

“Alms for Oblivion”
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5.6.2466, $g = 14.9 \text{ m/s/s}$

And so we were pressed to the earth that was not the earth, and our bones ached. Our bones ached because they were not made for the earth. Our rusty bones were made for airier earth and more arid times, and our jaws felt like we'd been chewing gum for weeks. Our hair drooped into long thin squiggles like in a five year old's drawing. We frowned, constantly, under this new force, and even frowning took work. Some slouched around, stooped over, with their mouths agape, concentrating only on their next step which they couldn't always make. Bodies—slumped human bodies—became simply obstacles to shuffle around. It had become acceptable, socially speaking, to fall down and take a nap to regain one's strength in the middle of a store, or a road, or a conversation. But you could never regain enough strength to resist something that is only strength, that is only an iterative and perpetual increase of strength.

Our thoughts, once, had been lighter, and our prose—when we wrote it, which wasn't often—like dry ice, buoyed on its own disappearing. But this was before gravity's transparent touch began pulling us into the underworld and our own petty jealousies tied weights to our feet.

In his dense iron song Yeats sang that *things fall apart; the center cannot hold*, and thought this was a bad thing, perhaps because he was a fascist. Meaning that he wrote and sent actual emails to Mussolini about how great fascism was, and Mussolini wrote back saying *Yeats, you are right: fascism is fantastic—I wish you were here. We make an excellent spaghetti*. You can call up those emails and read them, and if you do read them, and if you then reread Yeats' cold iron

songs it will become clear that William Butler Yeats, Fascist, would have liked nothing better than a black hole at the center of Mars, if only for its symbolic force.

And now, lying here thinking this, it feels as if what is slowly buckling the ark of my ribs, the bridge of my spine, the temple of my skull, the multitude in my groin is no longer physical, but somehow symbolic—

I apologize. I normally do not write like this, dropping heavy names like *Yeats* or *Proust* on my readers' unsuspecting heads, which are bent, after all, reading my words. Given the current state of gravity, I should be particularly careful—today, a *Yeats* to the head could kill a man. Before you put on a helmet, let me take you back to a time when *everything* was lighter, when a dropped *Yeats* was more likely to—*flick*—flit out an open window without your notice, like a breath or a moth or a *Proust*.

3.22.2465: $g = 3.71 \text{ m/s/s}$

We were poets, and this meant nothing—had it meant something we would not have been poets. Had it meant nothing to be architects, we would have been architects. But architects walk around well-lighted offices, and attach sensors to the tips of their fingers, and lift earth into air in defiance of earth. They affect the world, and imprint patterns encoded in their brains onto matter, and that is something. Poetry is nothing, and the benefit of nothing is that nothing—unlike matter—cannot buckle under misguided policy and flawed science and hasty engineering. Or at least that is what we thought before our language buckled, before we buckled and broke and began falling toward that center to which all things tend.

See? I'm Prousting again. Hell, this is (*watch your head*) blatant Yeatsing.

Let me start over. With politics.

It makes sense that the President had been made his fortune in architecture, and not merely because his hair was hard and steely and architectural. His hair defied all that was good or reasonable, and people loved it. It defied the ever-growing gravity of Mars itself while our hair—the hair of poets—drooped; and swooned; and wilted; and frowned; and gave up. Our hair fell from limp to limper verbs while his hair stood defiant and, somehow, phallic. The news photo of him framed in a hexagonal window lifting off the surface at 30 g's shows his hair standing tall and—again, somehow—saluting. Hair should not salute, and yet the President's hair saluted us and the planet and itself as he was lifted into the atmosphere in a brand new rocket. They'd had to redesign the propulsion because of the new gravity, in two weeks, and had ended up scaling science back five hundred years and using fission. As his hair flew into space our hair drooped, and frowned, and fell out like leaves in autumn. Within a week the whole city looked like the floor of barbershop. The slumped forms napping made pillows from it; the others didn't.

But like I said, before the world became a barbershop we were poets, and so the way we protested his election and his policies and his patriotic saluting hair was to write poems. That is to say: we did nothing, and that is why we did it. Because it was nothing, and that's what we assumed poets did.

It was great. Two of us didn't even write. Alison, because she was lazy; and Miguel, for no discernible reason. There were five of us back then (six if you counted Kelia / Jessika von's dual personhood, which we did). This is when gravity was what it had been for billions of years, and

the surface hadn't yet cracked and buckled, and the oceans hadn't drained through those cracks and been vaporized into the thick fog that makes each breath feel like birth.

But again—it was great. We lived in a huge abandoned office space at the edge of town, just before the tracts of corporate houses. The air was thinner there, being farther from an Opening than the city center, and the rent reflected it—we could not have been poets had the rent been higher. We'd have gotten actual jobs, and would have moved further into the city, and would have affected the world, like architects. That was unthinkable, and so we lived in the thin air of our office, a hundred meters from an Opening, and did whatever odd jobs we stumbled across in the array—mostly language and translation stuff that people with low level apparati couldn't figure out on their own.

Not that *we* actually did it most of the time. Miguel had inherited a fairly sophisticated apparatus from his father's family, and before we moved out to the Office we pooled our funds into updating its language protocols—it cost a small fortune, mostly Miguel's—and then each week we'd make just enough money to buy the updates, pay off my and Alison's orphanarium contracts, and cover rent and food and drugs. Once or twice a week each of us would spend a couple hours in the array with the apparatus deciding what to buy and upgrade, and then we'd just leave it on the rest of the time while it wandered through the array talking with other apparati and making just enough money for us to live on. Almost all of the jobs came straight from Earth, where we were at a disadvantage from the time lag, so we started contracting out to other off-planet apparati. Our apparatus became a kind of broker or clearing house. A couple years earlier I would have orgasmed at the thought of designing and running an interplanetary clearing house—I mean this quite literally, by the way: my masturbatory fantasies in those days were unbelievably elaborate and drawn out, and tended to involve primarily: 1) my genitals; 2) Alison and her genitals, both of whom/which I knew well; and 3) complicated economic forecasts that

would allow me to begin creating, legally, a family (with Alison) that would evolve, over generations, into a dynasty that would eventually crush and buy out another dynasty (Plyodyne, the firm that had traded my labor and person for stock options)—these fantasies, for reasons that I hope I don't have to spell out, skipped forward and backward in a rhythm of time and space, between the cerebral ecstasies of fiscal planning and the pulsing chemical intimacy of another body, from time with Alison, back to our first times together, across fields of stock options that would secure future love-making, along the jagged peaks of projected growth, and down through future generations of selves who would seduce CFO's from Earth and wind themselves around their dense, earthy bodies, breaking up families and toppling firms and propagating my financial and genetic legacies. Sometimes these fantasies would go on for hours, and they were ridiculous. Though now, as a self-proclaimed poet, I let Miguel and his family connections handle all of that poison that had once been my lifeblood.

At first I figured all of it must have been illegal (Miguel's schemes, not my fantasies—though that was iffy), but then, after I got to know Miguel and his ideas a bit better, I realized that it couldn't have been, even if he'd have felt less guilty had it been. That was something that always puzzled us about him. Three things, really: 1) his utterly extreme (and I mean Absolute) stance toward what he called Transfinite Justice (= roughly, social justice, in normal, non-obsessive-compulsive terms)—all of our excess earnings for the month, those that didn't go toward rent or food or drugs or my or Alison's orphanarium contracts or apparatus upgrades, went directly to social programs that he researched in the array while the rest of us were passed out on the floor; 2) his complete lawfulness, even down to the daily micrograms of CG he allowed himself to ingest—though it should be remarked that he ingested *exactly* the legal limit of CG, and did so according to the Jupiterean day (9h 55m 33s, the shortest in the solar system) because of certain ambiguities attendant upon the legal definition of "day" in the age of interplanetary travel and colonization; and 3) his refusal to speak out, even in sanctioned

protests, against any of the bullshit that he'd all but dedicated his life to stamping out. He didn't, for example, even write poems. And we've already established that poetry is basically nothing. Miguel did, in other words, less than nothing—perhaps because of the more than double the (pragmatically speaking) legal limit of CG he ingested “daily,” which tends to mellow one to the point of soft liquidhood.

OK, I'm putting all of this bluntly, and in reality it's far more nuanced and difficult to tease out, but still: it makes less sense to me now than it did even then. Obviously, Miguel did more than nothing—heroically so, given the Herculean quantities of CG he was imbibing. Like funneling all that money into all those programs: that's something. But if you're friggin' Miguel and the dailies are all but begging you to produce for them and you pass that up... you pass that up and you can produce like that? Meaning, you can produce a poem—your only one, your first try—that gets four people in your class who'd never even heard of poetry to drop out and become poets and move into an abandoned office with you? You have that natural sway and you go off to live in an abandoned office with two orphans and two people who were demonstrably crazier than you? You're goddamn Rimbaud-with-an-implant and that's what you choose to do with your life? At least Rimbaud *traveled* after he stopped writing—you lived in an office.

Sure (and here I'm summarizing a hundred things that you, whoever you are, can't possibly know about), all that had something to do with the implant. After a minute talking with him you'd know he had one—that speech, that instant recall, that instantaneous synthesis of a thousand disparate things that he could translate into an image a symbol a joke that made you see the whole picture there, before you, gazing back. That haunting look that he was only ever half there. It wasn't your standard implant—it was obviously something earthly and experimental, and we all figured it was fucking with his head twenty-five hours a day.

It clearly was, and we wouldn't have been there had he been more stable and he wouldn't have, either. Had we figured out that it was perfectly legal for him to feed Jupitorean quantities of drugs directly into his implant—which, being experimental, obviously hadn't yet been regulated—we would have probably intervened. Trying to imagine what it would be like to have an implant is hard enough, but trying to imagine what having an implant *vibrating to transfinity on drugs you yourself are designing* is impossible. But look, again, I'm trying to summarize an entire human being for you in a finite language in a finite space and I don't even have an implant. It's way more complicated. You probably think, for instance, that Miguel was this haunted and sullen figure with a beard and crazed eyes who strode around in the thin air wearing sandals with his hands behind his back. And he did. Sometimes. But he was also, and I don't use this phrase lightly, *Completely and Utterly Bonkers—in a good way*.

1.12.2465, g = 3.71 m/s/s

I said that we ended up becoming poets and moving in with Miguel because of that poem he wrote, but that's only about half true. We all watched the poem when he presented it in the class, and we were all swept out in its tide of language and sea of images and sound of sounds and thought and courage. We'd never seen anything even approaching it. It was, after all, an economics class, and we were born and bred economists (Alison and I literally so), and at that point anything that wasn't economics made us uneasy. (Recall, for example, my aforementioned masturbatory fantasies concerning the transgenerational interplanetary corporate dynasty).

It made the professor *incredibly* uneasy (the poem, not my fantasies, which I kept to myself). Miguel was supposed to be giving a presentation on quasi-periodic market collapses, really complex stuff, and he ended up presenting us with that poem that all but blew the windows out. It would have actually blown them out had Miguel turned the volume up, and Miguel would have turned the volume up had the professor not hoarded the projector and broken it halfway

through, during the part of the poem where the first wave of Martian immigrants began turning blue in the air and a man who looked suspiciously like our professor began “taming” what had to be a bestiary of markets with a long whip that was either a devil’s tail, or something even more unpleasant.

So, technically, we only saw half the poem—we never saw, for example, whether the economist was devoured by the bestiary. Had we seen the whole thing, that might have been enough to win us over. But like I said, the poem was only half of it. The other half was the argument that happened after the professor broke the projector with his shoe. Miguel, who’d disappeared after pressing play, rose from the floor where he’d apparently been lying down for the duration of the poem, walked quietly over to the professor, pointed at his (the professor’s) chest, said calmly *this is what I think of your economics*, and then, out of the absolute blue, *bonked* the economics professor on the head.

As in: BONK!

Hard. It wasn’t like one of those comical *bonk*’s like you see happen every now and then in the array’s archives. It was an aggressive, angry sort of *bonk* that let us and the professor know *exactly* what Miguel thought of the professor’s economics. The *bonk* was so perfectly timed that the professor didn’t even argue back. His theories were flattened—*swat*—like a flounder. All he could do was lie back on his desk, spread his arms out, and look at the ceiling like Miguel had been doing during the first half of the poem. After several stunned minutes we—maybe forty of us—left the room, and for all I know the professor is still lying there, staring at his squashed and floating will.

Outside the classroom, in the diamond half-dome entryway left over from colonization's first wave, I think that Kelia / Jessika von (she of the dual personhood) was the first to build up the courage to ask Miguel why he'd done it. I remember that Miguel put down his espresso—apparently he had the presence of mind to order an espresso from somewhere—and answered, staring her directly in the eye: *because at times one must philosophize with a hammer. I had planned on hitting him at the end of the poem, anyways—in the nose. He was wise to end the poem when he did.*

And so weeks later we moved in with him, and became poets. We would have been stupid not to—or at least Alison and I would have. It was our only chance to avert the path laid for us by the orphanarium, eight hundred years of direct economic oppression, and our own inertial cowardice—our cowardice that had very nearly fed us back into the system that had produced us. A recycled biotic system floating through space, feeding, begetting and suffering. Miguel's *bonk* jolted us out of it, and for that we were grateful.

The others—Arvinhd and Kelia / Jessika von—they perhaps were stupid to move in with him.

6.12.2307, g = 3.71 m/s/s

In the first wave of colonization there was a poet, like a withered and acrid peanut in a dish of M&M's. His name was Jin-Hoi, and only scraps of his art survive. He wrote, they say, in ink on paper, and then let his poems fall and blow away in the winds. At first the poems would fall to his feet and stay there for days until a wind arrived and took them by the hand for a walk through the camp, and across the deserts. As Jin-Hoi grew older the camps swelled, and the winds grew more ruthless, pulling his children from his fingers often before they were born. He grew blind, we hear, from the silicon dust in the factories, and yet he kept writing and letting his poems fall into that oblivion that had become his world.

Alms, he called them. He'd somehow gotten the phrase from Shelley, who in his darker moments had so described his own poetry--*alms for oblivion*. Maybe six or seven of Jin-Hoi's alms survive (there's debate), though only in translation. The originals—one thousand and one, the number of sheets of paper Jin-Hoi had smuggled during the first wave—are wandering the surface of this planet that will soon involve and twist and blink into an abyss.

Alm 361; A Fragment

*An orbit, a blind point
of mind sings, is an endless
falling
from
and towards – the two
finally one word
(falling)
the same transparent pull*

and here I am, a blind point
grappling with an endless
pineapple;—
Who cares;—

His, not mine. They say that the information that falls into a singularity is never lost, but merely converted. It somehow gives me comfort that those poems, in some form, will be translated into pure energy, into the rhythmic pulse of radiation that will beat in the universe like a cold dark heart. That raw heart would give me solace were it not for this spiny pineapple that the living call life.

No one knows whether the fragment just cuts off there with that disjointed punctuation or whether the poem continues and resolves itself with a nice ending, a dense little point. The pineapple, for all we know, could really be jaggedly endless. Dante thought so—at least for some. For the others—those blessed in space—space blessedly bends back upon itself into a *knot* or *node* composed of three impossible circles. He called it God, a Divine Rose, and he meant it.

In its profundity I saw—ingathered
and bound by love in one single volume—
what in the universe seems separate, scattered:
substances, accidents, dispositions
as if conjoined—in such a way that what
I tell is only rudimentary.
I think I saw the universal shape
which that knot takes,

Dante tied that double knot which is both God and his own poem in *one single volume*, while Jin-Hoi left his poems frayed with hyphens and colons like the universe's exposed wiring, or its ragged nerves. Or perhaps the universe, those ruthless winds and the super-structural failings of interplanetary capital, frayed them for him.

Perhaps that is how it is.

Who knows;—

What one does know is that eight years after his sight gave out, the planet's power grid gave out, and then the air gave out, and that was that: *out*. A frayed and scattered life on an accidental planet.

Jin-Hoi wrote from the center of his dying planet; Dante wrote from afar, watching his Florence tear itself to pieces. One gets a lot of reading done in situations such as mine—it's the only way to avoid thinking about that eternal and approaching knot or hyphen, noose or dagger.

7.15.2465, $g = 3.71 \text{ m/s/s}$

So we'd moved in with Miguel. Up until then I'd been maybe half in love with Alison. After a couple months in the office she was maybe a quarter in love with Miguel, whose threat made me

completely-and-then-some in love with Alison. Had I not been sure that Miguel was impotent from the huge quantities of CG he was taking I would have been jealous and done something. But then again I was taking a fair amount of CG, too, along with other things, and my moods were as even as the seas. The months passed as though we were somehow outside of time, watching time turn, if that's what it does.

The air in the mountains on earth, I hear, is thin. And so as we watched time turn in the thin air of the office I imagined that we were in the Alps, or the Andes—I get them confused. But I pictured us there above it all, walking around above petty jealousies like gods, making tea like gods, updating the apparatus and redistributing wealth like gods.

We weren't gods.

The money we were bringing in and “redistributing” was sucked directly from those we were giving to. For every hundred shares we took we gave back maybe five. As a percentage we were about one nineteenth more ethical than the average Martian citizen. It's actually a fair bit more complicated than that—I'd give you the details, but I've given up on economics.

My brooding love for Alison was really more of a weird longing for safety and order and regularity. I'd known her since I'd been transferred into her orphanarium when I was about twelve. My test scores had begun to fluctuate quote unquote *violently*, and my old firm, Plyodyne, had basically given up on me and traded me to the new one—*Fling!*, an upstart making inroads with the new Administration. That's how I became an economist. The idea was that they'd buy up maybe two hundred of us who had certain aptitudes, but who's aptitudes were too erratic or irregular to use in your typical engineering or marketing firms. *Fling!*'s strategy was to use us basically as generators of explanations—they'd give us a particular trend (about,

say, unemployment, or raw materials mining, or what have you) and we'd generate theories about why it was happening, trying to explain it. The firm would then sell those theories *en masse* to the Administration who would sort through them and offer to the public the one which made the most sense for whatever policy they were trying to push through. Sometimes we'd work alone, sometimes in teams—we were given quotas and it was left up to us to work out how to meet those quotas.

Alison had been drafted in at an early age, when *Fling!* was little more than an array of numbers. They ran tests with her, and had even fitted her with an implant for a couple years before they'd uncovered certain design flaws that caused them to switch it off. Not because they cared about her per se, but because she was a valuable commodity who was more valuable working at a lower capacity than with those flaws. That's the same reason they didn't fit me with one when I was hired over. Arvinth and Jessika von / Kelia were from collapsing families back on Earth, and had been contracted out long before they were born—their contracts came through Plyodyne, just as mine had, and they came about a year later, though from a very different situation. They'd grown up, for instance, in what you'd call a *stable family unit* for a solid eight or nine years before moving into a transitional institution, and then they were flung over to *Fling!*

Miguel... we were never totally in agreement as to how Miguel ended up with *Fling!* It was even unclear when he ended up on Mars. Though he didn't talk about it, the unbridled wealth of Miguel's Earth-based family was taken more or less as fact—his speech, his manner, the insane regularity of his thought, the sort of implant more or less unheard of even in the Entertainment Archives of the Array pegged him as someone who had to have been educated in an environment that could only be paid for with the wealth of Higher Ups in one of maybe a couple dozen Earth firms, or (maybe) Mars' very own Plyodyne. This is, of course, setting aside the possibility that he had some manner of unbalanced mother or father or uncle or benefactor or what have you

who would have blown company money on such an implant—hundreds of firms would have enough liquidity to do that, though it would probably take someone with an implant like Miguel’s to figure out a way to funnel the funds into such a project, since creating the implant itself would have to take place in house, or in the house of a direct competitor. When I was younger I could probably have pegged a dozen or so such mid-level firms which could have met all those criteria (the liquidity, the in-house operations or the potential connections, the batty benefactors). Like I said, there’s a reason I was in Plyodyne’s pool—but as I’ve also said, I’ve given up on economics. It probably has something to do with the fact that I can barely lift my head off the ground, much less update the apparatus which is now barely pulling in three percent of what it would take to update it.

But why Miguel would ever leave such a situation was beyond us. Yes, there was the instability of the implant—that was certainly a factor. But, we figured, there had to be some sort of family or firm dynamic that was off. Like one family being forced or hostilely bought out by another, or something within the family—Hamlet stuff. There could be no other reason for up and moving to Mars. If he wasn’t born here (he was short, maybe 245cm—he’d had to stand on his toes to *bonk* the professor), then he’d moved here when he was young, by maybe six or seven. You could tell by the way he moved, the way his frame had conformed to the gravity. Either that, or his family or benefactor had been anticipating a sudden move to Mars and had been training his cells and metabolism to live efficiently in lower g’s—we’d imagined that too, except that we couldn’t account for his accent, which mimicked perfectly the city’s upper class cadences, and even the soft *shsh/xiu* tonal sounds that supposedly became imperceptible by age four. But again: who knows what an implant can do. He never volunteered the information, and we never asked—like I said, we were taking a lot of CG at the time and so we were far from confrontational.

In any event *Fling!* would have been stupid not to take him. Besides his utter brilliance (with or without the implant) *Fling!*'s contract with him would entail far less than, say, my or Alison's contracts which included employment, health, &c all the way through "adolescence" as defined by Earth's International Academy of Research in Behavior and Cognitive Development—that is to roughly the age of thirty-five. Even if rarely challenged with any sort of success, Martian firms were always wary of breaching those sorts of contracts on account of inordinate amount of press such cases always garnered on Earth, the headline MARS CLONE FACTORY FOR FIRM X being too tempting for any agency worth its weight in stock holders to pass up. Which is why someone like Miguel would be such an automatic hire for a firm like *Fling!* whose only asset was, well, us—rejects from wealthier firms who happened to possess a random set of attributes exploitable in a niche market. This in spite of the fact that Earth was nothing if not a clone factory for firms of every imaginable flavor.

But back to the love triangle: *it didn't end well.*

2.1.2466, $g = 6.92 \text{ m/s/s}$

There were really two love triangles, interlocked like a magician's trick: mine-Alison's-Miguel's, and Kelia's-Arvinth's-Jessika-von's. The second triangle was arguably—hell, demonstrably—more complicated in spite of the fact that it only involved two people—that is, two bodies. Technically there were three triangles, but that will take some explaining.

Kelia / Jessika von's story is both incredibly sad and incredibly common, at least among individuals in that bizarre underclass of technicians that I and Kelia / Jessika von inhabit. Her dual personhood began shortly after she got her implant, around age six or seven—the typical time for standard implants, since by then universal grammars, solid notions of self and others, &c are more or less developed to that fragile degree where the implant can begin to extend them

through the iterative patterns it introduces in the brain. It's sort of a feedback loop where the implant and the brain learn, over the next couple years, to trade off tasks like memory, language, computation, and so forth. The implant, and to a lesser extent the brain, optimizes the efficiency of these functions through the feedback it gets from the environment and from the rigorous courses the individual is run through for the two odd years after implantation. The courses are designed by the creators of the implant and are subject to constant modification, as the implants themselves are constantly updated and patched and altered.

Problems such as the aforementioned dual personhood, or worse, typically happen on account of a mismatch between the coursework—the hours of uninterrupted computation, the days in the array, the coordination of the senses, &c—and the implant's alterations. The most common cause being a fault in the implant rather than in the coursework, and the most common cause of a fault in the chip being fluctuations in the market—meaning discounted and refurbished implants being sold, illegally, at whatever value the black economic climate deems appropriate (which is typically very high in years of famine, recession, etc., and shockingly low in times of boom, bubble, etc.). And who would buy such a thing? Families such as Kelia / Jessika von's who've contracted out future generations under the assumption that the short term fix would give them ample time to rebuild their fortunes and—potentially—buy back those contracts. When the market shifts, or dynasties make a series of poor decisions, those contracts are called in and the families—allotted X number of children over Y number of years—hand over individual after individual until the contract is fulfilled. The contracts, as is well known, can vary widely. Some, like myself or Alison, are basically leftover dividends from as far back as 2151 when the population became officially regulated, and others, like Arvinth or Kelia / Jessika von, are the result of far more recent transactions, mostly from 2410's crash (though I believe Kelia / Jessika von is even more recent than that).

Long story short, the implant is nothing if not a parasite whose nourishment is a) the positive feedback from the coursework, which is highly regulated, and b) the energy from the synaptic connections it makes within the nervous system, which are all but unregulated. Usually, the regulation provided by the external feedback (i.e., the coursework) in effect regulates the internal feedback from the brain. But like I said, when the implant's own inner workings are out of sync with the external feedback—when, for instance, the implant is cobbled together from several different versions that haven't been regularly updated—then the implant can figure out its own, unregulated way to maximize the quantity of positive feedback it acquires from the brain and the environment. Most often it does this by minimizing its connections with the nervous system, typically selecting out and developing a particular sector of the brain, and then, as it were, preying off of the coursework and developing its own complexity (that is, the implant's) with that of the small sector of the brain that it has partitioned, at the expense of the rest of the brain. The rest of the brain, in other words, is left in more or less suspended animation. The result being dual personhood—one regressive and childish and timid (the “rest of the brain”), and one aggressive and unworldly and brilliant (the implant and its portioned section of the nervous system).

Kelia (the child) and Jessika von (the implant / partition) functioned far better than any other dual I had ever met. By a long shot. So much so that K / Jv could even maintain a relationship with Arvindh, who had his own problems unrelated to an implant. And her poetry—her poetry rivaled Miguel's. Her hyperrational, predatory side had learned to feed off of her imaginative, adolescent side, to sharpen it and set it to music. What is poetry if not that? Arvindh, his poetry was, frankly, shit; dark sullen shit about his feelings and squelched desires. Though you can't really fault him—he was, after all, with K / Jv, and Jessika von was in love with Miguel.

Well, “in love with.” I had mentioned that there were three love triangles, and there were: 1) me-Alison-Miguel, that one was simple and, due to the CG, fairly relaxed as far as love triangles go. 2) Kelia-Arvindh-Jessika von, that one was complex (and involved a whole mess of neurological and metaphysical and childhood issues on all three sides of the equation), but remained fairly under control on account of the fact that it was, after all, between only two bodies. Plus, the third triangle tended to trump the second both in terms of complexity and intensity: 3) Jessika von-Arvindh-Miguel’s implant. This is the one that ended it all, and it ended—they say—with a torrent of broken glass.

2.2.2466, g = 6.96 m/s/s

I’m rushing this ending, just as my own rushes. Alison and I had been away when it happened. The end, we knew, was coming, and so we had visited the poles before the gamma radiation had grown too intense along the planet’s magnetic axes (the singularity having aligned, almost magically, over ninety percent of its output along that charmed chord). We returned to find half of the office, the living quarters, simply torn off. At first we assumed that the stresses from the increased pull had finally shorn the building in half, but a quick inquiry into what was left of the government gave us the amazingly blunt report that no, it had been purposefully destroyed. An assassination threat had been called in from and at that address and so, the President’s departure only weeks away, a task force had been called in. And that, they said, was that—an end shorn off.

Alison and I never conclusively discovered whether there had actually been a threat (true or false) called in, whether it had been a mistake, or whether it had been something else altogether (say, an inter-dynastic hit). We simply don’t know, and we never heard any news of the whereabouts of Arvindh’s, Miguel’s, or Kelia / Jessika von’s bodies. But our intuitions told us it

had something to do with that third triangle—Jessika von’s implant all but fused to Miguel’s, and Arvindh all but fused to his own dark pain. I could imagine any one of them calling it in.

5.7.2466, g = 15.08 m/s/s

I imagine that the answer is somewhere in the apparatus, which survived the bombing, and yet I don’t call it up. I would prefer not to know, I believe, because of Alison. I can’t explain it. She’s a month gone, at least—I came out here after, while I could still walk, and now I can barely breathe.

g = \mathcal{N}

The raw heart of space pulses, rhythmically, and here you are left grappling with a pineapple that can only be endless. Close your eyes and watch your fingers and think about the sweet sting the pineapple guards—that tart gamma sliver that

ragged nerve that

here, there

pulses with;—