factual evidence, of what the breeder babettes had gone through, and she would get it during the coming months. She would videotape interviews with Deirdre and her present six babette subjects who would undergo one breeding cycle this coming year. Ruby's renewed one-year grant contained the proviso that the study of proto-language in breeder babettes was to be videotaped for future reference by the Comparative Language Association, the donor of the grant. Since a matching grant was once again to be given the breeding installation, Matron would have to swallow the videotaping proviso, like it or not.

Ruby would gather evidence from those babettes who were capable of signing, about their life histories, at first as experimental animals undergoing keen suffering and then as inmates in a totally bleak and deprived environment for years. It would be shown that the suffering continued for the babettes as breeders whose babes were immediately taken from them, leading to depression for mother and babe, and to the certainty of further artificial insemination of the breeders within six weeks. All of this would provide part of the basis for a class action suit against Amhound. Additional evidence would be provided by Deirdre's rapid progress on an unusually high human level in the school she was now attending, progress never attained by any primates. This in turn would lead to Ruby's demand that Deirdre, the six present babette subjects, and the bones of the five murdered babettes, all be DNA tested, and then that Homi from all the branches of the meat, experimentation, and breeder businesses be DNA tested. And it was Ruby's ultimate goal that reparations be made to present-day Homi not only for their own sufferings but perhaps also for the sufferings of their past generations up to sixty years ago. The evidence for the suffering had to be graphic and compelling, and Ruby would see to this in the videotapes. The reparations would be so huge that this might bring down those subsidiaries of Amhound that ran the Homi meat, experimentation, and breeding units of Amhsound. Buck Wells's industrial empire would still not be destroyed, but these particular units would, she believed, be closed down. Public consciousness would be jolted, too, into a new reflection about what is done to nonhuman animals all the time in the meat, experimentation, and animal breeding industries ... for nothing was being done to the Homi that wasn't also being done to nonhuman animals all the time.

Ruby was not as sanguine as Anikka had been about Buck's being ignorant or wilfully

ignorant about the Homi being human. She believed that already, years ago when he'd heard her and Chase discussing this possibility, that he'd quite possibly secretly looked into it ... and had discovered that it was true even though up until then he'd not known it. Furthermore, Ruby believed that Buck had sold his soul to monetary greed at that point, preferring to hush up his findings, and had proceeded in the Homi-exploitative industries full steam ahead out of greed for money and power. This, she figured, was the source of his increasingly explosive anger and purported contempt for her, when he continued to hear her and Chase discuss the issue.

She wanted to bring down the Homi-based industries that were branches of Amhound, wanted it enough to play it cool, to lay her strategies carefully, to build a sound basis for a class action suit. Her anger toward Buck personally would have to be kept down. She couldn't afford to operate on that basis. ...And beneath all this, she continued to feel the sadness that had never gone away and never would, the sadness about ... about Buck losing his soul, as it were ... about Buck selling out to the worst part of himself ... about the impossibility of her loving him now or ever again.

Ruby had been hearing for some time via the grapevine that Buck's second wife, Jolie, had left him and filed for divorce some months ago, not long after a stay at a beauty spa in Thailand to get a face lift and bust implants, and purchases of some expensive designer clothes at the Paris showings. She did these things because she felt Buck's attentiveness waning, and she wanted to rekindle it. But when she returned a week early, she surprised Buck in a love nest with his mistress. And she then bribed servants to report on Buck's doings for the past few years, and found that his chauffeur reported there having been a string of mistresses. Jolie, usually so bland and quiet, had a tantrum and hurled several delicate crystal wine glasses at Buck's face,

narrowly missing his eyes as he ducked. The maid, who'd rushed in when she heard yelling, saw the whole thing.

"Go to hell," Jolie had screamed at Buck, and she walked out and contacted her lawyer at once to arrange a divorce as soon as possible. She took a Concorde to London, and stayed there until the divorce came through, and bought a fine country home outside the city where her money and social status soon brought her plenty of company.

Ruby had enquired about Jolie because she'd wondered if this busybody would still be coming round for her annoying Saturday inspections. She wanted to try to put a stop to this, and she knew Matron and the caretaker would side with her. Jolie was an uncontrolled variable in the careful research that was being done, and might have some unpredictable emotional effects on the babette subjects. But it turned out that there'd be no problem after all, for Jolie was gone for good, out of Buck's life for good.

"Mistresses!" Ruby thought. He hadn't had time for that in the past, as far as she knew. He'd been too busy building up his empire. But the empire was just about running itself now, and Buck was taking a little more time to enjoy himself buying bijoux for his gorgeous mistresses. Ruby felt sorry for Jolie. She'd been so quiet and devoted, and look what it had all come to.

As time had gone on, Ruby had wondered why Buck didn't try to stop her from getting her grant renewed and from continuing her researches. But, then, if Jolie wasn't coming around on Saturdays any more, she wouldn't know to tell him about it. And maybe Buck was now so entangled in running his multinational subsidiaries in a great number of enterprises that he might not be paying close or frequent attention to the doings of this particular unit of this particular

breeder installation. This was, after all, only one unit of one installation out of a tremendous number, all of which were only one of Buck's by now huge network of subsidiaries. But Ruby decided she'd better keep her doings under tight security, just in case, and she put all her files on her home computer and erased them from her office computer. She kept all her records at home, and alerted her assistants to do the same with their records. She also alerted them to disclose nothing about their work to anyone, until further notice, explaining to them that "corporate interests" might interfere with their freedom of research.

Deirdre's life at school was thrilling for her intellectually, but it was socially lonely. She couldn't tell the others about her past; there was no way they could understand that she'd been viewed as a nonhuman animal until recently. The few times she'd come close to speaking of it the other person had backed off. Ruby took her to the breeder installation sometimes for reunions with the six present babette subjects, and Deirdre enjoyed signing with them but had less and less in common with them as the months went by. And she had nothing at all in common with the six new breeder babettes who had been moved in to take the place of Deirdre and her five dead companions. She was now a boundary person, a person with one foot in each of two worlds, not fully a part of either. Little by little she signed for Ruby all her life history as far back as she could remember. There sessions were videotaped. Ruby paced them very slowly and carefully, for the memories were depressing and bleak and emotionally hard on Deirdre to bring back. Deirdre was in a partial state of emotional anesthesia as she told her life; the full meaning and impact of it all would not open for her until much later in life.

In the meanwhile, Ruby gathered as much information as she could from the six babette subjects, who signed to her and her assistants all they could remember of their life histories.

This was videotaped too, with the three assistants present. These six present subjects underwent artificial insemination and pregnancy, processes that Ruby explained to them as gently and kindly as she could. These six were touch-starved, she found, and she and her assistants held them often, even rocked them in several rocking chairs that Ruby brought in despite Matron's disapproval. She was doing this with Deirdre too. "How shallow I was, back when I ... we all ... thought Deirdre wanted to mate with David, that time she crept into his cot with him and rubbed against him," she thought. "I didn't even then see how needy she is and was for touch ... how starved for the touch of a fellow being, ever since her early months. Maybe she did have a little crush on David, probably she did, but she more deeply wanted some mothering and fathering and wanted to be held and hugged and tenderly touched. Just as we all do. Animals want it too, particularly from the mother perhaps." She felt awful about having been this insensitive, not that long ago, and resolved to try harder to avoid jumping to conclusions about others without sufficiently looking into what was going on with them.

Insemination and pregnancy were entirely senseless to the six subjects, unconnected with any love or tenderness or hope or meaningfulness. Ruby was hard put to it to keep their spirits up in any way at all, much less to provide much of any instinctual satisfactions or spiritual and emotional and intellectual meaning for them. Their only joy in life came from the continued signing lessons and other lessons, frequent treats of sweets, and hugs and rocking. Ruby brought in a CD player and some music CDs, which they liked and swayed to, and this helped. But it was all only a makeshift pseudo-life. Ruby collected videotape after videotape of their memories expressed in signing, and continued this right through the pregnancies and births and the post-partum depression worsened by the immediate removal of the newborns. The mothers'

chest were bound to prevent lactation, and they were allowed a respite of a month and a half before the next insemination, a meaningless respite, bodies emptied now of their fruits, and minds confused by what was for them the totally pointless severe physical pain of giving birth. They could not even scream, to express the pain. Ruby stayed with them throughout, filming everything, talking to them and comforting them as best she could, getting them to sign their feelings and sensations and thoughts. The films collectively were indeed graphic and compelling, just as Ruby had known they would be.

In the meanwhile the police had had Deirdre inspect a number of photos and line-ups in an effort to track down the abductor/killers. Nothing turned up for months and months. During this time Ruby had an idea about how to ease Deirdre's social loneliness. She told her about the Boys' Ranch in Canada and about Evan's rescue of bobbies who were sent there, and about Pierre's moving reunion with Amigo and his decision to stay and work at the Boys' Ranch. When Deirdre showed interest in all this, Ruby suggested that they go up to Canada with Evan and Anrikka and Chase. It would give Ruby a chance to discuss her thoughts about a class action suit, as well as providing some social interaction for Deirdre.

So they went, and Deirdre found understanding and friendship with Evan and Anikka and Chase and Pierre, and she also found many former bobbies of various ages, to love and care for and relate to. For the first time Ruby saw new, deep purpose in Deirdre's eyes and face. "I'm going to come up here and work here when I finish my schooling," Deirdre signed. "I'm going to learn everything I can that will help. And I'm going to start a Girls' Ranch." Her friends were moved and happy to hear this, and they all hugged her.

But there was unlikely to be any such positive outcome for Ruby's six babette subjects.

They had all undergone isolation experiments in early life, and their meaningless recent parturition and loss of their babes plunged them back into early fear and anxiety. Ruby feared they, and so many others, were truly lost, and she longed for the class action suit to begin. This was her darkest hour, when she could not bear the thought that so many lives were lost to hope, and she had to let this go on a little longer until her evidence was as complete as she could make it. She mourned, too, for all those babies who had died from various sorts of experimentation done on them, or else had been killed afterwards, with no happiness in their lives at all.

One day, called to the police station once again to look at a new batch of photos that the police now had of recently arrested felons, Deirdre spotted a face she recognized. She signed excitedly and anxiously, "That one! He was one of the two men!" The police captain asked if she was sure and she said she was, and she described his approximate height and weight. This matched the information the police had. They had recently caught him for robbery and the serious but non-fatal shooting of a 7-11 store clerk in this county. When he was brought over to this police station, Deirdre immediately picked him out of a lineup.

He not surprisingly refused to confess anything about any involvement in the abduction of Deirdre and her five companions, or the killings of the five, but the police told him he might get a slightly lighter sentence for all that plus for the 7-11 case if he'd disclose the name of his partner and of the person who had hired them to do the abductions and killings ... in the event that there was such a person.

He named the other man who had been his partner in the abductions/killings, and finally, after being told again that it would go easier for him if he could name the person who had hired them, he muttered, "She'd have me killed if I tell you."

"She!" the captain exclaimed. "A woman? Who? You'll get police protection if you name her."

"Mrs. Wells," the fellow said. "Buck Wells' wife, you know, the Amhound bigwig's wife."

When the police ascertained that Jolie Wells was now living in England, they pressed for her extradition. This wasn't so easy, since the abducted and killed babettes were not seen as humans, and hence the charges were not of kidnapping and murder, but rather of much less serious charges of inciting to the theft of expensive property and inciting to the wanton destruction of most of that property. But when Buck Wells was notified of Jolie's hiring of the two men he was incensed enough to put a lot of pressure on the British government to return Jolie for questioning. He had up to this point been completely unaware of Jolie's involvement in the case, and he was now extremely puzzled by it, although he finally put it down to her spite about what he supposed were her jealous suspicions about his long-time extra-marital games. He thought of Jolie's participation in the crimes of theft and destruction of property as an act of petty personal spite against him, a rather silly act and all of a piece with her flinging of crystal wine glasses at his face. Silly as it all was, he wasn't going to let her get away with this sort of thing and he wanted to punish her for it, and so he pressed for her to be sent back to the States to stand trial for the charges of theft and wanton destruction of property. His international clout was sufficient to bring about her extradition back to this city.

Once back here and in jail, Jolie was extensively questioned by the police as to her motive for inciting the abduction/killings of the babettes. She was by now so deeply infuriated with Buck, who -- she rightly perceived -- had had her brought back here just to punish her for what

he actually regarded as a minor spite crime, that she finally decided to go for broke and get him ruined for good. If she had to pay the penalty of being brought down with him, it would be worth it. The police told her she could and should hire an attorney to represent her, but she said that she felt like making a full confession at once, regardless of the repercussions.

"I found out something interesting, about five years ago," she said. "One time when Buck was out of his office I saw some memos on his desk and I found some more going back for awhile. He'd started wondering about the biological status of the Homi, he told me one time, because his first wife brought up questions about it quite some years ago. He just thought she was a nut. But more recently, some junior executive in the corporation was reviewing the corporation's history and uncovered an old rumor from decades ago that alleged that originally, sixty years ago, the founders of the industries that use the Homi had gathered up a lot of homeless little white street children and used them for meat, experimentation, and breeding as a cost-free way to get livestock. They allegedly used white children to get a paler meat. The junior executive could scarcely believe it, but he figured the corporation had better check into the biological makeup of present-day Homi, the descendants of the original ones, in case this old rumor might ever leak out and cause future problems for the corporation. He sent memos to Buck about this, and Buck sent a few memos to key figures in his management upper echelon, and they all agreed to hush the matter up completely and let it go no further. The junior executive was fired and threatened that if he ever circulated anything about the rumor he'd uncovered he'd be blacklisted for good in any job. And Buck could have had that done, you'd better believe it. "

She went on, "I didn't tell Buck I found out about that firing and about hushing up the rest

of the management people about the whole matter. I didn't want the meat and experimentation and breeding industries to be investigated and maybe brought down, because I liked the big money it all brought in. And Buck really never believed the junior executive's story about the original founders of the industries using little homeless white kids. He thought the old rumor had just been silly, envious gossip, and he thought the junior executive was wacko, along with Buck's first wife. Buck completely bought in to what we're all taught in school about the Homi being genetically altered chimps. I bought into it too. But I got worried when I found those memos in Buck's office about that old rumor coming to light. So I told Buck I found those memos, and I asked him if he'd like me discreetly to check into the present day Homi, about their DNA. I said I felt sure this would lay to rest any rumors, for good. He told me o.k., to go ahead with it. So I privately hired a couple of lab guys to come to the bobbypen and the breeder installation in town here, and I told people they were vets doing a health survey. They took blood samples from the Homi, and did lab tests on them ... and they reported to me that the blood samples showed human DNA. I offered them a fantastic cash sum to keep their mouths shut, to come in yearly instalments on condition that they continue keeping their mouths shut. I didn't tell Buck that the blood samples showed human DNA; I told him the opposite, namely that they showed nonhuman DNA. So Buck quit worrying, and the whole matter was closed. I figured our financial future would be assured for good, at that point."

"When Ruby Glidden started doing her work teaching the breeder babettes signing, Buck didn't worry at all because I'd fooled him into thinking that nothing at all threatening would come of it since the babettes were nonhuman. But I started coming around the breeder installation on periodic visits, to check out what was going on, and I found out that the babettes she was

working with were doing a kind of talking with their hands, and I found out from the caretaker that they were evidently saying more and more. Then I got scared, because I was afraid that maybe at some point Ruby would realize they were human. So I hired the two men to do the kidnapping and the killings, and I left the back door of the installation unlocked for them to get in -- I'd come by just a little earlier to do it -- and I told them to come at the time when the caretaker would be at lunch and Ruby's assistant would be in Ruby's office working. I told the men to chloroform her so she'd be de-activated for a little while."

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Of course Jolie's confession worsened her own situation appreciably, because the charges against her were now that she had paid for the kidnapping of six humans and the murder of five humans and the attempted murder of the sixth. She expected Buck would be brought down with her because he'd chosen to discount the old rumor the junior executive had told him about and had not taken any interest in looking into it himself. The thought of bringing Buck down was what lifted Jolie's spirits greatly during the difficult days to come. She was a bit like a suicide bomber in this respect. Pretty, bland, docile Jolie! She'd been in the marriage the whole time for the sake of the money and status, while faultlessly playing the perfect wife. Unlike Ruby, she didn't care at all about the state of Buck's soul and felt no sadness about the slide of his psyche into escalating remorseless greed. She liked the escalating remorseless greed.

A NEW DIRECTION

After the news hit the press about Jolie's confession, the apprehension of the second of the abductor/killers, and the court case against Jolie, there was in the city talk of little else for some weeks. A court case against Buck was being prepared. Chase Wells's film "Meat," already a cult favorite, was even more in demand at many film theaters nationwide, and Chase was thinking about writing a sequel or maybe a prequel. The Kung Fu guy was now a folk hero, seen as the Robin Hood of the present age, although just specifically who he was remained unknown. Evan wanted it that way. He didn't want to go public right now, didn't want to be feted as a hero. Anikka also preferred to keep her role in spiritual gardening a secret. She wanted to go on doing it unpublicized. She believed strongly that the need to help the public evolve spiritually would be ongoing. Rip Richards was busy planning a conference on animal rights, with presented papers to be printed in a forthcoming issue of *Journalism and Humane Vanlue*. He believed that now was the time to direct public interest and the public conscience to an increased awareness of the fact that virtually all the sorts of treatment that had been accorded the Homi for years was also being accorded to millions of nonhuman animals nationwide, animals that were being bred and used for experimentation, and bred and factory farmed for meat. He wanted to evoke serious and deep public discussion of the moral considerability of those nonhuman animals with central nervous systems as feelingful beings capable of as much pain and suffering as humans are.

And Ruby and her assistants continued to prepare their case for a class action suit against Amhound, for reparations to present-day Homi for the pain and suffering they had undergone,

possibly with reparations for the treatment of previous Homi. The topic of cannibalism was one of the hottest topics around, for a time. TV stations played and replayed old films such as "Soylent Green" and "Sweeney Todd," and English classes were assigned to read Swift's essay, "A Modest Proposal," because of its emphasis on cannibalism. National horror on the topic was at an all time high.

Amidst all this furor, few people gave much thought to what fate awaited those Homi who were at present inmates of bobbypens, experimentation units, and breeding installations. These branches of Amhound were all under court order to desist in their practices and to feed and house and provide a decent environment for the present inmates until further notice. Ruby, Evan, and Rip Richards were largely alone with each other in their mutual concern for the future of all these beings. Ruby doubted that any fully satisfactory plan could be found for them, although it would be necessary to plan something.

In the court case against Buck Wells, the prosecution alleged that Buck had been guilty in not showing appropriate concern for the memos sent him by the junior executive he had fired. The junior executive, named by Jolie, had been found and was called upon to testify about what his investigations had uncovered. His report was largely what Jolie had said it was, but had more details. He said that in the 1930s Depression years the founders of Amhound had bought up the babies of many jobless, homeless, and abjectly penniless people, promising the parents to provide housing for the babies, and had begun, on a modest level, to rent out the infants to business-owned labs that wanted to test cosmetics, consumer products, and over-the-counter medicines on human subjects, with the aim of increasing commercial profit. The story was circulated at the time that this was after all better than the abuse and starvation these babies

would otherwise undergo. After twelve years of so the founders began to use this by now newly fertile population to breed more babies. And it was then that the really ghastly business of using male babies for meat had been started by one of the founders who concealed this caper from the others. This reprobate was the one who began the story that these "meatlings" were a selective breed of chimp developed on Mendelian principles from specially selected chimps. The project was so lucrative and the times were still so hard economically that people who suspected otherwise looked the other way. And it was out of this matrix that today's huge Amhound-owned Homi meat, experimentation, and breeding enterprises had developed, a situation thoroughly entrenched in the culture by the time Buck became CEO of Amhound and built this corporation up to its gigantic multinational status. Buck's schooling at public schools and at a major state university had exposed him to a barrage of purported information on the nonhuman status and inferiority of the Homi, attested to in the past by many noted scholars. Textbooks used in schools and universities were produced in court as evidence. The pitch of the defense was that Buck was innocent of wilful wrongdoing and was the victim of the widespread misinformation fed the public for decades.

The defense case was impressive and hard for the prosecution to defeat. Much ado was made about the difference between ignorance and wilful ignorance. The latter, it was claimed, is ignorance in which a person chooses to remain when presented with an opportunity to learn more about something. Chase and Ruby and the junior executive all testified for the prosecution with respect to Buck having chosen wilful ignorance, and this was augmented by Jolie's statement about Buck's not having participated at all in the checking out of the biological status of the Homi. It was a difficult call, and Buck was prepared to fight to the limit the allegation of

willful ignorance. In the end he was let off with a large fine and a year's probation.

Jolie, sentenced to prison for life, was furious about the outcome of Buck's trial. Ruby, though she hated Jolie's crime, nevertheless felt emotionally sympathetic to Jolie's fury, and went to visit her in prison. "Jolie," she said, "we may get at Buck yet, if not in one way then another. We're preparing a class action suit for documented extreme pain and suffering of the Homi, with a demand for reparations. It may take years, and a judgment adverse to Amhound may be appealed, but we might get somewhere in the long run. I'm hoping Buck will get hit terribly hard in the pocketbook, more than he already has ... after all, that is his major pain center."

The class action suit against Amhound began and dragged on and on inconclusively for months. Ruby felt increasingly stressed out. The evidence her videotapes provided was indeed just as graphic and compelling as she had hoped and intended, but the Amhound defense team was the best money could buy. A decision in favor of reparations was appealed, and the case was to begin all over again. Heaven knew how long that might go on.

It was hard to protect Deirdre from the media's constant attention to the suit, but Ruby tried her best. She did not discuss Deirdre's former classification as an animal with the girl's schoolmates, teachers, and principle, and shielded her from exposure to the media as much as possible. But this latter wasn't completely possible, and Deirdre was visibly anxious as increasing information about the Amhound scandal became available to the public. She was now going on fifteen, and her mind and sensibility were developing fast. Ruby had legally adopted her by now, and felt concerned about Deirdre's peace of mind as well as her own.

Amhound offered Ruby the job of planning for the nationwide breeder installations a kind of pro tem boarding school program for the existing experimental and breeder babettes, with

enriched educational and cultural opportunities. Rip Richards was offered a similar job with respect to establishing nationwide a number of enriched orphanage situation for bobbypen inmates. The two put their heads together and hired the best developmental and educational experts to set up the best programs they could under the circumstances. Amhound was on court order to do all this, pending any final settlement of the case (if there were ever to be a final settlement) for reparations to the Homi. Ruby could have stayed on as the permanent national director of the babette programs but she turned the offer down because she was burned out from the exertions of the last several years, and she felt deeply committed to give her adopted daughter Deirdre the best life she could. She also felt committed to make frequent visits to keep in touch with the six babette subjects she'd seen through their first parturition. But she had to re-invent herself and her life now. There was within her an urgent drive to create something new. She gave three months' notice to Amhound. Luckily they were paying her very well during this period while she was setting up the nationwide program for babettes, and they had also reimbursed her, with interest, for the purchase price she'd paid for Deirdre back at the time when Deirdre had been classed as an animal, hence property, rather than as a human being. She'd be in a position to take a hiatus for a few months while she was considering what she wanted to do next.

One day when the mail came at home there was a letter from Toronto from Pat O'Hare to "Kitty, in care of Ruby Glidden." It was over two years since they had seen or heard anything from him. It was a hand-written message, which Ruby thought was a nice touch. It started, "Dear Kitty, I think of you and I miss you." That was another nice touch. He went on to say that he had been taking graduate studies at the University of Toronto for close to two years now,

in epistemology, and he liked his studies. He had kept on with his writing too, and felt encouraged that some of his professors were supportive toward his work. He wondered how Kitty was doing with her studies. "You are a very smart girl," he wrote. And he wrote that he wondered if there was some way he and Kitty could get together for a little reunion. He enclosed his e-mail address.

Deirdre/Kitty's face lit up as she showed the letter to Ruby. "Oh, may I go?"

Ruby could see how much this meant to her, and although she hadn't liked Pat, or hadn't liked aspects of him, she realized he had been good to Deirdre and had made a big difference for the better in her life. "Yes," she said. "As soon as your school term is over and my job is finished -- one more month -- we'll fly up to Canada and we can go to Quebec to visit the Boys' Ranch and then we can go on to Toronto in Ontario and we can stay at a hotel there and you and Pat can have a reunion in the lounge in the lobby. I have some shopping I'd like to do. We could stay a week in Toronto if you want."

Deirdre was happier than she had been in months. Ruby made flight and hotel reservations, and Deirdre e-mailed Pat that they could see him for a week in June in Toronto, and would this be convenient? He e-mailed back that he'd save that week for the reunion.

Ruby and Deirdre went up to Canada to visit the Boys' Ranch. Amigo had been blossoming developmentally, physically and emotionally and mentally, under the loving attention and the excellent care the Boys' Ranch provided. Pierre had found a girlfriend from among the young people who were volunteer helpers. "This is what we must do," Ruby mused. "We must make enclaves of hope wherever we can. Greed and wrongdoing won't go away, but we can at least make some alternatives, some islands where things are better."

On the first morning of the reunion in Toronto, Ruby said she wanted to talk with Pat alone for a couple of hours, before she left Deirdre with him for the afternoon. During their morning talk she filled him in on the doings at the breeder installation and on Deirdre's life and on the court cases of Buck and of Jolie, and on the stalled class action suit. He had gotten a little acquainted with some of this via the media, but it was not the major thing in Canada that it was in the U.S. Then during the afternoon and the next day Ruby left Deirdre/Kitty in the hotel lobby with Pat and went shopping for a new wardrobe. She loved fashion; it was a way to bring beauty into the everyday, and she felt a deep longing for beauty after the ugly events of the court trials and the rigors of her work before that. She met them at a nearby sandwich shop for a light supper at seven each of the first two evenings, and the time passed reasonably well with Pat and Ruby not getting into any fights. After the second evening's supper as they left the sandwich shop Pat asked her if he could have some conversation with her, by themselves, the following morning. She was quite surprised, but thought why not, and agreed to have breakfast with him in the hotel coffee shop and spend a couple of hours in conversation. Deirdre/Kitty could have room service bring up her breakfast and later on she and Pat could have another afternoon to themselves.

The next morning Ruby and Pat met at the coffee shop at nine, and she asked him what he wanted to talk about. "I know you're suspicious of me," he said a bit abruptly. "I know there's a big gulf between us. Can't you get over your offense and can't we be friends?"

She put down the impulse within her to show irritation at his way of putting things, as if it were just a matter of her taking "offense," and she should just get over it. But this was not the time to get into a further snarlup. "Pat," she told him gently but firmly, "It's not a matter of my

taking offense. When we met over two years ago there were some things that you said that sent a shudder through me, that seemed to me to show a ... forgive me ... a callous indifference to some of my dearest values in life, values that I've built my life around, that are a part of my deepest sense of who I am. I felt ... hurt, felt that you didn't want to know me at all or what my life was all about, or want to know what was important to me in my work. I admit that I felt hot under the collar, and that didn't help, I know. Your turning to sarcasm rather than to discussion when we differed was for me the final straw. And yet ... I know there's some underlying sweetness in you, and you did wonders for Kitty, and she loves you. You know, she really does think of you as her father."

Pat reflected carefully and didn't answer right away. When he finally answered his tone was patient and reasonable, much more so that Ruby remembered it being over two years ago. "My studies have meant a lot to me," he said. "I've been rethinking a lot of things. And Kitty has been telling me her whole life story these past two days. Her signing has come along incredibly! She can express just about anything now. I didn't know in any detail before now all the things she's been through, and I can see now that it doesn't make sense to think of somebody getting "healed" from something like that. It's more a matter of a life taking a certain direction, irreversibly, because of hardships that have happened, and of the person trying to play out the hand they've been dealt in the best way they can. It can never be as if those things hadn't happened. And the person has to figure out for herself or himself what to aim for and how to do it. And my priorities aren't necessarily their priorities."

Ruby was very impressed. He was expressing himself very reflectively, with no resort to anger or sarcasm. The two years of graduate work, involving constant reasoned discourse, had

taken deep root in him, and she saw she was in the presence of a very keen mind and a consciousness of considerable depth that was beginning to find itself. "Thank you, Pat," she told him warmly. "This means a lot to me. And thank you for really hearing Deirdre -- as it were -- because sharing her life history with you is enormously important to her. Can you accept that she loves you as her father?"

He looked a little uncomfortable, then said, "I never had any kids. But ... I guess I did help to form Kitty's nature, didn't I?"

"Yes. A lot."

"And I'm very fond of her."

"Good enough! That's a bit like a father."

He thought some more. "She's our kid," he commented. "She told me you've adopted her and you're now her mother. So we have a kid together."

Ruby was startled by this new idea. "I'll give it some thought," she promised.

They were silent for a few minutes, mutually surprised by this new turn of events. Then Pat said, "Do you still read philosophical material? I mean, I realize you've been focussing on other things for awhile."

She said that philosophy had been a central part of her nature all her life and she still read and always would read philosophical material, and write it too. So he asked, "Would you read some epistemological essays I've been working on currently? And maybe we could talk about them? My professors have been very encouraging about my writing."

"Well," she hesitated, then cautiously asked, "what will you give me in return if I do?"

"Give you," he said, puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"It takes time and energy and work for me to read somebody's philosophical essays and then discuss them with the person. I don't just sit down and get the drift of things straight off, you know. That's not how it works. It takes a lot of energy and focussed thought for me to get into somebody else's mental world, their categories, their assumptions, their reasoning, and so on. It's not a quick thing. And I have to leave the material sitting in my head for a few days, to assimilate it, and that takes more work and energy too. If you want me to do this for you, what do you offer in return?"

He felt irritated for a moment, but managed to control his manner, and he answered, "Isn't your interest in the subject matter enough of a reward."

"Maybe it would be rewarding, maybe not," she said drily. "You never know. But I'm asking to get back something of equivalent value in the way of your devoting a similar amount of time, energy, work, to something that's been central in my agenda. You said a little while ago, 'Can't we be friends?' Well, this is the sort of thing that friends do. There needs to be some reciprocity."

"Oh, all right, I'll try to take an interest," he said a bit impatiently. "What do you want me to do?"

She decided to ignore his impatience and also the loftiness of the word "try," in favor of seizing the moment to move ahead some. "I'd like you to read my research reports on the memories, thoughts, and feelings of the six breeder babettes with whom I worked through their first parturition cycle. The material is going to be published. You could give me some feedback on the manner and clarity of the presentation. And actually, I bet you might find that it all connects to some extent with your interest in epistemology, because some philosophical

issues come up about the problems of illusory "knowledge" people claim to have about minds that develop in circumstances very different from one's own ... there are serious problems about people assimilating what they believe they know about others into their own biased mindset, particularly if the people whom we think we know have a lot less power than we do and haven't had a chance to express or even any experience in expressing their own thoughts and feelings and experiences. The elite "knowers" develop fantasies about the less powerful, and mistake this for "knowledge" when it's a mix of bigotry and ignorance. I think that sort of thing was going on a lot with respect to what people claimed they 'knew' about the Homi. So, will you read my research reports?" she asked, persistently but pleasantly. "If you will, then I'll be glad to read your epistemological essays, and we can have lots of e-mail discussion about all of this. I think you're very talented and very smart, Pat. I'd really like to exchange some ideas with you."

His face softened. "There's something I want to tell you," he suddenly confided. "Twice in my life, once thirty years ago and another time eighteen years ago, I was institutionalized for about six months each time for a manic phase of a bipolar disorder. They filled me up with heavy medications and I finally came down out of it each time. I got depressive phases too. Bad, bad times. I've felt a little uncertain about the worth of my ideas, since then. But I think some of my ideas are good, in spite of all this."

She was moved. "Pat," she said, touching his hand softly for a moment, "I'm sorry you had to go through that. Did somebody take some time to sit down with you and talk with you during those times in an institution?"

"Yes," he said, "sure, people talked to me."

She wondered, though, if anybody had helped him get to the bottom of what it had all been about. But she decided to wait and let him choose his own time to say more about it, if and when he wanted to. She had the feeling that nobody had really helped him tease out the deep seated roots in his life history of his mood swings. But she wouldn't push the river with Pat. Nevertheless, she now felt she had more of a handle on his nature than before. Just as she had thought after she first met him, somebody or various somebodies had not really heard him deeply enough in his own time of need.

"Pat," she said, "sometime if you feel like telling me more about those days I can be a good listener."

They said good evening, at this point, and the next day Deirdre resumed her reunion with Pat. The following day he brought with him to the hotel lobby several epistemology manuscripts he'd written, and Ruby handed him her research papers that she'd had faxed to her from her office. After exchanging their writings they promised to get in touch by e-mail when each had digested what the other had written.

The week in Toronto came to an end, with a very happy Deirdre giving Pat a big hug as they said goodbye, that he reciprocated. He and Ruby hadn't had any more depth level talk since their conversation earlier in the week, but she felt that the snarlup between them was enroute to a rapprochement now. "Goodbye, Pat," she said as they touched both hands in parting.

"Maybe we can be friends," he said, and smiled a smile of remarkable sweetness that touched Ruby's heart. To her surprise they fell into a quick, sweet hug that felt very good.

"Maybe we can."

Ruby and Deirdre flew out from the Toronto airport the next morning, and got home by nightfall. They didn't know what the future might bring them, but they now felt a new energy within them to try new directions.

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