

Metempsychotic

A Novella

by

Antony Nigel Donovan

Submitted to the Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Science in Creative Writing

at the

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Program in Writing and Humanistic Studies

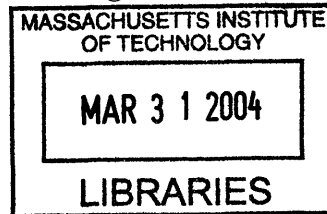
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Abstract

This novella is the story of a young woman, Sakura “Cherry” Ogata, who is inhabited by an alien construct, “Nephesh.” The motives of the alien are not explicitly malevolent and Cherry’s experience leads her to believe that they are benign. A significant portion of the story examines how Cherry and Nephesh learn to live with one another.

In the larger sense, the alien has no motives, either benign or malevolent. In some circumstances, it simply acts in the way it must. This leads to the story’s conclusion, which purposefully leaves many unanswered questions. Cherry cannot truly understand the alien, and the reader is left wondering about her fate and the fate of humanity.

Thesis Supervisor: Joe Haldeman

Title: Adjunct Professor

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Chapter 1

Prologue

Professor Jorham Eckles walked into the classroom and put a folder on the table near the front. The room had dull olive-tan walls. The large baseboards, door-trim, and chalkboard-frame were all painted flat black. Six incandescent lights hung down in two rows from the high, white ceiling; inverted mushroom-cap shaped frosted glass softened and dispersed the light. Eckles opened the folder he'd set down and turned over the top page. After selecting a large piece of chalk from the tray at the bottom of the chalkboard, he wrote "Intersubjectivity and The Other" on the board. He turned to face the class and looked quickly up one row of chairs and down the next until he had examined all six rows of students. More than one-third of the forty-two chairs were unoccupied. He checked the clock above the classroom door—nine minutes past seven—and then picked up the page that he had turned over.

"I am not the only one running late," he said. He read something from the paper in his hand and looked at one of the students. "Mister Tompkins, where is Mister Bluett?"

Tompkins shrugged. "I think he's sick."

Prof. Eckles asked about two other students and got similar responses. "A veritable epidemic. And Mister Van Krieger, is Ms. Ogata also ill?"

Van Krieger stared at the pen in his hand as he repeatedly spun it around his thumb and caught it. Several students watched him for a moment and then turned away. Eckles repeated the question. Van Krieger stopped twirling the pen but re-

mained silent. One of the students near him volunteered that she'd been taken to the hospital early that morning, her condition critical. She wasn't expected to recover. Eckles lay the page face-down on the left-hand side of the folder, stood silently for a moment, and then expressed sorrow for the loss to her friends and family. He turned back to the blackboard, wrote "Dasein: veracious, mendacious, capricious?" under what he had written before, glanced at the clock—thirteen minutes past seven—and began the class.

During the class break, from thirty to forty-five minutes past eight, Eckles spoke with the student who had explained Ms. Ogata's absence. Several other students joined their conversation. When Eckles questioned them, a story of a drug overdose or attempted suicide emerged. Van Krieger was not in the classroom during the break.

At seven minutes before ten, the class ended. Prof. Eckles waited as the students filed out, answering or deferring questions, and wishing them a good night. He stopped one of the students, who had described what had happened to Ms. Ogata in some detail, and asked him if he knew which hospital she had been taken to.

Eckles waited until all of the students had left, then picked up the folder and started toward his office. He walked slowly through the corridor, favoring his left leg. Students occasionally passed him from either direction. The corridors were all brightly lit, but most of the classrooms he passed, and all of the offices, were dark. He turned at connecting corridors several times. There were fewer students after each turn. He entered a stairwell and walked quickly up the three flights to the fourth floor, taking the stairs two at a time. He put the folder he carried into one of the file cabinets in his office, checked something on his computer, and then called a taxi service.

When he got to the hospital, he took an elevator up to the Chronic Care Unit. As he got off the elevator, the CCU nurse looked up at him from a reception area facing the elevators. She put down a thick paperback book. They exchanged pleasantries and he asked if he could see a Ms. Ogata; Cherry. The nurse looked in her files and told him the only Ogata was named Sakura.

“That’s her,” he said.

The nurse apologized. Visiting hours were over, except for next-of-kin. He frowned at the news, unbuttoned his jacket—tweed with patches at the elbows—and then smiled sadly. “I need to see her. I don’t know when I’ll be able to come back. I have to pay my respects.”

The nurse asked him about their relationship—she was his student—why he couldn’t come by in the morning—he was scheduled to give a paper to a conference at Cornell—and then examined his identification. While the nurse pondered, he stood without moving.

“Just for a minute,” she said. “Room 914.”

He thanked her and went to the room. He looked toward the end of the dimly lit hallway—a red exit sign the only prominent feature—before opening the door to 914. The nurse had followed him and stood in the doorway, watching the elevators. Cherry lay on the room’s only bed, connected to a heart monitor and a mechanical ventilator. An IV ran into her right arm. He stood near her for a minute and then turned to the nurse.

“Is there any hope?” he said.

“I’m sorry. She’s only on the respirator until her parents arrive. Tomorrow.”

He nodded and walked back to the elevators with the nurse. While he waited for the elevator, she sat down in the reception area, picked up her book, and began reading. He took the elevator to the second floor and walked to the stairwell at the end of the corridor. He ran up the stairs to the ninth floor and paused for a minute before carefully opening the door. He watched the brightly lit area near the elevators as he walked to room 914 and stepped inside.

He looked over her chart and then made some adjustments to the heart monitor. He pulled loose one of the leads but its display didn’t change. After disconnecting the ventilator hose from the plastic adaptor that rested between her lips, he lifted her into a sitting position and pulled on the adaptor until the endotracheal tube came completely out. He took a deep breath, held her mouth open, pressed his mouth over hers, and exhaled sharply. He did not move, or breathe, for several minutes. She

began to breathe as he lay her back down on the bed. He walked stiffly from the room, down the stairs, and out of the hospital. An EMT asked if he was all right as he walked by, but he didn't answer or acknowledge the question. After walking for several miles he was confronted by three young men.

Upscale condominiums, townhomes, and small storefront restaurants characterized the neighborhood around the hospital. Numerous boarded-up windows and broken streetlamps revealed the nature of the neighborhood through which he now walked.

The young men all wore dark windbreakers, jeans, and unlaced sneakers. One of them stepped directly in front of him and the other two moved up behind him. He continued walking.

"Hey, Pops. Got any change?" the one in front of him said.

He started to walk past him, but the young man grabbed him and pushed him into the other two. He stumbled and fell back against them. They moved him into a standing position, holding him at the shoulder and elbow. His legs moved as if he were trying to walk away, but they held him in place. The one who had asked the question punched him, first in the face, then in the abdomen. He fell to his knees. Before the two holding him could pull him up, he stood and began walking. The one who hit him pulled a telescoping rod from his pocket, snapped it open, and struck him across the side of the head. Blood began to ooze from the tear in his scalp.

"Now it's everything," the one holding Eckles's left arm and shoulder said into his ear.

He continued moving as if he were trying to walk. His assailant went through his pockets while the other two held him. He pulled cash and credit cards from Eckles's wallet and then dropped it on the ground. He pulled off the old man's watch and rings and stepped back, staring at the continuing motion of his legs.

"Fucking weird," the one holding his right arm said.

The one with the rod struck Eckles three or four times in rapid succession and then told his companions to follow him. They had only gone a short distance when they turned and saw him walking in their direction. Blood poured down his face.

They began to run away just as a police cruiser turned onto the street. Its blue lights came on.

“Go!”

They ran in three different directions.

The cruiser stopped and one officer got out and took aim at the one with the rod. The other officer used the cruiser’s PA to announce, “Stop, this is the police,” before he got out of the car.

None of the three stopped. The first officer said, “Shit!” as the one with the rod rounded a corner. The officer looked around while his partner ran toward Eckles. The other two were no longer in sight.

“Get an ambulance,” his partner said.

Eckles’s pace faltered, then ceased when the officer reached him. The old man went limp and fell against him. The officer eased him onto the ground, checked his pulse, and began CPR.

Chapter 2

Back from the dead

Cherry walked down the long corridor, running her fingers along the mortar between the yellow bricks. She heard muffled lectures from the classrooms she passed. She'd finished her exams. She just had to wait. She needed air. The corridor opened onto a garden. Rocks and sand. Small trees and flowers. She leaned towards one of the flowers but the scent was wrong. Not sweet, or even cloying, but antiseptic. Shame overwhelmed her. She turned to go back to her office but there was just a blank white wall. She was trapped by a mistake. She tried to move her arms but something held them at her sides. She tried to walk towards the wall but couldn't move. The wall grew brighter and fear pushed aside the shame. She opened her eyes, lids sluggish, sticky. Sunlight.

"You didn't even *check* for neurotoxins? Barbiturates? Benzodiazepines?"

She struggled to turn her head away from the sunlight and toward the speaker. Two men in white coats: the first livid, almost red with rage; the second patiently enduring the onslaught. The fear had waned but she was confused: the fading nightmare—she hadn't had a nightmare in years—and the strange room. She tried to speak but nothing came out. She wasn't sure her lips had opened.

"... bag over her head. Her Glasgow Coma Score was three. I had two other trauma patients. What would you have done?" The second man—doctor—calmly defending himself. His words made it clear she was in a hospital.

Were they talking about her? She tried to speak again and then raised her left

hand slightly. There was a small bandage taped to the inside of her elbow. Something obscured her vision near her nose. A thin, clear tube ran from her right arm to somewhere behind her head. The two men continued talking, but she didn't pay attention. She had to let them know she was awake.

She couldn't sit up. Bending her arm and resting it on the elbow, she waved her hand slowly back and forth. The first doctor noticed and came over to her.

—“Sakura-san? Do you understand me?” Japanese, which she didn't use. She understood him, but couldn't explain. She shook her head, but it hardly moved.

“Can you understand me?” He frowned slightly as he spoke, watching her eyes intently. She nodded and tried to speak again. There was something covering her mouth. “Don't try to talk. Not yet.” He held her hand. No, he was taking her pulse. She waited. There was nothing else she could do. The other doctor watched as he examined her: listened to her heart, shined a light into her eyes, had her track his pen as he moved it around. He finished by running something pointed across the soles of her feet. Each leg twitched when he did that. Something was taped to one of her legs. He sat on the edge of the bed.

“I'm Doctor Takahashi,” he said.

He told her to blink once for no, twice for yes. He asked her a few stupid questions: did she know who she was, where she was, what day it was. Yes, no, no. The other doctor checked his watch and glared. She wondered if he was as annoyed with Takahashi as she was. She tried to speak; when Takahashi asked her to wait, she tried again. He turned to the other doctor. “Get some water.” The other doctor left. Takahashi tried to continue questioning her, but she shook her head. It was pointless. She needed information, but couldn't get it that way.

She looked around the room. Machines, two chairs and a television hanging on the wall. A privacy curtain hung from a J-shaped track on the ceiling. The curtain was pushed up toward the wall near the head of her bed, partially blocking her view of the door. She couldn't tell if it kept her from seeing anything else. She turned her head toward the window and understood why the wall in her dream had brightened. The sun was just high enough to be seen over the building next to the hospital.

An orderly came in with a pitcher and some paper cups. He set them on the table next to the bed. Dr. Takahashi spoke with him for a moment. The orderly shrugged and left. The doctor's color was rising again. After taking a moment to compose himself, he unhooked the mask covering her nose and mouth and then poured some water into a cup. He supported her head to help her take a sip.

"Start slowly," he said.

"Why?" It sounded more like a croak than a question. She raised a hand to her throat.

"You've been on a ventilator."

She shook her head. "Why here?" A little better. She gestured at the cup he held. He gave her another sip.

"You were found unconscious. You'd stopped breathing."

She tried to understand that, to remember. What was the last thing before the sunlight, before the dream? The dorm? Her office? She couldn't be sure. She asked him about what had happened to her—it was already easier to speak—but the doctor was evasive. She started to ask again, but he shushed her and told her to take things slowly. Another doctor would come to talk with her soon. She wanted to protest, but the feeling of error and shame from the dream rose up inside.

Takahashi grabbed a cord from behind her head and pressed the button on the end. The orderly returned after a minute. The doctor conferred with him for a moment and then left the room. The orderly asked her if she wanted to watch TV. She shrugged and he pulled one of the chairs near the bed. He got the remote from the bedside table and turned on the television. She didn't understand why the orderly was there. She was frustrated again, but almost wanted to laugh. She didn't know what was wrong, what had happened, and she was watching daytime TV. She would have added "bad" to that, but thought it redundant.

The position of the television made it easy to watch from the bed. A game show, volume set low. If it had been one of those confessional shows or, worse, a pseudo-trial show, she'd have insisted he change it. With a game show, you could see if the contestants had any innate concept of probability or search algorithms. If they'd

refrain from jumping around and screaming, it would almost be interesting.

She tried to talk with the orderly, but he seemed fascinated with the game show. Lying on the bed, it was hard for her to keep her eyes open. There was nothing to do but watch. After a time, the contestants' struggle to be chosen to compete for the big prize turned to the lurid. The current leader the object of attack: biting, clawing, tearing at her flesh. The television, the orderly, the hospital room, were all gone. Cherry could smell sweat, blood, and fear. She was captivated by the depravity of the contestants, and the vicarious pleasure of the audience. She started awake. The contestants were still jumping and screaming, but no one had bled.

When Dr. Takahashi returned, a grey-haired woman in a pants-suit accompanied him. He gave the orderly a look and the orderly switched off the television and left the room. Takahashi introduced the woman as Dr. Lejeune. She would help answer some of Cherry's questions. Takahashi left. Dr. Lejeune turned around the chair the orderly had been in and sat. She took out a small notebook and a pen and told Cherry that she was glad to meet her. Cherry was guarded but attempted a pleasant answer.

"Do you know why you are here?" Lejeune said.

Cherry explained that that was what she was trying to find out. Other than often tired, she felt fine. She wanted to know if she'd been sick or in an accident. Lejeune didn't answer her, but asked if anything important or troublesome had happened to her in the past few days, or weeks. Cherry told her no and tried to remain calm. She was used to dealing with people who answered direct questions directly. Apparently, doctors in this hospital weren't in that group.

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

Cherry thought for a moment. "No, not right now."

Lejeune asked for his name. Luk. His full name. Luk Van Krieger. She questioned her about the breakup. Had it made her sad? Did she have trouble sleeping? Did she have a need to get back at him? Cherry realized she was being tested, by someone who just had to be a psychiatrist. She told Lejeune that she'd ended that part of her relationship with Luk. He'd been almost obsessively possessive, jealous. Cherry

felt a comprehension she didn't understand, but it felt good to talk about it. He'd been a close friend since they were undergraduates together. They'd gotten into the same graduate school and, although he was in a different department, Biology, they'd seen each other regularly. After they'd started dating, things hadn't gone well. He'd started calling her frequently, demanding to know what she was doing. Finally, he'd become accusatory when she wanted to spend time with other friends. She'd broken it off. Luk had accepted that, almost calmly. He'd even grudgingly promised to remain her friend, but she hadn't spoken with him in the few days since then.

Lejeune wrote something in the pad and asked her what she'd been doing Thursday night. If she'd made any plans. If she'd written anything down. Cherry told her she didn't know what she was talking about.

"Do you know what 'denial' is?" Lejeune said.

"Do you know what a 'Catch-22' is?" Cherry said.

Lejeune smiled and asked her to explain it.

"If I really don't know what you're talking about, I would say that. If I'm in denial, as you put it, I would say I really don't know what you're talking about. Catch-22."

"And what can we do about that?"

"Call my therapist?"

Lejeune wrote down the number, but continued to ask questions. Cherry knew she should try to cooperate more, but she couldn't help being somewhat obstinate. Too many questions of her, but few answers for her.

Lejeune looked at her watch. "Have you eaten?" she said.

Cherry shook her head, her throat was a little sore, and Lejeune pressed the call button. The orderly stepped through the door almost immediately. He talked with Lejeune and then left.

"We'll get you something. Nothing solid at first. You might have trouble swallowing." Lejeune flipped to a different page in her notebook and checked her watch again. "I'll come back later this afternoon."

The orderly returned and Lejeune left. They weren't leaving her alone. How do

you prove you're not a danger to yourself or others, if you don't know what happened to make the doctors believe that? She didn't know how to answer that, so she decided to spend a little quality time with her TV buddy. Maybe she'd doze off again. That might be exciting.

A nurse brought apple juice, tea, and some sort of broth, all at room temperature. The orderly left and the nurse stayed with her. Cherry drank the juice, and even some of the tea, but couldn't bring herself to try the broth. There was something about the congealed fat floating on top that was especially unappetizing. The nurse watched her swallowing and told her that she'd get something solid for dinner. Cherry nodded, unenthusiastic. Dr. Takahashi came into the room as the nurse was clearing things away. He asked her how she was feeling.

"Tired. Too much time in bed. Can I get up? I'd like to try walking around." She didn't add: angry that they weren't telling her everything. It seemed pointless.

He explained that she'd have to wait a few minutes. She was connected to a urethral catheter and after it was removed she'd be able to move around. He called the nurse who brought him a mask, gloves, goggles and a disposable garment that looked a lot like the gown she wore. After putting them on, he worked to remove the catheter, the nurse mostly holding things for him. Her legs were held up in stirrups the nurse had also brought in. A white sheet was draped over her legs so she didn't see what he was doing. She tried to pretend that it was a gynecological examination, but her OB/GYN was a woman and never put up a modesty barrier. What he was doing was different enough from her biyearly exams, and distinctly uncomfortable, that she couldn't hold the illusion. That a man was in such close proximity to her genitalia in such a non-sexual situation also amused her. Along with that feeling came a sudden burst of what she could only call curiosity. The feeling was so incongruous she nearly told the doctor. She wondered if there was something wrong with her that she hadn't noticed. She stared at the ceiling and went over some of the signal analysis she was doing for her thesis. She'd need to talk with someone else to be sure, but it seemed that she still understood all of it.

He wiped off the area where he'd been working with something that felt cool in

the air, then lifted her bottom and pulled out the sheet they'd slipped under her before starting. They got her legs out of the stirrups and Dr. Takahashi said, "All done." He sent the nurse for an orderly and explained that they wanted to continue watching her closely for some time because of the strange nature of her case. She knew, at this point, it was really a suicide watch, but didn't think it would be worth arguing about. She didn't expect anyone to tell her what was really going on until Dr. Lejeune reached some conclusion.

The nurse returned and disconnected the wires running to the heart monitor. They all came together in a connector that now hung under the gown she wore. The nurse helped her out of bed, and walked with her as she shuffled around the room. She used the IV stand as a rolling cane. The orderly changed the sheets on her bed. She walked with the nurse out into the hall. She felt weary, but didn't want to return to the bed. A sense of urgency prodded her. She had to demonstrate that she was healthy—physically and mentally—if she was going to get out of this place and back to her life. They were the only ones walking in the hall. Cherry made two circuits from the nurses' station to where the hall ended in a window and then stopped.

"Have to pee," she said.

The nurse warned her that she would likely have some discomfort and led her back to her room. A door to a small lavatory was all that the curtain had kept from her. She tried to close the door, there was just room for the IV stand, but the nurse shook her head and explained that she might get dizzy. Even for a suicide watch, that seemed a bit much. Especially since they hadn't told her enough to help her prove she wasn't suicidal. She wished she could remember what had happened to send her to the hospital.

While she waited to urinate, trying to ignore the nurse, a tone sounded in her right ear. She tilted her head slightly and reached to touch her ear, but stopped when she saw the nurse's curious stare. The tone, high-pitched but not very loud, lasted just a few seconds. She was still waiting to urinate, but couldn't while the nurse watched her.

"Could you turn around?" she said.

The nurse smiled and nodded. Cherry tried to relax and was finally able to urinate. It hurt more than what she thought of as discomfort, but she still felt relieved. As she wiped, the tone sounded again, but this time in her left ear. It started out high-pitched, but then grew deeper while the volume oscillated between barely audible and almost painful. She tried to ignore it as she walked back to the bed. It stopped as the nurse helped her cover up. She wasn't sure if telling someone about the tone would help or hurt her situation. It wasn't that different from the tinnitus she occasionally experienced. She decided to wait. If it kept recurring she'd tell the doctor.

Once in the bed, she wanted to get out again. The nurse asked her to be patient as she reconnected the wires to the heart monitor. The orderly would help her walk again in hour. Cherry agreed, but only because she knew she didn't have any choice. She spent a few hours watching television with the orderly and going for slightly longer walks as each hour passed. The nurse returned and took her on another walk and then got her back into bed.

"Let's get you some dinner," the nurse said. "You must be starved."

Cherry nodded, even though she still didn't feel terribly hungry. But eating might help the weariness. She stared at the ceiling while the nurse asked the orderly to get a meal. She tried to find small imperfections that would show a pattern in how the ceiling had been painted, or in how the ceiling had been constructed, but didn't succeed. Her eyelids felt heavy again, so she closed them.

Colors swirled and formed simple shapes. The shapes broke apart and reformed into more complex systems. Complexity revealed a kind of simplicity found in fractals. There was meaning if she could only find it. Determination consumed her.

"Are you awake?"

She woke up with a start. The nurse had a hand on her shoulder. She nodded and the nurse helped her into a sitting position by adjusting the bed. The nurse swung a table in front of her and pulled the cover off the food tray. The entrée was some sort of meatloaf. She leaned forward and sniffed at it. Nausea gripped her and she sat back against the bed. She pushed the table away and breathed deeply several times until her gag-reflex relaxed.

"Can I get something else?" she said. "Something bland. Without too much dairy?" She didn't know if they'd have Lactaid.

The nurse gave her an odd look. She rolled the table away and made arrangements for a different meal. Cherry wasn't sure what was wrong. Meatloaf was hardly at the top of her list of favorites, but it wasn't jellied pigs feet. She'd put that in her mouth before it made her gag. Maybe it was just hospital food.

The nurse stood at the doorway talking with someone in the hall. Cherry couldn't hear what they were saying, but she sensed that something was wrong. The nurse grimaced as she walked over to her.

"Your family is here," she said. "Let's wait on your meal until after they've had a chance to see you."

So nothing was wrong, not really. Her father had probably just berated the staff for whatever he viewed as the shortcomings in her treatment. She wondered how her father had managed to get the family here so quickly. Her father's power games were evident: he came in first, followed by her brother, Hiro, and then her mother. Her mother had probably tried to soften his dealings with the staff and now was making amends. The nurse tried to stay in the room, but her father wouldn't allow it. "Family matters are private," he said.

She waited while her father expressed his extreme displeasure—in Japanese—at having to fly from California to deal with her hospitalization. Her mother and brother also waited, but she knew they wouldn't interfere with his tirade. He asked if she knew the dishonor she brought to the family, the shame he had to bear, for this and other episodes. It was the only way he could show that he cared, and that was why she had only considered schools on the East Coast.

When he finally trailed off, her mother came forward and asked her, obliquely, if she had tried to hurt herself. Cherry answered that she hadn't, but that she also couldn't remember. This almost got her father started again, but her brother came to her rescue.

—"Father. Mother. Please. Let me talk to her. Alone. Please." Hiro couldn't really plead. Their father expected him to be the good and dutiful son. And he played

the part. Cherry knew it was for her sake. She had stopped playing the good and dutiful daughter years ago. Her father agreed when her mother gave him the look she always thought of as the for-everything-I-have-done-for-you-you-will-do-this-for-me look.

After their parents left the room, she said, "My hero." It was her little joke, and he winced as expected. "And speak English. My head hurts."

He asked her what had happened and she told him what little she knew. He pushed on the question of suicide and she got angry. She didn't know what had happened, no one was telling her, and now her brother doubted her.

"A month goes by and you think I'm a different person?"

He thought for a moment and apologized. The staff had told him that they believed it was a suicide attempt, but hadn't given any particulars. He was wrong to take their word without speaking with her first. They talked for a short while, until she was sure he was speaking to her the way he used to, and then she pulled him to her, hugging him hard. "Thanks, little brother." She held him until he started to pull away. He stretched his back and grinned at her.

"Can you get Dad to spring me?" she said. "Without him insisting that I go back to California?"

"I think so," he said. "I'll be your protector for a while."

She was excited that he was going to stay in the area. They talked over what it would take to convince their parents and the doctors. Their mother agreed almost immediately. Their father was reluctant at first, but eventually acquiesced, trusting in his son and knowing that he could not control his daughter. Dr. Takahashi insisted that she stay twenty-four hours for observation. He also wanted to run some additional tests before releasing her. Her father didn't think that unreasonable, although he did imply that the hospital's tests hadn't proved accurate. Her mother asked what tests he wanted to perform. When the doctor mentioned a head CT, Cherry grabbed her brother's arm. When he looked at her, she shook her head.

"I wouldn't want my head in one of those things either," he said. He turned to the doctor. "What's necessary?"

The doctor started to explain why he wanted to run each of several tests, but Hiro interrupted him and repeated his question. Dr. Takahashi said that, other than the observation, she would have to meet with a staff psychiatrist, who would decide if she could be released. He didn't mention the earlier meeting. Hiro turned to her and she nodded, but the implication that she might be mentally unstable was almost too much for her father. He began to rail at the doctor, questioning his education and lineage. Her brother interceded, asking the doctor to accept that their father was distraught, but had been hiding it well, and didn't mean what he had just said, and explaining to their father that the doctor was bound by oaths, rules, and laws, and wasn't suggesting that she was unbalanced. Dr. Takahashi went to find the psychiatrist. He never returned to her room.

Hiro suggested to their mother that she get Cherry some clothes. He managed to convince his father, with his mother's help, that it made sense for him to accompany her.

"Where are my clothes? The clothes I was wearing?"

"Sorry," Hiro said. He sounded almost sheepish. "They cut them off."

She thought about trying to convince her mother not to get anything too conservative, but knew she wouldn't succeed. She asked for something lightweight, appropriate to the season. After their parents had gone, an orderly looked into the room. He saw Hiro, nodded, and stepped back out. Hiro sat next to her and assured her that they would figure out what had happened to her. She wasn't all that interested; maybe a little anxious. Tired of all the secretiveness, she just wanted to get out of the hospital.

He asked about her, what she'd been doing since they last spoke. She wasn't sure, but he might have been verifying her stability. The nurse brought some food: toast, jam, and tea. It wasn't much, but she was feeling less tired and still didn't feel hungry. Her parents returned and her mother hung a bag of clothes on the back of the door. Her father remained unusually quiet, and Cherry wondered if her mother had been working on him. When visiting hours ended, Hiro promised to come get her around noon. He thought eighteen hours should be enough.

After her family had gone, the orderly came to watch television with her. She

asked him if someone would be with her all night. He shrugged and told her that he was on until midnight. At ten, it was lights out, low really. The orderly moved the chair back to where it had been, sat in it, and started reading a magazine. Cherry wondered if she'd be able to get to sleep and then it was morning.

The nurse brought her oatmeal, juice, and tea for breakfast. After she finished eating, Cherry asked for some magazines to pass the time. She was surprised when the nurse left her alone. She felt a moment of indecision, as if there was something she should do, but it quickly passed.

The nurse came back with several magazines. News, popular culture, fashion. Reading them was very strange. Some of the news stories seemed more interesting than they should have. Everything in the popular culture magazines was much more amusing than she expected. And the fashion layouts captured her attention, and evoked feelings, in a way she couldn't quite explain.

Hiro arrived just as the nurse was taking away a mostly inedible meal. Cherry wasn't sure what was wrong with her appetite, but suspected it would improve once she was out of the hospital. Her parents were running some errands, including finding a different hotel. Hiro didn't have to explain, their father could be quite particular about accommodations.

Hiro was annoyed that she couldn't check out yet. Cherry wasn't surprised. Dr. Lejeune hadn't come to see her again, and her decision had to be the controlling factor. After Hiro had finished venting about the way the hospital was run, they talked about what they might do together while he stayed with her. A middle-aged man in a cheap sportcoat came into the room.

"Sakura Ogata?" he said. He said it as if the first syllable in her first name was a synonym for pouch.

"Call me Cherry."

"Do you know a Jorham Eckles? Professor. He came to visit you... two nights ago." He was looking at his notepad.

"I'm taking one of his classes. I don't know about a visit."

The man nodded and explained that he was a police detective. She felt a little

uncomfortable sitting in the bed wearing only the hospital gown. He didn't really seem to be paying attention to her, so she resisted the urge to pull the sheet up. He asked her a few more, seemingly redundant, questions. Did she know of any reason why the professor would come visit her? What was their relationship? When had she last seen him? Did they spend time together outside of class? Since most of the questions were, as far as she could tell, already answered, it was difficult for her not to be annoyed. The detective didn't seem to notice and wrote something down each time she answered. He told her that Professor Eckles had been walking in a rundown neighborhood and been mugged. He'd died at the scene. She felt a strange sense of completion at the news and immediately dismissed the feeling. Her reaction to the magazines had already made it clear that her emotions were in a bit of a jumble.

The detective thanked her and left. Dr. Lejeune arrived a few minutes later and her brother went out into the hall. She'd talked with Cherry's therapist. Cherry was glad her father wasn't there. Some of the anger that Dr. Takahashi had had to endure would have been directed at her. The psychiatrist asked Cherry several questions, but still seemed undecided about releasing her. She told Lejeune her brother would be staying with her for some days, even after she had returned to school. That seemed to satisfy her and she went out into the hall to talk with her brother. When Hiro came back into the room, a uniformed police officer accompanied him.

"Another one," Hiro said.

Two policemen coming to see her in one day seemed excessive, but this one was from Cambridge, not Boston. The officer explained that Lieutenant Fomin would like to talk with her. He would be at the station all afternoon. She could come by whenever it was convenient or Lieutenant Fomin could come see her. The officer handed her a card, asked her to call Fomin, then left.

Hiro took the card from her. "You don't have to go today."

"It's all right," she said. "Can you put off Dad?"

"I'll think of something."

Chapter 3

Back to school

That afternoon, Cherry and her brother took a cab to the Cambridge Police station. Their parents were busy finishing their errands and checking into the new hotel. Her brother waited for her while she met with the detective. Lieutenant Fomin told her that her case was listed as a suicide, changed to attempted suicide now that she wasn't dead, but there was some pressure to change it to accidental drug overdose.

“But then I'd have to charge you with a felony,” he said.

He sat next to an old desk covered with bulging file folders, leaning forward as he spoke. She sat directly in front of him—he'd moved the chair before asking her to sit—and his posture and tone stressed that they were having a friendly conversation. She didn't believe that anymore. When she insisted she hadn't tried to kill herself he said that left a drug charge.

“Why?” she said.

While she was in the hospital, she'd given up trying to find out what had put her there and just wanted to get out. Now someone was finally explaining what had happened to her. He told her that she'd been found in an empty classroom by a cleaning crew at four in the morning, a large plastic garbage bag over her head, a hose delivering nitrous-oxide into the bag. She couldn't even imagine how she'd gotten there and told him that.

“You were lucky. One of the cleaning crew knew CPR.”

He asked her how she would judge what he'd just told her. She thought about

it and realized a suicide attempt was a reasonable explanation. Only an idiot would put a bag over her head to get intoxicated. Drugs didn't interest her, so even if she were an idiot, what happened still didn't make any sense. She thought about how this might effect her academic career and suddenly understood who would be pushing to have it classified as a drug crime.

"Suicide makes for bad PR," she said. She wanted to be angry, but should have expected it. Bureaucracies weren't known for honesty or compassion, but they always defended themselves.

He almost smiled, then looked away for a moment. "How long have you known Frank?" he said.

When he turned back toward her, he seemed to watch her intently, gauging her reaction. She didn't know who he was talking about.

"Frank-the-tank? No?" he said. "No, maybe not."

He explained that it was slang for the tank of nitrous-oxide that had been found with her. He sat back and picked up two folders from his desk. He flipped through one—he said it was from the Boston Police—and then asked her about Professor Eckles. She felt sad for a moment, but in an abstract way. A feeling reserved for acquaintances, but more appropriate than what she'd felt when she first heard of his death. She told him what little she knew.

"It's curious that he would visit you," he said.

She agreed, but had no explanation. He opened the other folder and read the top page, apparently several times. The hospital had run toxicology tests on her blood—she touched the small bandage on her left arm when he said that—but hadn't found anything. The most likely explanation for the appearance of brain-death was an overdose of barbiturates, but since the tests hadn't been done until she was already off the ventilator, the negative results weren't surprising. He flipped through the rest of the folder.

"Do you know who pays for the work I do?" she said. "A drug charge? Attempted suicide? Do you know how screwed I am?"

"The case is still open," he said. "That's the best I can do right now."

He spoke with her for another minute and then something seemed to occur to him.

“If you didn’t do this. . .,” he said.

She didn’t understand what he was getting at, but the small hairs on the back of her neck stood up. After a moment the unstated was obvious: *someone else did*. He pointed to Hiro through the glass that separated his office from the squad-room and asked who he was. She told him and that he was going to stay with her for a few days. The detective thought that was a good idea; too many unanswered questions.

He asked for her number—she gave him the one to her mobile phone—and told her that he’d contact her when he knew more. He gave her a card and told her to call him if she remembered anything important, or if anything out of the ordinary occurred. She thanked him and left his office.

She told Hiro what had happened and that she was worried she might be prevented from returning to her thesis research. She didn’t want to think about the other issue. She couldn’t do anything about it except stay alert and keep her brother nearby.

“Have Dad deal with it,” he said. “You won’t be out a day.”

She asked him if he wanted to get an early dinner, then called her father as they walked out of the police station. She didn’t tell him about her meeting with the detective or her concerns about school, just that they were going to eat. Her brother smirked and asked if she’d lost her nerve.

“I’ll tell him in the morning,” she said. “I can’t take any more today.”

They walked to the Middle East restaurant and sat in a booth. Hiro opened his menu and almost immediately announced he was having the Lamb Kabab. Cherry looked over the section of the menu that she normally ordered from, but nothing seemed appetizing. She turned to the vegetarian section, hoping to find something that wouldn’t challenge her digestive system. None of the entrées were terribly appealing, but she finally settled on the Mjudra. Lentil stew with rice shouldn’t cause any problems. When she ordered, her brother raised an eyebrow.

“I haven’t eaten anything substantial in days,” she said. “I’m not up to a slab of beef.”

He told her now that he'd finished business school, their father was really pushing him to join the family business, consumer electronics. He still wasn't sure that nepotism was the best way to start his career. On the plus side, as long as their father thought he might join the firm, he didn't need to start looking for a job. He could stay with her for weeks, if that's what she needed.

"Always my hero," she said. He didn't wince this time. She'd have to be more sparing if she was going to get a reaction.

He looked around the restaurant with a bemused expression. "What's with the decoration?" he said.

He pointed to the pictures, or maybe they were almost flat sculptures, that hung from the walls. She found the card taped to the wall under the piece above their booth and tapped it. He spent a minute reading the card.

"Sure, it's different, but is it art?" he said.

She knelt on the seat so she could read the card: Title, Artist, Message. By her definition, it wasn't art. Art didn't need a crib sheet so you wouldn't miss the point. Art was its own point. He asked if she thought that was fair. Fair or not, she stuck to her opinion.

Their food arrived. He pulled a piece of lamb off the skewer and waved it in front of her. "Are you sure I can't tempt you?"

She was so revolted that she hurt her back when she jerked away. He apologized and promised to keep his food away from her, but he looked concerned. She tried to ignore that and began to eat her Mjudra. It was delicious. She'd worried that she wouldn't have any appetite, but with every bite, she wanted a little more. The dish was somehow more satisfying than any steak she could remember eating.

As she was finishing her meal, her mobile phone rang. She finished chewing, took a sip of water and then opened the phone to answer the call. It was her father.

—"You will stay with us at the hotel tonight," he said.

Hiro couldn't stay with her at the dorm until she got permission from the House Master, so she agreed. That she might want a favor from her father made it easier to acquiesce. The Marriott was closer to school than the dorm, so that was a plus.

When she got off the phone, Hiro told her their father would be more amenable to assisting her if she could keep the conversation to non-controversial subjects. She thought about that as she switched her mobile phone's ring to vibrate and tucked it into her right front pants pocket.

"What do I do if he starts?" she said.

"I'll get you out of it," he said.

The waitress brought the check and he paid it. They left for the Marriott, walking down Main Street. She was a little surprised that she had so much energy. Hiro had to walk quickly to keep up.

Their hotel room had two beds, three nightstands, a dresser with a television on top, and a desk near the window. Her mother had left another bag of clothes next to the television. Cherry sat at the desk and called her parents' room. Her mother answered and told her that her father wanted to speak with her. Her brother snorted when she said she was tired and wanted to take a nap. As she hung up the phone, an odor caught her attention. She sniffed her armpit and made a face. Her time in the hospital had left her reeking from old sweat.

"I didn't want to say anything," Hiro said.

She stuck her tongue out at him, grabbed the bag of clothes, and went into the bathroom. There were side-by-side basins in front of a large mirror, a tub-shower combination, and behind a three-quarter door, a toilet; stainless steel safety bars in the shower and toilet area. Towels and robes hung from a rack facing the mirror. She undressed and piled her clothes next to one of the sinks. She looked at herself in the mirror. A bit gaunt, but she felt fine. Maybe even great. She felt a flutter low in her belly and a sudden flush. She wondered for a moment if the food had upset her stomach but she didn't feel nauseous or in any other way unwell; she decided to ignore it.

She turned on the shower and waited for the water to get hot. One of the few things she missed from home was a really hot shower. The dorms only had what was for her warm water; never really hot.

The bathroom began to fill with mist. She stepped into the tub and pulled the

shower curtain closed. She washed her hair. Her mother hadn't complained about the length; without precedent at any meeting since Cherry had first cut it short. She scrubbed her body with a facecloth. Three days of perspiration soaked into her skin wouldn't come off easily.

As she was rinsing off, running her hands over her skin to make sure she got all of the soap off, she felt the flutter again. Her nipples tightened and she felt a tingle between her legs. She recognized the feeling and it wasn't an upset stomach. She'd masturbated in the shower before, but never with her brother in the next room, or even in the same building that she knew of. The feeling intensified. *Why not?* She raised her right leg so her foot was on the edge of the tub and held onto one of the safety bars. As she slid her left hand down her belly and across her pubic hair an almost overwhelming sense of anxious anticipation joined the already erotic feeling. The new feeling was not something she had felt before in that circumstance, but it was somehow right, and made continuing an imperative. She was glad she'd grabbed the bar. Every sensation seemed to echo in her head and at the end she nearly collapsed. She stood under the shower for another minute, rinsing off the fresh perspiration.

She didn't bother dressing. She put on one of the robes, picked up the bag of clothes, and left the bathroom. She put the bag down next to the television and flopped onto one of the beds.

"What are you smiling about?" Hiro said.

She almost giggled. She shook her head and said it was good to be clean. She felt like she was twelve years old and had snuck a treat without getting caught.

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The following morning, she visited the lab with with her brother. Professor Lees, her thesis supervisor, was glad to see her, happy that she was all right. He told her the Dean's Office had required that she receive the approval of Counseling Services before she returned to her research. She'd hoped to give Hiro the tour, showing off her work, even if he wouldn't understand, but first she'd have to deal with administrivia.

She felt confident. Her father had said he would help her in any way that he

could; his support was unconditional. It always amazed her when things went that smoothly between them, but this was the special case. He might criticize her, question her choices, or even judge her, but that was his prerogative as her father. Usurping that prerogative he would not allow.

The Counseling Dean could only give her a few minutes, but he offered to talk with her at greater length during his next free appointment time. He said how glad he was that she was well. He took her therapist's number and told her that he would need the final police report to reach a decision regarding her status. He seemed surprised when she told him the case was still open.

"Still," he said, "I'll need to wait for the report."

She didn't argue. Although the morning with her father had been great, the evening visiting had been tense and she hadn't slept well. She woke up at least twice because she thought she'd heard a voice. Getting back to sleep had been difficult: she had trouble escaping the feeling that someone other than Hiro was in their room. She wasn't tired, just distracted.

She met her brother in the outer office of Counseling Services and asked the administrative assistant for the Dean's next available appointment time. He'd had a cancellation and she got an appointment at two o'clock that afternoon. Hiro wanted to know if she should check with their father first.

"He said to tell him where and when, and he would be there."

She called her father and then took Hiro on a tour of the campus.

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Her father made short work of the Dean's objections. The Dean expressed them as concerns for her wellbeing, but she knew that he was just covering his ass. That her father expressed no interest in suing the school probably made it easier. The Dean had avoided a potential PR disaster.

She was glad the meeting hadn't taken too long and that she mostly observed. Asking her father for this favor had been difficult, but it was worth it. She wanted a return to normality and that meant getting back to the lab and her thesis. When

they left the Dean's office, her father returned to the hotel and Hiro went with her to the lab. She told Professor Lees that she'd straightened things out with Counseling Services, at least for the moment.

Her office had a large fixed window that looked out onto a corridor that had windows to a sunken courtyard. The lab was in the basement, but the light and view through the windows kept her from feeling cut off from the outside world. There were several windowless offices in the lab, one used by her advisor. She didn't understand why the professors let the graduate students have the offices that faced that corridor. Especially since no natural light made it into the lab proper.

"Not too bad," Hiro said. "This morning, I thought you worked in a dungeon."

She shared the office with Tushar Sarathy, a Masters candidate in Electrical Engineering. She introduced him to her brother, but he was busy as usual, and went back to his circuit design problem. She logged in to her workstation and brought up the title page to her thesis: Probabilistic Identification of Messages Using an Unknown Encoding.

"So this is how you spend your time," her brother said. "But how can you use an unknown encoding to identify anything?" He smirked and she punched him in the arm.

She told him about her work and how it might be applied, but when she saw how bored he looked, she told him to go and explore. He agreed to meet her at the lab around six o'clock and made her promise not to go anywhere alone.

After he left, she opened a formula editor to play with some filters that she thought might be useful in her work. When she was going over the first set of equations, she felt distracted and impatient. The same feeling recurred with each set until she loaded the fifth and then—*déjà vu*. She adjusted one of the parameters, increasing the sampling window, and felt a sense of dissatisfaction. She incrementally decreased that parameter until she felt it somehow correct. The feeling was similar to reading a multiple choice question on a test and knowing the answer without having to think about it. Letting her feelings guide her decisions was out of character, but this wasn't serious work. Not yet. She ran some test data through the equations. The results

didn't compare well with tests she had run earlier. When she tried to discard the changes and restore the original equations, she mistyped "yes" in response to the "are you sure?" prompt. She felt like she was making an incorrect decision, but looked down at the keyboard and carefully typed "yes."

Professor Lees came to her office to ask how she was doing. He moved a stack of books from her side chair to a shelf and then sat down. When she told him about looking over the formulas, she felt a moment of surprise followed by a sense of determination. She was getting used to momentarily out-of-place emotions. He told her not to be concerned, that it might be a few days before she was "back in the groove." He sat with her for close to half an hour, asking about everything that had happened since last Thursday, and demonstrating real concern for her health and safety. He'd asked Tushar to give them privacy, which was unusual. They could have gone to his office, but he didn't want his concern to seem part of his duty as her advisor.

"I'm just offering what support I can to a colleague," he said.

When he left the office, Tushar came back in and gave her a dirty look. She shrugged in response. She wasn't going to argue with Tushar about the appropriateness of Lees' request. It was his lab and the students were funded from his research money. She thought Tushar should just be thankful they had a window.

She checked her e-mail. Most of the spam already trashed. Several pieces about seminars she might attend. One each from Wyeth Blair and Savannah Collins, two of her closest friends. They'd heard that she'd died, but were glad that she wasn't dead. She could tell they'd talked about what to write and how to express their concern without becoming a burden; waiting for her to decide if she wanted to talk about it in a serious manner. But no e-mail from Luk. It annoyed her that he hadn't contacted her. Even if he was still angry with her, he should have written, or called. She heard her mobile phone ring. She pulled it from her pocket and flipped it open. With that, any hope for a return to normality was gone.

"Hello?" she said.

"Ms. Ogata. I have been trying to decide how to make the best of this situation

I have put us in. I see no other option than to ask for your assistance.”

“Who is this?” she said. She doubted she’d ever heard a stranger line open a conversation.

“You knew me as Professor Eckles.”

“That’s not funny,” she said. He did sound something like Prof. Eckles, but his voice was deeper, more resonant. She pulled the phone away from her ear to check the caller ID. The phone wasn’t connected, and was still set to vibrate, not ring.

“Please keep the phone to your ear. You do not want to draw undue attention to us.”

Her first thought was that someone was pulling an elaborate, and tasteless, prank. She looked around her office. Tushar was bent over his desk as usual; the door was closed. She tried to think of a way to transmit sound so that she only heard it in her right ear. It was silly, but she felt her right ear for a receiver. The voice started to speak again. She looked at the phone. “Just wait!” she said. The voice stopped. She heard Tushar move in his seat and held the phone up to her ear.

She considered the possibilities. Prof. Eckles was dead; he could be haunting her. That might have been comforting, given the only other option she could think of. It was too bad she didn’t believe in the supernatural. That left a coma-induced psychotic break. Despite that, she felt very calm. *What do you want?* No response. She tried again.

“Didn’t you hear me?” she said.

“You didn’t say anything.”

That was interesting. The voice in her head—no, the voice in her ear—hadn’t read her thoughts, apparently. She’d try to test that later. She repeated the question out loud. Tushar said something from behind her. She turned around to tell him she was on the phone. He suggested that she speak more quietly or have her conversation somewhere else. She nodded and he turned back to his desk.

The voice—she decided to call it Prof. Eckles—didn’t answer her question. It—he—wanted her to go to his office to prove he was real. She thought of Descartes’ famous aphorism. That a hallucination wanted to prove its existence would have

been funny in other circumstances. She couldn't go. She'd promised her brother. And doing what a voice in your head told you to was a sure step from crazy toward committed. He asked her to reconsider. She raised her voice when she said no for the second time. Tushar cleared his throat. Eckles repeated his request. She lowered her voice and said she wasn't going anywhere without her brother. He took that as an offer, but wanted her to go alone. She thought going to the office with her brother was a good idea. She'd be safe and might learn something.

"Take it or leave it," she said. "And don't talk to me for a while."

He agreed. She closed her phone and put it in her pocket. Her delusion was being cooperative. She searched the web for information about mental illness. If she'd known someone in Cognitive Sciences, she might have called him. She opened up the Medical Center's website. She didn't know how to proceed. She was afraid that if she told anyone, she would be in a strait-jacket and heavily sedated five minutes later.

She started when the voice spoke again. "I am sorry for ending my silence so soon, but I thought you should know that I see everything you see."

A considerate hallucination. She didn't say anything, but typed "SHUT UP!" several times. She just had to wait until her brother returned. He'd go with her to the office and then she'd tell him everything. He'd help her figure out what to do. She went back to work on the equations. Eckles tried to to give her advice once, but she just typed "SHUT UP!" and he stopped.

She didn't accomplish anything significant with the equations; when Hiro arrived she was waiting for him. She said she had to make one stop before they met their parents for dinner. Tushar was still in the office so she couldn't explain even if she wanted to. Eckles guided her to his office: fourth floor, turn right, then left, then right, then left. The older buildings in that part of the campus had interesting floor plans. She couldn't remember if she'd been to his office before. When they got to the office, her brother saw the name painted on the door.

"Hey, isn't that...?" he said.

Cherry nodded and told him she would explain later. The doorknob had five buttons above it, an older combination lock. Eckles told her to push five, four and

one, then three and two. She turned the knob, but the door didn't open. She leaned her head against the glass. She'd been half-hoping that it would open. Being haunted would have shattered her world view, but better haunted than crazy.

"I believe button three had been pushed before you started. Turning the knob reset them all. Try again and it will open."

When she stepped into the room, she turned on the light without thinking about it, and suddenly felt dizzy. Her brother took her arm and asked if she was overdoing it. The dizziness passed as quickly as it had come. The office was deep, but narrow; a window opposite the door. Along one long wall were shelves stacked with papers, along the other were file cabinets. A desk near the window faced the door. Eckles told her to pick any drawer in any file cabinet and he would tell her what papers were stored there.

"First and last," she said.

Her brother asked her if she was talking to herself. She said yes and told him to write down the titles of the papers she'd tell him. She touched the handle on the second drawer of the third cabinet from the door. She repeated the names of the papers to her brother, opened the drawer, and pulled out the papers at the front and back—monographs on applied probability. She showed them to Hiro. The titles matched. The next two were philosophical works on science as phenomenology. She kept touching drawers and verifying titles until her brother asked her if it was some sort of memory game she'd played with Prof. Eckles.

"That's it," she said. "Exactly."

She felt elated for a moment, but it didn't last. If she wasn't crazy, she was in some way inhabited. She'd been nursing the ghost idea because she was sure she was nuts. She sat down at the desk and pulled a small pad towards her. Her brother stood near the door, watching her intently. She wrote "What are you?" on the pad and he told her. Not everything, few details, but enough. If she'd actually been dead, he would have felt beyond reproach. She felt like she was in a bad sci-fi movie, except the monster wasn't eating her brain. He suggested they wait until they were alone to discuss it further. She thought about it and realized she now had a better reason

not to let anyone know she heard the voice of a dead man. If she wasn't crazy, or haunted, getting locked away or medicated wasn't what she wanted for her future. She wrote "What should I call you?"

"Nephesh."

"Okay," she said. She stood up and walked over to her brother.

"What's going on?" Hiro said.

She didn't want to lie to her brother, but she had no choice. She told him what she'd done had to do with the philosophy class she'd been taking with Prof. Eckles. She'd remembered the assignment only after getting to the lab. If they got another instructor for the class, she wanted to be prepared. She couldn't think of a better lie under the circumstances and tried hard not to grin as she said it. He looked at her oddly and pointed out that they were going to be late for dinner. She didn't care. The elation had returned. She hadn't felt this good since she'd been accepted to graduate school.

Dinner didn't go well. Her father was angry they were late and had picked a restaurant with little on the menu that she could bring herself to eat. She was distracted and her brother kept asking oblique questions that she didn't want to answer. Her parents were scheduled to return to California in a few days, but her mother asked if they should stay longer. Cherry said they should go, that Hiro would look after her. He wasn't sure they should leave, which made her sad. For the first time, he wasn't siding with her, not even surreptitiously. She wanted to explain, but doubted he could believe her.

When they went back to their room in the hotel, Hiro expressed renewed concern about her behavior. She didn't know how to reassure him, or even if that was warranted.

"I can't really explain it now, but I think I'll be okay," she said. "If not, I hope you'll help me." He looked doubtful. "It's still me," she said. "I'm still the same person." Saying that felt less like lying.

His mood brightened a bit and he hugged her. After he let her go, she told him there were some things she wanted to work on. He nodded and lay down on one of

the beds to watch television. She sat at the desk and pulled out the hotel-supplied paper and pen to communicate with Nephesh. She started to write something, but then stopped. He asked her if anything was wrong and she wrote “bathroom.”

Being host to a creature that was usually a saprophyte—parasite or symbiont might be a better term for her situation, since she wasn’t dead—had its humorous aspects. If she’d been an exhibitionist, it might have been easier. Nephesh was curious. He’d never worn a woman’s body and was fascinated by the differences. She normally couldn’t use the shower or the toilet while someone else was in the bathroom, but now she had to. She was glad he didn’t bring up what she’d done in the shower the previous night; it was almost too embarrassing to think about. She took so much time in the bathroom her brother remarked about it. His earlier concern might have gained credence if not for the loud fan. She shrugged and said she was still getting over her hospital stay.

Back at the desk, she tried to find out exactly what Nephesh wanted. He said there was a problem in signal analysis and synthesis using data that was just becoming available. Once that was solved, there would probably be other tasks. It seemed awfully convenient that his problem was related to her research. She asked what he would do if she didn’t want to cooperate. He didn’t answer her immediately. When she heard his voice it sounded sad, and she felt that emotion. He said that he would have to wait for her to grow old. Very old. She had trouble concentrating because of the intense sadness she felt, but managed to ask why he couldn’t find a fresh corpse to animate.

“If I leave you now, you will die.”

Chapter 4

Calling

Her dorm room was the mess she'd left it in. She'd gotten Hiro a temporary cardkey and sent him to collect his stuff from the hotel while she cleaned up.

She thought about what Nephesh had told her while she worked. How can you tell if the voice in your head is trustworthy? At least she'd convinced him not to talk to her in the bathroom. She could pretend she was alone. She'd put all her clothes away and had started vacuuming when there was a knock on the door.

It was Luk.

He looked flushed and held his arms stiffly at his sides. She was about to ask him in when he rushed forward and shoved her. She stumbled but didn't fall; her body seemed to recover on its own. Luk closed the door and came toward her wielding a large kitchen knife. She wanted to run, but couldn't. He thrust the knife toward her abdomen. She turned and the knife tore her shirt, cutting her chest. She felt like a puppet. She clamped his arm against her side and broke his elbow with her other hand as she kept turning. She slammed a fist into the side of his neck and he fell to the floor.

She knew it had only lasted a few seconds but it felt like a lot more. "Nephesh?" He began to apologize for controlling her body, but she stopped him and thanked him for saving her life. He insisted that an apology was necessary; he hadn't received permission. She thanked him again and called the campus police.

When Hiro returned to her room, the CPs had already taken Luk away. An EMT

finished cleaning and bandaging her wound. He thought it strange that there was so much blood on her shirt, but the wound was barely oozing. He told her to go to the Medical Department to make sure her shots were up to date. Hiro had to push through the crowd of students and post-docs in the hall. One of the CPs kept him from coming in until Cherry confirmed that he was her brother. He sat by her on the couch and asked what had happened.

“Ex-boyfriend,” she said. She leaned against him and closed her eyes. An old friend and former lover had tried to kill her, and all she felt was mildly curious. She wanted to ask Nephesh if that was his feeling, hers, or some strange admixture of the two. She would have to wait.

“I think we’ll be closing your case soon.”

She looked up and Lieutenant Fomin had come into the room. He told her that he’d been to Luk’s room and found various controlled substances, including a number of barbiturates. He didn’t know if they would find any hard evidence linking Luk to her near-death, but it seemed obvious what had happened.

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Luk was charged with attempted murder. That all but closed her case and seemed to satisfy Counseling Services. Her parents rescheduled their flight; they would stay another week. They wanted to spend time together as a family. Cherry knew it was really her mother’s idea, but she was glad her father had gone along. Hiro would fly back with them. He’d put off telling their father that he wasn’t joining the firm until they were in California. Cherry put her research on hold for the week. She asked Nephesh to remain silent unless there was an emergency.

She wanted to believe, if only for the week, that she was normal. It wasn’t true, but it was comforting to pretend. Having an ancient, hyper-intelligent—Prof. Eckles was world renowned, if only to other mathematicians—permanent companion living in her head would change her.

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Her family dropped her off near the lab on their way to the airport. Her mother and brother kissed her goodbye. Her father, never one to be overly demonstrative, shook her hand. She felt tears well up as they drove away, but the sadness began to fade. “Stop it!” The sadness returned and she welcomed it. She had to accept that life was now different; pretending was over.

She stopped in the ladies room to blow her nose and wipe her eyes before going to the lab. Prof. Lees asked her about her time away and expressed sympathy about the “terrible incident.” Tushar expressed shock and outrage that someone had attacked her. He was never very personable, at least not with her. She really appreciated his expression of support.

She typed “Nephesh?” after she logged on to her workstation, and with his guidance, spent an hour building tuned Kalman Filters. Tuned for what, she couldn’t be sure, but she’d decided to trust him. He’d saved her life, and he could do it himself, but he didn’t. She spent the rest of the day working on her thesis. She tried not to let him help her, but she couldn’t always distinguish her sense, or feel of the problem, from his. He saw what she saw and to ask him not to think about what he looked at for hours seemed cruel and futile.

She worked that way for several weeks, building different signal filters under his direction for an hour each morning, and working on her thesis the rest of the day. She seemed to be making more progress on his endeavor than her own, but she wanted her thesis to be hers as much as that was possible. She went out to see a few movies with Wyeth and Savannah, but most evenings she spent alone in her room with the stereo on loud enough to cover conversation. He wouldn’t tell her much about himself—he claimed much of it he didn’t know—but she enjoyed talking with him. He had a unique perspective on a variety of past world events because he had been present for them.

Although they talked about a lot of things, there was one subject she never brought up. Showering was an overly sensual experience. Refusing to succumb to the auto-

erotic temptation presented was difficult, but whatever desire she felt was mitigated by the knowledge that he took part in everything she did and felt. She guessed her admonition against speaking with her while she was in the bathroom kept him from mentioning it. She knew they'd have to talk about it at some point, but she wasn't ready for that. It was still too embarrassing.

One morning at the lab, he told her it was time to get the data to be filtered. It was publicly available, but tedious to find. All the data was from radio-telescopes, captured at various times over the past few months from the same general region of the sky, and included more than two dozen frequencies. At first she wasn't sure what he would do with it, but then realized that a spread-spectrum signal could be assembled from samples at different times, if the signal was periodic. He might not even need to know the period. She asked Nephesh if he was looking for a message sent to him. He was. It was the only way to know if those who had left him were still out there.

She used a different grouping of filters on each dataset and then ran the results through a combining process. Four kilobits displayed in hexadecimal. Her eyes started to scan the output, not under her control, but stopped just as she felt a rising sense of embarrassment. She typed, "It's okay. Go ahead." She wasn't sure what he was trying to see and it would be difficult for her to follow directions. When he was done, she didn't need to ask him if they'd been successful. His disappointment was palpable.

She suggested the data might be at fault. It might have been preprocessed and there was probably better data available. Academics were unlikely to give away their best work. She didn't want to suggest another obvious possibility, not after that feeling of disappointment: whoever they were, they'd stopped transmitting.

He wasn't sure why it hadn't worked, but agreed the data wasn't the best available. He seemed convinced that the only way to get the best data, to be sure, was to make the observation directly using an appropriately sensitive instrument. She understood what that would require, but wondered if he did.

She typed "You can't just ask someone for an hour on a radio telescope."

“Why not?” he said.

He didn't mean it was as easy as that, but he was sure that if you had something to offer, something too useful to ignore, someone would say yes. He would think about what they might offer to a radio astronomer to get time at the Arecibo Observatory or the Very Large Array. He knew some people at Cornell, which might have helped more if Eckles weren't dead. He didn't know anyone at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory, but thought the VLA was a better choice to capture and process the signal he looked for. Better too because they could drive there. He didn't want to fly.

Getting access to Arecibo or the VLA seemed impossible, but she didn't argue. Nephesh, as Prof. Eckles, had decades of experience with academic politics; she was just beginning to deal with it. Maybe he knew something about professors, researchers, that she didn't.

His confidence amazed her, but she wondered if it wasn't part bluster. If he didn't find the message, he was alone in a way that she could only imagine.

Finding scientists affiliated with those two facilities and studying their research interests took several more days, one hour each morning. Nephesh didn't seem to mind and Cherry wanted to make progress on her own work. She asked him if he'd decided who to contact, but he needed to think about the best way to get someone's attention and convince them they couldn't do without what he'd have to offer. That it not appear to be something Eckles would have done was also important. An accusation of plagiarism would make proceeding very difficult.

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Savannah and Wyeth insisted that Cherry go with them to a club. They both said that seeing a movie now and then wasn't enough. She needed to start interacting with the world again. She wished she'd said no.

When she'd first met Wyeth, she thought her given name was Blair, and called her that for a month. When Wyeth asked her why she always called her Blair, Cherry figured it out. That had been embarrassing, but was nothing compared to what she

felt as they sat at a table in the club. She had gone to Wyeth's room before they came to the club, to help her pick an outfit. Wyeth had tried on several combinations, changing clothes in front of her. The flutter in her belly that had started then was still with her. She felt flush every time she looked at Wyeth. She couldn't figure out how to ask Nephesh to stop thinking whatever he was thinking, without someone questioning her. There is never a good time to talk to yourself in public.

Savannah must have noticed how uncomfortable she looked and asked her if she couldn't try to enjoy herself. Cherry said she didn't really like bars; too loud, too hard to have a conversation. If she wasn't going to be able to talk, a movie was more fun. Savannah asked her what her favorite movie was.

"Invasion of the Body Snatchers. Nineteen-Fifty-Six. Kevin McCarthy. Dana Wynter."

Savannah didn't know the movie, or the actors, but Cherry didn't mind. Her answer had been meant as a joke for Nephesh. He seemed amused and that made her glad. She was even able to look at Wyeth without feeling attracted to her. That didn't last, but Wyeth had managed to get a man to buy her a drink. They were engaged in a seemingly deep conversation. Cherry told Savannah she was going home.

When she got back to her room, she turned on the stereo and started to undress. He began to ask her what she was doing, but she shushed him. She finished undressing, lay down on her bed, and closed her eyes. Auto-erotic desires she could handle, but fantasizing about Wyeth was too much.

"Go ahead," she said. "I want you to."

She felt a moment of confusion and then increased excitement tinged with embarrassment. He started to say something and she shushed him again but added some encouragement. This was a time to do something about it, not to talk. Some impulses go away more easily if part of the impulse is satisfied.

Her hands moved tentatively at first, until the embarrassment faded completely. With her eyes closed, she could imagine that someone else stroked her, someone with small, soft hands. The illusion was easy to maintain, Nephesh touched her in ways completely different from how she touched herself.

Later, when they talked about it, they didn't really resolve anything. He explained that the desire he felt was something primal, learned from the dead. It was something that every man must feel.

"But you're not a man."

"True," he said.

She thought she'd hurt his feelings. He promised to try to find some way to control his urges, redirect them if he could. She hoped he would be successful. Otherwise, she might never have sex with anyone again. She thought of something and chuckled, but didn't explain it to him. She didn't want to start on that path, not yet, and he might find that option easier than undoing centuries of conditioning.

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He gave her the names of two researchers, Kalila Kardar and Haiyan Huang, who could probably be convinced to give them dish-time. Kardar was affiliated with the VLA, Huang with Arecibo. The most difficult step would be getting them to consider what Cherry had to offer. When a graduate student, in a different field of study, claims to have an important new technique, credulity is not the correct reaction.

She began by sending Kardar and Huang an e-mail providing a broad outline of a new statistical method for analyzing radio emissions. She asked for an opportunity to describe the method in greater detail. Each responded with essentially the same two questions: What were her qualifications, why had she contacted them. Kardar polite, Huang less so. Nephesh wasn't surprised.

Cherry thought her own work was going well. That was important. Professor Lees would expect a progress report before the summer term started. She continued to limit helping Nephesh to an hour each morning.

In her second e-mail to Kardar and Huang, she explained her thesis research, but added that she had a general interest in signal analysis. Since the method she proposed was inapplicable to her thesis, she'd searched for researchers who might be interested. The partial truths made her uncomfortable, but Nephesh assured her that hers would not even be close to the worst of the lies either woman would hear from

a colleague that day. After a week of exchanging e-mails, Kardar showed more and more interest in some of the ideas Cherry had sent, but Huang just wanted Cherry to stop contacting her. The final e-mail from Huang had been copied to Prof. Lees. Cherry waited all day to be rebuked by him. Just before five o'clock, he came to her office.

"May I speak with you in private?" Lees said.

That phrase usually presaged bad news for the person it was directed to. Tushar looked up with an expression of satisfaction, seemingly equating her difficulty with a personal victory. In the past Cherry would have been upset by his attitude and actions. Now they seemed so petty and unimportant in her understanding of the world. She smiled pleasantly at Tushar and followed Lees back to his office. She tried, and failed, to think of a plausible excuse for contacting a radio-astronomer, at another university, without talking with Lees first. He sat behind his desk looking at his workstation's monitor as she struggled for an answer to an unasked question. Nephesh kept assuring her that this wasn't a problem.

"I received an e-mail we need to discuss," he said.

She started to apologize for upsetting Haiyan Huang, but Lees waved her off. He wasn't interested in Huang's e-mail and he thought her foolish. He'd received an e-mail from Kalila Kardar. Not a complaint, but praise, and a request to Lees for some of Cherry's time.

"The method you suggested may be a real advances. For certain problems. How did you come up with it?"

A compliment to Nephesh's skill. Cherry felt no pride, but Nephesh must have been amused. She tried not to smile when she told Lees that it must have been prompted by her research into statistical techniques. Lees checked his calendar and asked her how her thesis was coming along. She started to give a positive-leaning but noncommittal response. Nephesh prompted her. "You are doing quite well," he said. "If you were not, I would have told you." She stopped speaking while she listened to him, and then told Lees that she was making excellent progress on her thesis.

As they discussed how Cherry might assist Kardar, it became clear that Lees's

main interest was getting something for himself and the lab out of that assistance. He wasn't being entirely mercenary, he also wanted Cherry to receive appropriate credit for any publications, but only as a member of his lab. That would ensure that he would also be listed as an author. The larger the number of papers authored, the larger the funding. More or less. Lees finished their discussion by reminding her that her thesis came first.

When she got back to her desk, she typed "How did you know?" Nephesh made a sound that she'd learned to interpret as a snort or chuckle. He'd been a professor at the university for decades and known many men like Lees. Understanding what she'd proposed or where it came from was unimportant, profiting by it was.

Kalila Kardar was also curious about how Cherry had come up with the idea. Cherry wanted to be as honest as possible, but she could only answer "It just came to me." They were planning a paper, based on the algorithms Nephesh had provided, and would need at least two sets of observations under essentially equivalent conditions. Kalila had submitted a proposal, based on suggestions Cherry had relayed from Nephesh, and they'd been granted dish-time at the VLA in a little over three months.

A new normality settled over her life that was much like the old. She still spent one or two nights a week with Wyeth and Savannah. Her closest "male" friend was once again her lover. The majority of her time she spent working on her thesis. A new normality colored with the strange: she continued to feel pangs of desire for Wyeth, Nephesh couldn't suppress them; her lover in most ways herself; a portion of her time dedicated to helping an alien receive a message from space.

When it came time to leave for New Mexico, she was excited. Partly Nephesh's feeling, but also her own. The trip would answer some questions. Either Nephesh was alone, or they would learn more about why he was here. Cherry would know how to lead the rest of her life.

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She drove alone from Socorro to the VLA as the sun neared the horizon. U.S. 60, to 52 to the old highway 60. Ricardo Houck, one of Kalila's graduate students, met her at the entrance to the Control Building. When they went up to the control room, Cherry was surprised to meet Kalila. She'd come to Socorro to talk with some people from Array Operations Center and to collect some tapes. She'd thought it would be fun to come out to the array and meet Cherry.

"I can't stay, but I wanted to meet the person who's going to clean the noise from my observations," Kalila said.

Cherry smiled, but added the caveats maybe and some to Kalila's statement. She didn't doubt Nephesh's skill, but theory into practice didn't always work out as expected. Kalila thought she was being too pessimistic.

Ricardo showed her around the control room. Two other graduate students were there, along with someone from the VLA staff. Cherry looked for a place to put the laptop she'd brought, but most of the horizontal surfaces were covered in computer equipment. Some of it in use, some just being stored. Ricardo found a spot where she could set up and connect to the network. He reassured her that when their observing window came up, she'd have a better place to work from. Kalila couldn't stay and wished them luck before leaving.

They would have control of the array from midnight to six a.m. About three hours running with the pre-filtering Nephesh had developed, about three hours without. Cherry wondered if anyone would notice—a VLA staff member most likely—when the array stopped tracking the galactic cluster that was their test subject and started tracking something else. Nephesh had built a five minute break into their observation plan, during which he expected to receive and process his message. But a break and tracking something else were different things.

With a little less than four hours before they could start loading the control program for their observation, she followed Ricardo out of the Control Building and to the cafeteria. They had a light meal, got some snacks for later, and chatted about

the upcoming test, the weather, and current events. At eleven-thirty they headed back to the control room.

The other graduate students were cleaning up and making room for them when they arrived. Cherry uploaded the programs that Nepesh had helped her write while Ricardo realigned the array manually. At midnight, she started the program for that morning and then they waited. The VLA staff member made sure that everything was going as expected and then went to the dormitory.

Ricardo was nodding off before two. Cherry told him to take a nap, she couldn't sleep. He said no, he'd stay awake, but soon his head was hanging back, his mouth open.

At three o'clock, the array realigned itself, slightly, and Cherry recorded the raw data onto the laptop. She repeated the steps from their first try at finding the message and let him scan the result. She didn't have to tell him to go ahead this time. When he was done, she asked him what it said, but it didn't say anything. It was a key to the lock on a cypher.

"I need to do something else with the array," he said. "May I?"

She said that he could and she walked from the laptop to the console next to Ricardo. A puppet again, she realized that he must feel that way most of the time. Her hands started to type under his control, much more quickly than she could, loading a control program and setting various parameters. He was going so fast that she couldn't be sure what he was doing, but guessed that he was looking for another signal that could be decrypted with the key they had synthesized. She was sure that hijacking the VLA like this was a bad idea. Someone would notice, but she wanted him to succeed at getting the message he so clearly needed. A `Data>` prompt appeared and he typed a stream of seemingly random characters. When the `Command>` prompt reappeared, he typed `run` and then her hands were her own again.

"Now?" she said. She felt a sense of satisfaction. This must have been an important step in receiving the ultimate message he was looking for, but she knew he hadn't gotten anything more from the VLA. He said there was nothing to do but wait. She asked him when they would be able to get the data to decode with

the key. He told her the key was the message. He had answered it.

“What?” she said.

Ricardo stired beside her. She got up and walked back to the laptop and typed a question into an editor. She asked him what message he’d sent.

“Come and get me.”

Appendix A

Point of view in “Metempsychotic”

Finding an appropriate viewpoint, an effective narrative style, from which to tell this story was an evolutionary process. I learned, some time ago, that point of view in literature was not as simple as choosing first-person or third-person omniscient, limited, or dramatic. In writing this novella and researching this essay, I’ve realized that the process I go through and the choices available are even more subtle and complex than I had thought.

I frequently record ideas that I think might be the basis for, or at least part of, a story. Some are just a few words meant to be fleshed out later: “three generations,” “ruthless practicality,” “if it’s in the computer it must be true.” Some are a bit more detailed but still incomplete: “networked first person shooter games used as a recruiting technique by the army, looking for strategy and teamwork;” “recruiting gang leaders and successful drug dealers to be corporate raiders.” A few are short exchanges of dialogue: “‘You can’t expect that to change human nature,’ she said; ‘Human nature? There is no such thing.’” One of these ideas, from a few years ago, was the starting point for my novella:

“What’s your favorite movie?”

John was awake, so we answered: “Invasion of the Body Snatchers.”

“Which version?”

“Nineteen-Fifty-Six. Kevin McCarthy. Dana Wynter.”

I wondered if he meant it to be ironic.

This exchange was my way of starting to think about a story in which an alien creature, or creation, shared the body and senses of a person. I didn't want to present a predictable and cliched monster story. I wanted to tell a story in which the alien was viewed, not as a threat, but rather as a benign or possibly beneficial companion of the person inhabited. All I had was a situation and two characters. A possible kernel for a work of science fiction, but no plot and no sure idea of who would tell the tale, and how.

The anthology Points of View, edited by James Moffet and Kenneth R. McElheny, presents a number of stories grouped into eleven different points of view.¹ The order of these groups is meant to "call attention to who the narrator is, when and where he is telling the story, who he is telling it to, what relation to the events he stands in, and what kind of knowledge he claims (p. xi)." If these statements had been questions, the answers I finally gave largely determined the narrative style of "Metempsychotic." But what is the goal of those answers? In his article from the September 2000 Writer's Chronicle, "From Long Shots to X-Rays: Distance & Point of View in Fiction Writing," David Jauss says "[...] perhaps the most important purpose of point of view is to manipulate the degree of distance between the characters and the reader in order to achieve the emotional, intellectual, and moral responses the author desires." Not surprisingly, his list of possible points of view² reflects this focus on distance. Perhaps implicit in these lists is the connection between point of view and plot. I would now argue that the story you tell and the way you tell it are usually intertwined.

I began the process of finding an appropriate distance by writing a scene. The first difficulty was finding a way to make the alien appear benign. I decided to make the infestation of Cherry a mistake. The alien would normally only reanimate

¹Interior Monologue, Dramatic Monologue, Letter Narration, Diary Narration, Subjective Narration, Detached Autobiography, Memoir or Observer Narration, Biography, or Anonymous Narration—Single Character Point of View, Anonymous Narration—Dual Character Point of View, Anonymous Narration—Multiple Character Point of View, and Anonymous Narration—No Character Point of View

²Dramatic, Omniscience, Indirect Interior Monologue, Direct Interior Monologue, Stream Of Consciousness

the recently deceased. This wasn't quite enough, so the alien would also feel that inhabiting a living person was morally repugnant. To illustrate that, I wrote in first person, past-tense from the alien's point of view as it discovered its mistake; the host was hospitalized while comatose and the alien thought she was dead. Telling this part of the story in the first person was somehow unsatisfying. I found it difficult to connect with the character. I quickly realized that this choice made it very difficult to generate any suspense for the reader, unless the narrator was unreliable. Since the alien is, well, *alien*, it seemed likely that I would confuse the reader rather than generate suspense or mystery for him.

Increasing the distance from the alien slightly, I rewrote essentially the same events using third person, past-tense, but remained attached to the alien's viewpoint. Since the host was in a coma at this point, and I felt I needed to convey certain information to the reader, this seemed necessary. As Orson Scott Card says when contrasting first and third person in Characters & Viewpoint, "Even though most third-person accounts are told in the past tense, they feel quite immediate (p. 148)." Card believes a first-person, past-tense account of events implies remembering in a way that third person does not. Increasing the distance from the character in this way decreases the perceived distance in time.

The result was somehow still unsatisfying. I wasn't sure what was wrong with it but I became aware of how difficult it was to portray the alien in an interesting way. I decided to continue with a scene from the host's point of view. In parallel to the alien discovering it had accidentally inhabited a living person, the host was becoming aware of some influence on her thoughts and emotions. I hadn't gotten very far when I realized that the human reacting to the presence of the alien, but not yet knowing the cause, would be compelling; more so if the reader was also unsure of what was going on.

This may be why I never considered an omniscient point of view. If a part of what makes the story interesting is information not revealed to the reader, then using a narrator who could tell the reader everything as it happens, but doesn't, would seem to be cheating.

Another possibility would have been to alternate viewpoints between the alien and the host and perhaps between first and third person. This would have reduced the possibility that the reader would feel cheated, but might still reveal too much about what was actually going on to generate the suspense I now hoped for. It also suffers from the potential of confusing, or worse, annoying, the reader. In a short novella, multiple points of view alternating would likely be too complex.

I didn't know as I began writing the first few scenes that I was deciding whose story this was and who would tell it. However close the narrative was to the alien, it was unlikely that a reader could ever really relate to its story. If I told it as the human host's story, I knew that it would be much easier to identify with the character and her situation, strange as it was. My previous excursions had already eliminated the alien as a direct narrator, and now it was also clear that it was Cherry's story, the host, but I still wasn't sure who would tell it.

Now I had the difficulty of finding a way to reveal information about the alien so that the reader was intrigued enough to accept the bizarre situation of the host. I decided to revisit the opening and attempt to transform it to a *cinematic* point of view. Cinematic is Orson Scott Card's term for what is sometimes referred to as dramatic. I prefer this term because it evokes a camera following one or more people around as opposed to the idea of watching a stage play.

The revised opening with the alien bore little resemblance to the original. Instead of mostly thoughts and feelings there were only locations, actions, and dialogue.

I found writing this scene from a completely cinematic viewpoint quite difficult. It took several passes on my own and a trip to the MIT Writing Center before I thought it was acceptable. The scene follows one man, who is actually the alien in a different host, through a few hours and establishes a connection with Cherry. I felt it was important to maintain a viewpoint character even though Moffet and McElheny refer to this as "Anonymous Narration—No Character Point of View." I believe all of this was necessary so that the reader would know there were rules to how I was telling the story. Setting this part off as a prologue also helped in that regard. It allows the reader to more readily accept the change to Cherry's perspective.

After I had completed the prologue, I reconsidered how I might tell the rest of the story. The most common and obvious choice was third person, limited to Cherry's perspective, past-tense. Since this is a science fiction story, I felt it was important to explore other possibilities and what they might reveal to the reader about the story and its eventual outcome.

I considered first person, past-tense, but worried that this might imply that Cherry could not die at the end of the story. Some readers would not object to a story told this way that ended with the storyteller's death, but others, and I am one of them, would feel cheated if she died while telling her own story. Because I did not yet know how the story would end, I rejected this as a possibility.

First person, present-tense doesn't suffer from this problem, mostly because this is a science fiction story. Since the alien could be recording Cherry's thoughts, this was a real possibility. I could present the story framed by a cinematic prologue and epilogue, and then reveal in the epilogue that the alien was actually telling the tale. The problem was that I didn't want the alien to be so powerful that it could read her thoughts from her brain activity. This seemed too much like fantasy and I had to reject this option as well.

A cinematic viewpoint throughout the story would prevent the reader from connecting to Cherry and would make the story less compelling. An omniscient viewpoint would have made telling the prologue from a cinematic viewpoint seem odd and would have made it much more difficult, if not impossible, to generate suspense. This left third person limited to Cherry's point of view the most viable option.

Even with third person limited, past-tense, there are options. Card describes two, light and deep penetration. In light penetration "we can see inside the viewpoint character's mind, we observe only scenes where the viewpoint character is present—but we don't actually experience the scenes as if we were seeing them through the viewpoint character's eyes (p. 165)." In deep penetration, "we *do* experience the scenes as if we were seeing them through the viewpoint character's eyes... we don't have to dip into his mind; we never really leave[.]" Jauss argues that such rules need not, and frequently should not, be observed at all times. I see the possibility of sliding

back and forth between light and deep penetration as the story allows or demands. I use this technique in “Metempsychotic,” mostly staying nearer the light penetration end of the spectrum.

Jauss’s opinion is that “classifying works of fiction according to their person tells us virtually nothing about either the specific works or point of view in general.” I am not sure how true that statement is, but the process I went through in selecting points of view from which to tell my story was very much about selecting its person, in the larger sense³. Finding the person of this story also helped me find the plot. When I knew whose story it was and how I would tell it, much of the action seemed inevitable.

I believe the narrative styles finally chosen, a cinematic prologue tied to one of the characters and a somewhat subjective, third-person limited to Cherry Ogata’s perspective, for the balance of the story, make the plot suspenseful and compelling. I do not believe that the basic elements of the plot require the viewpoint choices I settled on, but different choices would have resulted in a very different story. To generate the suspense I hoped for at the beginning, and the surprise I found at the end, I know I reached the right conclusions so that I could tell this story.

³first-person central or peripheral, third person omniscient, limited omniscient or dramatic—from Richard Cohen’s *Writer’s Mind* as quoted in Jauss