

Long Metal Pieces

Novel by

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Idealism,
Must Walk Upon the Stiff and Urgent Legs of
Realism

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First Paragraph

On the Significance of Amplified Macroscopic Probability in the Optimization of Learning

By The Author

Abstract:

This paper discusses the possibility that consciousness is the result of a large-scale, integrated physical process within the brain. This is a claim that will be substantiated by showing how, through modulating the fluctuations in the probability of a specific population of neurons firing or not, constrained variance within this activity is intimately related to a person's ability to learn and become conscious of themselves. The biological manipulation of neuronal firing operates through a form of processing that can be putatively referred to as non-systematic connectionism: a form of connectionism that is able to learn creatively. The variation in probability of neuronal firing, as it is related to consciousness, is associated with the motion of a specific set of neuronal processes inside the cortex. The agent that is being proposed as the cause of this movement - acting as a factor promoting nerve growth - is a magnetic field residing in the sixth layer of the cerebral cortex. Furthermore, it will be shown that the predicted physiological profile of the area responsible for the field could link it to the gamma frequency observed in human brain studies.

Chapter 1

Man, Woman, Death

A meaningless smile catches and keeps the attention of a large, older woman. It is the surest sign of a dull and short-lived infatuation. And because she was responding to something she liked, the woman instinctively smiled back, moving her heavy face into an honest reflection of her inner capacities. Even if the interest would quickly evaporate, there was a great amount of integrity in her response.

Before her forgotten feelings could become fuller, a hard object snaps her concentration in-two. The force belongs to a man standing beside her, looking over in earnest disrespect.

In an abrupt tone this person asks the woman, “What are you doing?” Then he becomes even louder and continues in a growl, “Get out of the way. Don’t be lazy. You’re getting in the way of . . .”

And before this disturbed man could finish his tirade, the funny looking person wearing a pair of serious looking glasses, the same individual who had been blocked by the woman, stares in their direction in emotionless anger as he begins to squeeze by. This inconvenience greatly irritates the disturbed man and causes the thin skin on his face to become hot and flushed. The woman understands this reaction and immediately moves over to where the disturbed man has stationed himself.

“Didn’t I tell you? Well . . . what were you looking at this time, Glenda?” His voice becomes slightly softer, but it couldn’t be described as tender. Seldom did it stray away from its ability to sound rushed and haggard.

“Nothing,” Glenda answers, almost mocking herself due to the lack of sincerity in her voice.

“Nothing? Sure. You stand in the middle of a busy corridor and you say you are doing nothing. Let me see.”

As this was said, the man shifts his position slightly and tells himself that he was looking in the exact direction that his wife of 40 years had been minding not too long ago.

“It’s all right, Nathan. It’s not important. We should move on. Didn’t you want to look at some of that kitchen stuff you mentioned before?” Luckily, she knew the right thing to say and this monetarily caused her husband of 40 years to forget about his need to subject his wife to his own pragmatic anger and move on. However, a disjointed object near to them, very near to them, starts to cough. The sound soon leads to a wet wheezing clatter cutting into the air. And before it vanishes, a series of other noises that were much harder to describe sprang raggedly into their ears.

Whatever unseen damage had produced this broken clamor of sounds, both of these people instantly recognized it for what it was and knew through the religion of practice how to deal with it. Without even looking at what he was doing, Nathan drew out one of his hands that had been sleeping by his side and picks up the dog resting at an angle by his feet. Upon finding a soft spot just below the dog’s neck, where the skin rolls over itself many times, he starts to gently massage it. It takes some time, but this action eventually gets rid of the rattling coming out of the dog’s throat and upper airway.

Nearly twenty minutes drags by in the steady drone of the room until Glenda speaks up, “Nathan, you should . . .”

“Should what?”

“Well,” she continued, feeling sorry for herself, “Abbie has been there for a while. Don’t you think you should set her back on the floor?” Glenda’s advice might have been sound, but she didn’t sound as if she believed it. So instead of meeting her husband’s hardened visage, she glared at the dog that was hanging limp in front of her. This allowed Glenda to see the film-covered eyes and the patches of darkly streaked fur that indicated how impossibly old this dog was.

“Glenda, I have told you many times that – never mind. No . . . I will tell you. You don’t seem to listen, but I have to tell you as many times as I have the strength to tell you.” Then as he gathered his vigor to say whatever he thought was his duty to say, he put out a hand and grabbed his wife’s discolored wrist. He did this so he could quickly guide her to the other side of the passageway that they had been standing in. Although she didn’t respond to his unyielding suggestion as fast as he wanted, they did make it to the other side before another wave of people had obliterated the emptiness that had been there.

“Glenda, as I have been telling you, many, many times, Abbie is an exceptionally old Pug. You know that. You know that very well. Her age, and her condition could not even escape your observations. Due to her extreme age, and the fact she is of a breed that should not exist in the first place, a by-product as I have told you before of human manipulation, she has a lot of needs. If each of them is not attended to, it may lead to further health difficulties. She is very fragile, and prone to breakage. It would make no sense to allow that to happen.

It would make no sense to permit her to exist for this length of time ...” Then Nathan adjusted his glasses and continued, “without staying committed to her health until she no longer has the strength to live.”

Having spoken in one long blast, Nathan gave himself another pause to think of what else he thought he had to say. And as he analyzed the awesome complexity of what it meant to take care of an older dog, especially an older pug who was blind, deaf, diabetic and had a bowel disorder which made it very difficult to leave her in a room by herself for any length of time, his wife once more forgot about her husband and started to scan the room with hopeful eyes.

Nathan might have detected the wayward look in her eyes, but choose not to say anything. He was the type of person that enjoyed explaining things. And when he was full engrossed in one subject, he wasn't going to let go of it until he was sure that he hadn't forgotten anything.

“If I put Abbie back on the floor, as you suggest, this will only lead to problems. And why allow problems to occur if you can easily circumvent them by not allowing them to set seed in the first place? To allow anything that you know will cause a problem to occur is wrong. Are you condoning the idea that I should not properly participate in the care of Abbie?”

He waited for a response that he knew would not occur. As mentioned, Nathan's wife was again preoccupied by the infectious nature of the room. It was teeming with so much life and overlapping voices trying to drench everybody in the hum of business, that it could distract the most self-centered person on earth.

“Are you finished?” he asked coldly once a few more seconds had ticked off.

“What? Oh.” Having realized that she wasn’t giving her husband all the attention he wanted, or expected, Glenda pulled her naked head downward. “Sorry Nathan. I just thought I saw something that looked like an old refrigerator. Probably from the early 50’s”

“Never mind that, it will be there in a couple of minutes. What - did you say it was probably from the 50’s?”

“Yes. From here it does.”

“Well, whatever. It will be there when we are finished.” Nathan hated it when he was on one of his numerous thoughts and it began to run out of steam because it was interrupted by somebody else, especially his wife. But, as was one of his many talents, and he was a very talented man after all, he could always find the idea that had inspired him in the first place, and go back to it if need be. Find it wherever it was and give it another hard, almost resentful push.

“As I was saying, Abbie cannot be placed on the ground where we are standing. To do so would be to commit an error. To commit to an outcome that should not happen. Do you want Abbie to be hurt? Is that what you are suggesting, Glenda?”

It was impossible for her to say anything but no. When they first met, Glenda had the ability to disregard his intensity without letting on what she was thinking. She could stand there and consider other things when he began to drone on about carefully drawn outcomes that she couldn’t care less about. Glenda kept to this well-worn pretence, thinking she was going to have it her way in the end. Unaware of her waiting patience, unaware that she believed things would get better for them, Nathan had continued on issuing his impermeable thoughts without any guidance from a better morality, and

without her knowing it, Glenda had become a different person with a number of different expectations. As such, his inability to change had overpowered their relationship, their marriage, and their lives. So, it was by minute, definite steps that Glenda had lost her freedom and most of her soul.

“No - Not at all. I’m worried about Abbie as well. I wasn’t saying that you should just let her go right here and now. No. I was thinking you should take her out of the harness you put her in. Put Abbie over your shoulder. Give her a better chance to breathe.”

Glenda executed her opinion well enough that there was a possibility that her husband would look at it, if only for a second, and vaguely consider it correct.

“To do so, dear, would be to commit another fault. If I took her and put her over my shoulder, that would put her again at risk. What if somebody backs up and hits her? Abbie would be pushed over my shoulder and this could cause her to fall to the ground. Such a fall would break her into a number of pieces. No, in this contagious environment I will keep her on her stomach. You see, if you do a quick vector analysis, as I have explained to you in the past, there is more weight on her posterior than on her front. Therefore, to remove her from this cradle with the idea that doing so will elevate strain on her chest is wrong. These devices are designed so that the load it spread out evenly, and with care. Infants in many different cultures stay in them for many years. And, unless new research on the subject has come to light, I am not aware that such devices can cause any kind of respiratory distress. Are you aware of any new research in this area, Glenda?”

Nathan bent his head to one side to show that he was done for now and was completely satisfied that he had addressed the subject of old pugs in frontal carriers in an expert and proper manner.

“No, but dear, Abbie is not a child. Aren’t dogs supposed to be on all fours?”

“You have said this before, and as before, I disagree.” Nathan might have looked relaxed as he replied, nevertheless, the remark made him uncomfortable.

“Anyway,” he began in a proudly dismissive way, “Abbie is quiet. Whatever had lead to her acute respiratory attack is no longer bothering her. So, where is that refrigerator you were talking about?”

His wife, keenly aware of what had to be done to distract her husband from even the thought that he was wrong, spoke up right away, “Well, I think if we walk over by the furniture to the right and go down that aisle and turn at the large clock, we will get there.”

Nathan thought about standing there stoically and giving his own opinion on how best to do this. Yet, his wife was much better at directions than he was. It didn’t matter if they were driving to the grocery store or were at the library. Time and time again, when they were together it was always his wife’s sense of where they were and where they wanted to be that got the job done the fastest. So it was with a few pounds of spite that he reminded himself of this fact and waved his hand so Glenda could lead.

Through a wandering maze of heads and colorful faces and odd expressions they moved in a westward direction. Undaunted by what looked like a thickened mass of people that couldn’t be moved, the wife tunneled vigorously. She didn’t have to look back to know what her husband was doing. If she did, she would have seen an old man with his elbows up over his chest area moving like a snow truck. Doing so without any

regard for what he was moving toward. Winter chains fastened around his feet, would have looked appropriate. Most of the time when somebody saw the determined bitterness of his face and the cold manner by which he moved, they reacted by pulling back so as to avoid contact.

Eventually, the density and or the consistency of the crowd let up and he could see the top of the refrigerator that was looming close to one of the exits on the north side of the room. But it really wasn't a room. It would be better to call it a hall. A large hall that had been rented out by the Antiques Association of the city it was located in. Yet, even using antiques in this situation might have been a misnomer as well.

For what was in the hall was nothing better, in most cases, than collected leftovers from uninteresting lives. Most of it was scratched or in a state of utter disarray that made the object or objects beyond the curiosity of most anybody. The husband was of course of this opinion as well. And if Nathan was asked by one of the vendors about the state of their merchandise, if they had the nerve or even the desire to do so, he would have added a few more of his own harder remarks to this discussion.

To me, he would have noted, people just can't show up to one of these events bringing junk. That is a very rude thing for them to do. What is worse is when you ask one of the vendors why they have selected the prices they do, most of the time the answer is silly, perhaps criminal. They claim that they are basing their prices on a scale upon which all the other values are a fraction of the price brought by an object in its best condition. To this, I have nothing but anger and resentment. What are they thinking of? Anything less than a perfectly preserved object is worth nothing. If the object wasn't preserved in the first place, it tells me that it must have been left lying around as junk.

And it was only when it was found by the vendor with the assumption that they could get money for it, did they label it as a collectible and try to affront everybody with the idea that they cared about it.

I can't stand those types of people.

I really can't.

They lie and they make up stories for their own benefit.

Filled by this and similar thoughts, the husband moved closer to the refrigerator and the 'valuable' litter that immediately surrounded it. Upon almost hitting a miniature tower of farm implements that had been lazily stacked on a stool close to the ground, his wife pulled up short of their destination. Instead of going right into the area where the refrigerator was, Nathan's wife wavered by a table that was completely covered with old post cards and coins.

"What's wrong?" he asked, impatiently.

"Nothing, Nothing at all, dear." Glenda was casting her shining eyes right at a group of objects that were nowhere near the direction of the refrigerator. Due to this Nathan became irritable and called out.

"Nothings wrong? Then why are we here? The refrigerator is over there. If you look over your shoulder you will see it. It's not in front of you." He was never one to simply ask what was going on. To him, it was best to fold and turn his words into an attack, and a pointed one at that, when the opportunity showed itself.

"You are right, Nathan. Of course you are . . . but, well, I wanted . . . I thought since we are going into this direction I could look at -" She cut herself short. Glenda knew better than to over explain what she was doing.

It was always best to give her husband an answer that vaguely stated what she was doing. To come out and say in anyway that she had only spotted the refrigerator because she was still looking at the object that had originally caught her attention would have been too direct for her husband.

“So, here we are. How long do you think you will need?”

“Not too long.” And just like that, her eyes fixed upon what she had seen from a couple of aisles away. Without another word, Glenda strolled toward it.

The stupid, immovable smile was still there. And because it was made of plastic and paint, there was no chance that it was going to change any time soon. And perhaps for this very reason, Glenda found it strangely attractive. She slowed her breath down as she thought about how much it would cost and where she could possibly place it within her home. Unknowingly, she was paying so much attention to these thoughts and the inner realms of herself that governed them and the pathways they could take, that she almost stopped breathing altogether. As Glenda took one very long stream of breath through her pursed lips, something happened that shocked her.

“Excuse me. Excuse me. Could you bring that over here?” It was her husband’s voice issuing a command to a man who was on the other side of the table. Nathan had followed her. His indelicate words were enough to dislodge this dreary man from the far end of this display and made him look at where Nathan’s august finger was pointing.

“Yeah. Which one?”

“The globe. Bring me the globe.” Apparently the man didn’t understand this taciturn request and stood there unmoved.

“The globe – bring me the globe.”

Nathan stretched out his finger and arm even more, giving the impression that if the man wasn't going to properly respond to the order he was given, Nathan was going to keep on pushing out his arm until it was long enough to grab the object.

“Excuse me, sir. But my husband would like to look at the yellow ball that has a happy face on it. Yes, the one that is close to the tin biscuit box. It really is wonderful what types of things you can find at a place like this.”

Glenda had asked so nicely, that the vendor forgot about her husband, and brought the item over without giving another thought to why some people are so hell bent on being such ass holes, although a part of him was tempted to throw the thing in his hand right at the man's head.

Up close the plastic ball with the happy face painted on it was rougher than it looked from a few feet away. There were many scratches embellishing its surface. This didn't bother her. Glenda wasn't put back by its condition. Besides, most of what they had already seen that day wasn't that good to begin with.

“Hear, dear, do you want to look at it?” Glenda knew the answer and handed the happy face over. “What do you like about it, dear?”

Glenda was curious why her husband had been interested in the same thing she had. By normal convention, this was unusual. His taste was for things that were large and made of metal. Most of the time Nathan turned his nose up at anything that could be described as dainty or impractical, consequently, seeing him look deeply, almost passionately at this plastic ball that had an amateurish happy face painted on it, caused her to think of many irregularly shaped things to say.

“I wonder – I wonder why it’s smiling?” Nathan said in a fading voice. “Don’t tell me, I’ll figure it out.”

Glenda could see that he was doing some serious thinking and this implied that she had no right to say anything. She believed this was especially true because Nathan was playing so much with a small dial on his glasses.

Regardless of these fears and curiosities, she didn’t want to move away from the spot just incase she was asked to do something.

Held by these anxieties and their lies, Glenda looked down on the dog that was hanging in front of her. Abbie was still there and not moving very much. This prompted Glenda to look at the dog’s white underbelly and see if it was moving. Ever since Abbie’s last operation, that being the one that involved five hours of her husband’s time and the removal of a two pound cyst attached to the dog’s back leg, Glenda began to find herself looking at the dog’s chest whenever she entered a room. To her, this was the best way to see if the dog was still alive. Following a brief absence of any signs of life, there came a bland quiver from the dog’s ribs and the belly moved as if it was hiccupping.

Glenda began to inspect the dog’s eyes, tiny diseased orbs that looked at you, but could not see. They were covered with a slight crust that had some fur stuck to them. Since Abbie was old as she was, and her tear glands had stopped working for more than a year, Glenda certainly expected to see this. But, it didn’t stop Glenda from thinking about how unnatural it was to have a creature this old and in this state of health being kept alive. Her eyes went back to the dog’s chest and a small thought entered her head. She wondered what would make it stop moving.

“Nathan, would you mind if I . . .”

Then the dog moved in a large jolt. As the released energy argued and coursed through the dog once more, a vicious sound flew into the air. For only a moment, Glenda believed that the dog was having some kind of fatal attack. Saving all its forgotten energy so that when it dived madly towards the blackness of whatever afterlife it was intended for it could forsake this harrowed existence in an impressive matter.

Glenda freely let go of this idea the second she looked up and saw the terrified expression on her husband's face.

His eyes were huge.

The limp, ugly flesh around his neck and lower face was flaccid and his neck hung out.

“Nathan, don't move. Give me a second. Give me a second. I'll get it, don't you worry. I'll get it for you – you'll be all right. Don't worry.”

If he had a chance to answer, and not be offended by a condition that was temporarily causing his throat to seize shut, Nathan would have told her that her endless commentary on his health was not helping matters. Her stick-like fingers shot into her purse and wrestled with a couple of large colorful containers as they tried to find a small metal object filled with medication. Glenda looked up once more and saw the immense amount of distress on his face. And instead of it causing her to think more clearly, and be more determined in finding the small canister in her handbag, Glenda's busy fingers slowed down. When they did, the rest of her became conscious of what her angry fingers were perhaps thinking. Producing, perhaps, a picture, a concise and meaningful portrait of life as it would be if the canister was not found.

Showing the end of the next minute,

. . . the next day and the next month in the presence of nobody,
but herself.

When this intimate display had passed by her a few times, it was only by the sound of her husband's suffering throat giving out another blast of tumultuous strain, that Glenda forgot her unnoticed wishes, and found the metal vial.

With a hard fist, Glenda pulled it out of the bag and faced her husband. Abbie stared back at her as if it was about to ask her a question. This confused Glenda until she realized that she had automatically placed the vial into one of his awaiting hands. Nathan further took the focus off the dog on his chest by quickly jerking the container up toward his mouth. Once he had done this, a trembling finger leap onto a trigger on top of the canister and a long series of hisses began to run into his mouth. Most of the people around him were surprised by this, but few of those who had been in the area before the attack showed any concern: at best they were curious, at worse, they were amused.

Protracted hisses continued to come out of Nathan's mouth as the rest of his body lost its protective rigidity. The medication was affective. The asthma attack was over and Nathan was going to live another day if nothing else happened to him. Relieved that this episode was over, Glenda tried to comfort her husband by stroking the hand that had the canister in it. The look of utter disbelief was beginning to become less thick in his eyes. However, even after it was clear that Nathan was breathing properly, there lingered a certain darkness in his eyes.

This caused Glenda to become frightened. Not so much because she believed that Nathan was on the verge of another attack, she cringed at the thought that perhaps he knew that she had hesitated, if only for a moment, to help him.

“Are you all right dear? Do you need to sit down?” She offered these words a couple of more times.

By the fifth attempt, Nathan appeared to be more alert of what she was saying and eventually unfroze his position and looked down at her.

“You’ll be okay. We can find a spot to sit at. You rest and you’ll be okay.”

She tried to believe these meaningful words, yet the look of agony still washed over his features. It was a stain that seemed to be running very deep and making it very hard for him to look comfortable.

“No, I want to stay here. I don’t want to move,” he answered, sounding very, very weak. Not just a weakness, a state bought by mere exhaustion, but within the tone of his voice was a previously unforeseen delicacy. Glenda had never, ever heard it before.

“Sure. We can stand here – if you want.” Then she noticed that the vendor that had given her the plastic happy face was looking directly at her. She looked back at him thinking he was going to ask her how her husband of 40 years was doing.

Before she reacted to this thought, Glenda carefully considered where the man’s frosted eyes were looking, and found that they were focused on her husband’s other hand. Through the course of the asthma attack, this other hand had vanished on the far side of her husband. Patiently, she shuffled to this part of her husband and glanced at what was there. To her absolute surprise, the happy face was still in this hand. This didn’t seem possible. Although her husband was of a large structure, with big features, it didn’t seem possible that one of his hands could possibly hold onto something that big. And to think that he could do so while undergoing the confusion and pain that always occurred during one of these attacks made her gasp in amazement

“Are you going to buy that, Miss?”

“Buy it?” Glenda answered, very bewildered.

In part, the vendor answered by pointing hard at the globe in Nathan’s hand. Taken aback by this rude behavior her immediate thought was to say nothing and hold her husband by his other hand and lead him to someplace quiet to sit at.

But she wasn’t that type of person. Glenda never really gave herself permission to act on what she wanted to do. Nor, was it really ever possible for her to do so. For within her cultured and oppressed mind, partially built by her marriage and neglect, were a deluge of unnumbered compartments. Each of them connected to the others. Therefore, when anything entered her mind, the information had to run the entire course. With this being no small battle, the distance that had to be visited usually overwhelmed the consciousness of the information. Which by default lead it to wane in energy and eventually becoming weak and misunderstood if the memory was ever retrieved.

“How much?”

“30 dollars,” the vendor asked blandly.

“Is that with or with the government and services tax?”

“The what?”

“The GST.”

“Yeah, I’ll throw that in. Whatever.”

Glenda wasn’t impressed by the vendor’s lack of customer service. She looked over at her husband to see if he was going to object to the purchase. He still appeared worn and in no state to consider anything other than himself.

Upon passively handing the money over in one and a half handfuls of change and getting a written receipt, conscious acts of defiance she thought would be an impressively childish way of getting back at the man for being so impertinent, Glenda managed to retrace her steps as she held onto her husband's clammy hand. Soon the couple found themselves in a semi-shaded spot under an enormous free-standing clock which was missing its hour hand. The remaining arms had been replaced by a knife and fork. Neither of them moved.

With the crowd in the hall letting up, Glenda did this quickly and without upsetting Abbie. The dog remained on her husband's chest and appeared to be in a normal state of suspended animation. The question it may have asked, if this was possible, was no longer in its crumbled face. Another foot and a half above this image was Nathan's eyes. They were still shocked and his hand was still firmly holding onto the happy face ball.

"Do you want some water? Your throat must be very raw." Glenda gave him a kind look, and expected Nathan to do little more than ignore her expression and stay quiet.

Glenda was wrong.

As soon as she smiled he noticed it and responded by trying to smile as well.

The resulting abomination almost made her scream.

* * *

Excerpt from the paper, First Paragraph.

There are many different aspects of the human mind that we do not understand. Some, such as consciousness and thought, cannot presently be explained by our sciences. Because clear and meaningful definitions cannot be produced for these terms due to their ambiguous natures, each phenomenon is still too abstract to capture. Without a definite purpose being given to either phenomenon, no precise definition can be generated for them. Without a reason affixed to either phenomenon it becomes easy to dismiss them as having no purpose at all, and therefore as not existing. However, we can use other faculties we know something about, for example the ability to learn as a starting point in the investigation. By focusing on learning and its optimisation in humans, it may be possible to find a purpose for consciousness and thought.

Chapter 2

Body At Rest

Three young people of finite and regrettable virtues and strengths were standing together in the cold. Two of them are comparing the thickness of their jackets, while the third is trying to fit as much of the cinnamon bun that's sticking to his fingers into his mouth as he can. As this drizzled confection slowly disappears into the vacuum of this young person's head, the others begin to laugh and say stupid things about what he is doing. To this, the boy tries even harder to play the fool, and pushes the pastry deeper into his gullet. For a moment the boy starts to choke. Before he has a chance to recognize how small he is, the food is destroyed and all that is left of its existence is a flakey smile.

There are other people in this area as well. None of them are as young as the three or are consuming so much of the silence that has been so firmly planted into the ground before the trio arrived.

Normally, little would be said or heard in this area at this time of year or in fact throughout the year. The cold and artificial nature of the place usually made people dreary and not interested in doing anything but wait. And truthfully, that was what people were supposed to be doing in this station. There was supposed to be not looking up or looking down, there was to be no thinking nor considering. The faultless engineers that were hired to design this underground train station were probably told to make it as lifeless as possible. To reduce the amount of hope that could rest inside of it so that it would remain uncongested and clean. Looking around, the public dungeon appeared to have no other personality than the grayish color it wore.

People waiting for their train to show up had their minds were pushed toward the tunnel that was in front of them. If any thought emerged, it was only about how many minutes were left until they could leave this place

Hampered by so much concrete and the ubiquitous stiffness that was reaching up through the tunnel, there was absolute silence holding onto the air whenever the three people decided to say nothing. Sharp stillness came into the area in large stagnant blocks of isolation; ice cubes formed by desolation. And it was only by the hardest strands of curiosity that a very long pause was broken by one of the members of this group.

“What is that?” the girl asked looking up, eyes opening and closing slowly.

“What are you looking at?” A tall boy came up to her and wobbled back and forth.

“Stop moving around and look, you lame.” She playfully hit him in the thickest part of his jacket and glared at him.

He wrinkled his nose, tried to cough and lazily looked in the direction she was indicating. “It’s just a stain. It looks wet - so what?”

“Well, braino, it’s December. Where’s the water coming from?”

The sarcasm enticed him in a funny way and made him think about what she was saying. Before he could be creative and bring any of his better ideas to the surface, the last member of their group strolled over. He was pretending to be walking a tight rope and was using his lanky arms to balance himself. His rope was the blackened cement line that passed between the bluish-gray tiles on the floor. With arms gesticulating, he took one last giant step and came to a halt beside the girl. The toque on his head was so tight that it made his ears vanish and his teeth appear larger than they were.

“Well, fellow circus dwellers. What do we have here?”

“Give it up, George. You’re not impressing anybody.”

“I’m not? That’s a surprise. How can you not be overwhelmed by George the Bun Eating Machine?” His friends smirked at that, but before the girl could forget what had been bothering her just a short while before, she spoke up again.

“Yeah, you’re so great. We all know that - good for you. Before you can go off and shove anything else into that cavern of yours, tell me why there is water dripping down the wall.” The blue wool of her glove pointed to the stain that she had shown previously to Todd.

“What? That? Ah – the world is about to boil over,” he managed to say before turning again and beginning to stride off.

“Hey come back here.” Alice sounded serious, but she could sound like that for almost anything. And because George wasn’t interested in hearing anything else, he found the remnants of his imaginary tightrope and went on walking with the upmost delicacy. The girl was about to throw a couple of words at him, but a ringing noise startled her.

Todd recognized what it was and took an object out of his outer pocket. “It’s me,” he answered. “Hey, hold it – George, its Joe.”

“Tell him I’ve joined the circus.” Todd reacted to this comment as if this was a fact and gave the answer to Joe.

George continued to move away. Quickly, he had forgotten about his friends and the water stain that was on the wall and was telling himself that he was high above the world.

The lifeless nature of his environment had withered away and George was visiting a different reality. Nimbly he placed his feet on the floor. Concentrating on staying as close to the line as possible; making sure he didn't let himself forget where he wasn't.

Thinking that he might as well be as consistent as possible with what he was doing, George looked at a point on the opposite end of the station and glared at it. A specific part of his memory was telling him that this was what a real tightrope walker did: they found a spot close to where they intended to reach and forced themselves to forget about everything else.

The effort to obliterate his surroundings made George feel somewhat excited and he was really getting in the spirit on being a high wire walker that just happened to be plying his trade two stories underground.

Then someone came into view.

It was a man who was beginning to walk toward the line that George was going along. This irritated him. He hoped that this person was going to turn around and go in the other direction, but shortly it became obvious that this other person had no intention of going anywhere else. This became an absolute certainty when the person strolled to the middle of the imaginary rope George was on and stopped. And the more George stared at this person, the more upset he became. Not just for the fact that someone else was standing on his wire, adding their weight to a situation that couldn't stand any more displacement, it was also the absurd way this person was dressing. Underneath the heavy skin of the blue winter jacket that was barely covering the torso of this man, was what seemed like a huge dressing gown. It was extremely long. Another couple of centimeters and it would have touched the ground.

After thinking about it for a second, which caused George to pause on his rope, he knew what it was. It was one of those heavy cotton lab coats that he had to buy a couple of months ago for his Chemistry Lab. Well, perhaps it wasn't exactly like his coat. His wasn't as clean as this person's garment, or as large. Neither of these points really mattered to him though. What was causing his front teeth to ache and the toque on his head to feel tighter was the thought of university. George detested the idea university was back in his head. He was very content to be oblivious to it and merrily defying death all by his lonesome.

But it wasn't meant to be. Even if the man hadn't come along and compromised his daydream, something else would have. It was an eventuality that woke with him each day for the last two years. Yet, George was the type of person who could hold a grudge and make it worth its weight in garbage whenever there was a need to understand things on a very basic level. Given this propensity, George told himself that he had to keep on going. So he did. His legs started to move again and he headed right toward the person in the large white university lab jacket.

Then another distraction slowed his pace. Near the hair line on the left side of this person's face, below the ear, was a shadow. No, it wasn't a shadow. George came to a stop and took the weight of this observation through his legs. They wobbled a bit as he continued to study this thing. With a sigh, George figured out what this thing was. It was a MOTOR (Mobile On-situ Transmitter Or/And Receiver). George hadn't noticed it before because the man in the white jacket was also wearing a pair of headphones that obscured the smaller pieces of the device that was attached to the skin of this person's face.

The hardened laws of the English Language would have placed an ‘and’ before the ‘or’, turning it into MOTAR, but those who marketed this product thought MOTOR was more memorable. Whatever it was called, this object was the next step in the evolution of cellphones and the destruction of privacy. Other than being connected to a person’s face, and reminiscent of the antiquated blue-tooths, the most desirable attribute of this device was that it had perfect clarity. Some inventive soul somewhere in the heart of some labored company came up with the idea of making the individual a part of the communication device. Turning them into a living antennae

The resulting boost in the strength of the signal was amazing. There was no noise, no interference at all. It made the cellular phone that his friend Todd was presently using, the type that a lot of people still had because the MOTORS were very expensive, seem bland, and to those who really cared about image, an embarrassment. Such a thought and his placement within it, blew at the embers of George’s building resentment. The heat from this action caused him to pick up his feet and move onward.

Perhaps with less than three meters between them, the person in the aforementioned jacket noticed a shape coming toward him. Or, maybe, he was just looking from side to side as most people did when they were trying to figure out when the train was going to come. When he did, the man quickly glanced away as if he trying to pretend not to see anything. His head pulled away for a couple of seconds and then it slowly moved back to study what was walking right at him.

Even though this was done cautiously so that it didn’t appear to be judging George’s foolishness, the boy took this other person’s interest as some kind of personal affront.

Whatever the case, George began to exaggerate his motions, making it look as if a great wind had blown into the underground train station. The invisible force thus upon George was causing him to sway dangerously from side to side, which was – well it seemed it was - offset by him bringing his legs up higher and higher into the air.

Needless to say, the man in the white jacket couldn't but he was shocked by what was coming toward him. Many other people would have instantly moved back and made some rude remark about this other person's juvenile if not, unstable behavior. That did not happen. Instead of provoking a response that brought out a flurry of charged emotions, the man in the white jacket appeared to be suffering from a negation of emotion. His eyes grew as big as dinner plates and then collapsed into dots. Then the flat smoothness returned to his face, which was quickly followed by the long muscles in his neck working very slowly to swivel the entirety of the head right toward the gap in front of him.

He was thinking. Was it about George? No, not entirely.

George was only a minor part of what was troubling this person.

Mostly, the individual in the white jacket was concentrating on what he wanted to do, and what he didn't want to do. He was going to go to the university by train but he hadn't bought a ticket. Both of these things were done intentionally. His head was filled with absolute apprehension over his inability to decide if he could continue standing there with no ticket in his pocket and a disparate understanding of his own needs and wants, his own loves and hates. People heading toward the gallows were probably more comfortable than he was at that second. Morality was holding onto his neck and

squeezing it. His legs were even acting as if they were being controlled by another. Sometimes they lengthened and sometimes they twitched.

It was their way of dealing with his uncertainty. It wouldn't have taken much for them to have rushed him back upstairs to where the ticket machines were.

But he resisted and despaired that he could do little more than wait for the train, could do little more than be saddened by the thought that while being amoral was making him uncomfortable, it really wasn't all that interesting. As he contemplated his reaction, a hard series of words entered his thoughts: *To be perfect is to be vigilant. It is to see what can harm you and to walk away from it. To be perfect is a never ending struggle to exist, to conform with the heavens.* Immediately the man in the white jacket pushed his headphones to his ears and turned up the volume until his ears hurt.

George was very upset by this apparent criticism of what he was doing. No movement meant that this other person couldn't be bothered to be part of the world he was currently occupying. And to put on his headphones was even a firmer sign of this other person's ignorance. George might have gone one further with what he was feeling by actually vocalizing his dissent, but he just happened to see an expression on the man's face that soothed his anger. Although from the side nothing seemed really wrong with the lines around the man's mouth, the eyes were shut. It reminded George of the expression a child might have just before somebody was going to hit them.

George couldn't help himself. He gave out a loud burst of laughter. It was very sharp and caused those who hadn't been watching him before to look.

"George – what the hell's so funny?" Todd's voice yelled out.

“Nothing, man. Nothing.” George straightened out as he looked steadily at the man who was trying his best not to do anything but ardently ignore everything around him.

George thought about throwing some words at this person, or even going up and tapping him on the shoulder and see what he would do. He was relishing the thought of making this man squeeze his eyelids even tighter.

These enraged opportunities were taken from him when a swirling shriek ran the length of the station. It was severe. The type of haunting noise you would imagine a gruesome monster might emit as it ascends angrily from its underground cavern. Amplified over and over again in the bottomless tunnels in which it lived, making an overly creative mind think about immense shadows coming up from the depths, of teeth and blood pouring out from their own bodies. Causing some to think about how much it would hurt if such a creature could be produced and was in the process of eating them.

Would they even notice it?

However, there was no monster of flesh and blood speaking. It was 8:33 am and the Light Rail Transit or LRT was making its unconscious way toward them. It was completely dumb. The train’s operator had no connection with what he was doing. As the unsettling noise became more complete, it seemed to fill everybody in the station with the need to move. An urge that was very present in the large man in the white jacket.

Even though George was no longer considering all of the viscous thoughts that had been preoccupying him a few moments before, he was still interesting in the figure he had been tormenting. Therefore, as he strolled back to where Alice and Todd were, he first noticed that Todd was still talking to Joe on his cell phone, which was immediately

followed by him seeing the man in the white jacket shuffling about on the floor. First looking left and moving left, then looking right and moving right. It appeared as if he was trying to figure out where he wanted to stand. It gave George the impression that he had forgotten something, or perhaps had misplaced it, and was trying to tell himself that a specific place on the floor was the best place to find it.

This behavior made the smile on George's face turn meaner as it grew into a thick, impervious smirk. It was only when the skinless head of the train erupted from the darkness to George's side that he momentarily forgot about the man. Feeling the gust of air push his shoulder around, Todd moved to the side of George.

"What was the laughing thing about?" Todd asked absently, while studying the sharp light in the windows that were slowing down in front of him.

"Some jerk. I was walking around and some jerk was getting in my way - what a lame-o. Like he couldn't move over. Looks like he got dressed from the Tingle Trunk."

"The what?" Todd asked in a raised voice. Although the LRT was slowing down, there was a confusion of noise building up around them.

"Mr. Dress-Up's Tingle Trunk. The orange box. You know - the box where he got all his clothes from." George wanted to see Todd's reaction to this, but someone's hand was softly squeezing his side. Before he could turn to figure out who was invading his personal space, a familiar voice spoke up softly.

"Hey, George, keep your voice down. The guy you're talking about is just behind us." He was too curious to be cautious, or take any advice, so he turned his head slightly and saw that indeed the guy with the white jacket was hovering close by.

In a very short time this man had moved into a tight cluster of people surrounding George and his friends. However, this person didn't seem to be taking any notice of him at all. His eyes were open and glancing here and there trying to find a place to fix on, but they had no interest in George.

At this small distance, George saw that he had been right before. It was a MOTOR on the side of this man's face.

This pulled at this resentment.

"Yeah, that's him. Mr. Dress Up," he said not trying to lower his voice. Alice was about to tell him off once more, but the train had finally stopped and there was no more time for idleness. Two automatic doors next to them slowly yawned open and a couple of well-dressed man walked out. This often happened at this stop. With the government buildings close by there was always a strong contingent of sharply attired individuals showing up in the mornings and evenings.

There might have been more of them, but the morning was still very young. Maybe in another 15 minutes, the number would have been multiplied by ten or twenty. That didn't matter. It meant that George and his friends could get on right away and not have to be careful where they walked.

Alice was the first on and she immediately placed herself on the first bench available. Todd was trying to do the same, but George slowed him down.

"Hey, Todd, I want to sit by Alice."

"What?"

"Yeah, I want to sit there."

“When did she become your wife?” Todd looked blankly at George’s boldness and couldn’t figure out what his friend was getting at. George knew he had little time to explain this comment or the other one standing in his head before the train would start up.

So he bent toward him and said quickly, “That guy I was telling you about, Mr. Dress Up, he’s a couple of seats over there, in front of us. If I don’t sit on Alice’s side I won’t be able to see him. I don’t want to be staring at the back of this shitty thing.”

When George pulled away from Todd it was plain on his face that he didn’t understand what was going. George shook his head in disgust and pushed himself back into the aisle. As the train lurched forward, he flopped down on the neighboring chair and sternly looked ahead of him. Before Alice or Todd had a chance to ask him what was going on, he made it apparent in his features that he didn’t want to talk to them. Shortly, as he held onto a look of abandonment, George was trying to squeeze the air out of his jacket, while in the next he was scanning the area in front of him and was at least temporarily satisfied with his location.

Without even thinking about it, he guessed that there were less than ten people in the car. And when his eyes had gotten used to the off colored glow of the lights inside the train, he saw that his estimate was pretty good. Up front there was three people, another four in the middle and only them in the back - a total of ten. Then to his surprise someone who had been leaning against the far doors came into view. It was one of the transit security guards. His small eyes were alert, and his uneven mouth was like a slit.

George hadn’t noticed him before. The guard had probably just squeezed onto this car so that it didn’t give those people who didn’t have a ticket a chance to jump off.

Ten became eleven.

For a moment, George began to think about something other than the guard. This caused his head to wane as he looked over at his friends, but he became distracted once more the instant he saw someone moving uncomfortably in their seat, twisting around in their clothes as if they weren't sure what to do. As his eyes focused and recognized it was the back of the guy in the white jacket, George made an effort to concentrate, however, with there being so many handrails and other plastic tubes hanging from the ceiling and coming out of the walls, it was impossible to get a clear look at anybody more than a couple of seats away from him. Nevertheless, George moved his head around so that he could properly see the guy in the white jacket.

George gave up quickly as the train jerked a few times as their car picked up speed and rapidly descended along the metal rails beneath it. And just as it seemed as if the train was about to lurch to the side and fall off its tracks, dim streams of natural light shown through either side of the train.

The world's tone eroded a couple of times as it mixed and folded in with the texture of the tunnel. Those who regularly traveled the LRT expected this harsh spectacle. Right after the Government Station was the Menzies Dudley Bridge. It wasn't a very big bridge, less than 50 feet above the slow movements of the North Saskatchewan River, a river that was shallow and bitterly cold and due to the time of the year, covered in a cast of thick ice.

The meager temperature of the light didn't turn the cabin any brighter. It was still early. There was barely any warmth in the air. Even the small bulbs regularly positioned beside the train tracks seemed to have their light pushed away as the train hurled onward. There was also the fact that the snow from that week had not as yet been

removed from the deck. The train swayed a couple of more times as it settled on the bridge. The previous clamor of confused metal and thoughts seemed to be overcome by the cold. In its place was a low hum, which wasn't that bothersome.

In the absence of a stronger mind, George forgot about the guy in the white jacket as a large grouping of buildings loomed on the opposite hillside grew more obvious. In the grayness of the hour, these solitary blocks of still history could have been the remains of some ancient beast, no longer recognizable as anything of real purpose due to the weight of time and usage: a dissembled skeleton completely cleaved of meat. Below these teeth was a deep impression in the side of the opposing hill. Amongst the mixture of evergreens and deciduous on the other side of the river valley was an opening into which their bodies were hurdling.

If asked, George could have named a few of the bones, described how they could be entered and exited, how it was possible to sit inside of them for hours, months, years and not gain anything by the experience. He could do that. Moreover, he could use a tone often reserved by mourners reading their own gravestones. Talking in dry whispers that didn't go anywhere as they attempted to sum up themselves, but a menacing sound just preceding a jolt caused his head to fall forward.

Immediately, he shifted his weight and looked out the window that was at the front of the LRT. Being in the first car of the train, even though the glass was becoming cloudy, he had an unobstructed view of the outside. There, George could just make out a cloud of blueness coming from the bottom of one of the steel posts growing out of the bridge deck. The picture was becoming larger, though not large enough. For some reason the train was slowing down.

While smoke condensed and began to swirl, the post appeared to be moving as well. George got up and as he stood, the picture in front of him shook violently and became frozen as the floor beneath him stopped. Before he fell back into his seat, George saw to his utter amazement the post sway to the left and fall, taking with it a dark metal line hanging from it.

Excerpt from the paper, Second Paragraph.

Creatures that learn the quickest usually have the highest frequency of survival. And because humans are defined – amongst other characteristics - by both their staggering ability to survive as well as having a form of self-awareness that is unique in the animal kingdom, perhaps these two ideas are interrelated. Perhaps both are the reflection of an underlying capacity and representative biological structure that work simultaneously. Consequently, if it was possible to fashion a pertinent theory that links learning to consciousness, i.e. outlining how consciousness is an end result of a human's continual struggle to survive with the latter eventually leading to the development of the former, then some progress can be made in the investigation of consciousness and thought. And, to this purpose this paper outlines the hypothesis that constrained variability in the firing pattern of a group of discrete neurites in the cerebral hemispheres results in the optimisation of learning. Furthermore, when this basic structure is modified through evolutionary pressures, consciousness was a primary result.

Chapter 3

Body in Motion

A tired man with a red forehead and an unhealthy look in his eyes was perfectly happy keeping his head against the frozen surface of the glass. His mind and body were weak and heavy. They wanted stillness. Such a desire even curbed any interest he had in seeing what had made the train slow down and come to an abrupt stop. Nevertheless, he did listen to the others around him as they got up from their seats and tried as best as they could to figure out what to do without any information.

“Main office, this is Officer Phillips, we have a situation between the Government and University Stations. Repeat, we have a situation. Do you read me?” It was the transit security guard speaking. With everybody supposedly at the far end of the train looking at the second post that had come crashing down on the bridge, it was easy for the lone person sitting by himself to hear exactly what the transit police was saying on his radio.

“Yes, you got it as well. Good. The lights are off, but nobody is hurt in our car. I - we are in car 1016. What do you want me to do?” Evidently there was a lot of things he was supposed to do because he said ‘yes’, and ‘I understand’ more than a half dozen times before hanging up this radio on his jacket.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, I have been in contact – please can I have your attention.” His voice was trying to be serious and capture everybody’s attention, but to the person with his head against the window who only wished for some peace and quiet, it was loud and annoying. Whatever this person’s solemn viewpoint was, the guard did manage to get the far end of the train to quiet down and he spoke immediately.

“I spoke to the head of security for the LRT. As you have seen one of the main cables, one of the main overhead cables, is down. They told me that there must have been some kind of electrical explosion in one of the power supplies, an overload of some kind, and that has caused the towers at both ends of the bridge to collapse. They doubt that it will affect anything else. I was also told we should stay on the train until the problem is solved.”

“How long will that be?” he was politely asked by a voice that was a long way off.

“I cannot answer that question. They are sending their best people right away to fix the problem.” As this was said, the interior lights that had flickered and gone blank right after the car had come to a halt came back on. This had the affect of calming the majority of people and the guard could easily hear the sighs of relief being emitted by some of their sagging faces.

The man by himself heard this and closed his eyes hoping that nothing more would be said. He was very, very tired. So tired, that if it wasn't for all of this sudden activity, he might have been asleep by the time the train reached the University Station. As his head wavered and sunk closer to his lightly moving chest, he heard someone approaching him. He didn't bother to look around. Because he was sitting so close to the front of the train, he only had one pair of seats in front of him, designed just like his; fitting, perhaps one and three-quarters people on either side, and separated by a couple of feet. And in that seat had been a thin, well-dressed man; who when things became noisy, had gotten up to look around. He didn't have to wait long to find out that the footsteps did belong to this other person.

Carefully, the man got back into this chair, but instead of pointing in the same direction, as he had before, the man had repositioned himself and was now facing, if at some distance, the man who still had his head against the window.

In response to this, the man tried to suppress his curiosity and closed his eyes hoping for the sleep. There was a few times in the next couple of minutes that he almost dozed off, but those episodes didn't last long. Every time his mind became less volatile and passed slowly toward stillness, a tiny part of him thought of something that bothered him. By the second or third interruption, he knew that if he was going to sleep it was going to happen when and if his body was ready for it. There was no way he was going to force this wish upon himself.

He didn't like this thought, but he was ready to accept it. And when it appeared that he could let go of the peace he was so eager to get, his weary eyes reopened and stayed open as they took immediate notice of the man in front of him.

When they did, the need to sleep became even less important.

There was a certainty about this man that just didn't fit this environment. He looked too comfortable, too confident and too free from burden. There he was reading and appeared more relaxed than he had a right to be. And the way he held his book was different as well. Thinking about it, the person who was observing this knew that it was common for himself to just hold a book open the best as he could. To him, it was common practice to use one set of fingers to hold down the page he was reading, while using the other to stop the opposing side from getting in the way. There was nothing graceful about the practice. Yet, this person in front of him was being very elegant in this very act.

In wonder, the man pulled his head slightly across the chilled window and left a wide streak. With keen eyes he saw how well the book was being held up by just one hand. The book rested against three fingers: the index, the middle and the ring finger. The thumb and the pinky fingers acted as two tiny braces that kept the book from sliding out of his hand. What's more, the thumb and the pinky finger were eschewed a bit to the margins so that none of the words on the page were obscured. And to further advance the air of sophistication and distinction was how the man was positioned. His legs crossed and the elbow of the reading arm placed lightly on the knee that was turned up. It made him look supremely unaffected by anything.

Page after page, the older elegant man moved through this book, turning each page with the opposite hand, using only the very ends of his finger tips to do so. Watching this was very calming for the other person, very similar to being inside on a very cold day in front of a well-kept fire. There are times when the oddest things can ease the mind when they are done well. The clicking and sliding of the pages faintly sounded like the crackles that would come from the fire as the wood burned away.

The younger man slumped heavily forward and searched the area closest to his feet. This was done to find some evidence of his backpack that he had thrown under the seat. Once found, he hooked it with one of his fingers and brought it up. He pulled it straight and undid the zipper at the top. Devoid of expression, he slid a dutiful hand inside and brought out an object about the size of a piece of paper. But instead of it being white, the right half of the article was black and the left side a strong shade of yellow. Both of these powerful hues swam before his eyes and held at their intersection was a name. The letters were in red, and it spelt out the word Meccano.

For a while, he had forgotten it was inside his backpack. The colorful booklet was discovered by chance when he had an afternoon off last Saturday. He had found it and bought it over at one of the used books stores, the third one up from the Tavern on Whyte Avenue. It was the instructions for a construction set for children, where small silver-plated nuts and bolts were used in the emancipation of any number of creations: boats, bridges or even airplanes. Normally, instructions are supposed to be accompanied by building materials. In this case, due to other people's disregard for sentimental objects, all he had the chance to buy were the instructions. The rest of it was gone, probably lost in somebody's basement or in the bottom of a landfill elsewhere in the bowels of the city.

He went immediately to the copyright page to see when it was written. There was a date; it read 1973. Without being aware of it he smiled. Then his curiosity grew and he started to slowly flip the pages. He did this carefully, almost respectfully, being very mindful not to tear any of the weathered pages. This lasted for a while, and he even caught himself trying to hold the book as if he were the gentleman in front of him. Being that the pages were so large his efforts were clumsy and unbalanced. When he discovered what he was doing, a welt of embarrassment struck him. This caused him to move uncomfortably. And this discomfort passed into his hands, causing the instructions to fold at the sides and fall to the floor.

The noise touched the older man for a second. There was a simple flash of interest from his eyes. Peace returned to them and he quickly went back to reading.

"Excuse me, what are you reading?" the young man asked politely after some time. He hated disturbing the amity that had lasted this long. However, the interest he was feeling was too much for him to ignore.

“Oh, this? This is Victor Hugo’s *Les Miserables*.” To this, the man who had asked this question quickly lifted his head from the glass and attempted to wipe it without making a fool of himself. He had tried to keep it upright while he read, but the temptation to rest it on the glass had pulled him back toward it. The coolness of the glass reduced the pain in his skin. However, by now he had moved beyond physical discomfort. And besides, his agony wasn’t that strong.

“*Les Miserables*. Thanks.”

“Have you read it yourself?” the man asked in a very unassuming manner, taking his eyes slowly from the book and looking at the person in front of him intently.

“No, never have,” he answered in a careful voice. He didn’t want to say anything that might incriminate the amount of knowledge he didn’t have, especially when it came to literature. Even bringing up the topic of what the book was about could have lead, he believed, to some embarrassing moments. Besides, he hadn’t even read Tom Sawyer.

“Ah . . .” he started weakly, then stopped.

“Were you going to say something?” The older person looked back at him patiently. To this, the young man cleared his throat a couple of times and seemed to be wondering what to do next.

“Sorry to disturb you again, but that red sweater of yours.”

“Yes, the sweater is red. What about it?”

“Did you buy it from Real-Good Foods?” It was a very strange thing to be asking under these circumstances. He knew it was, but asked anyway. It was something he couldn’t help: his mind was prone to launching itself at things it didn’t understand. Like a fisherman that had more bait than tackle.

In truth, it wasn't the book that had caught this person's attention. It was the sweater all along.

"Why do you ask?" Up to this point, the man with the book had spent very little effort answering the questions. It wasn't that he was being impolite, nothing like that at all. It was just that his manner was so easy, that he didn't have to do much in order to get this opinion across. Yet, with the mention of the sweater and its bright color, and perhaps even the location where it was purchased, the man seemed to become slightly different.

"Well, I work at a Real-Good Foods - the last one that was built. It's at the other end of this track. I just came from there. A week ago we were selling that very same sweater. We had a lot of them. There was a coupon in one of our flyers. Buy \$ 200 dollars worth of groceries or more and get the sweater free."

"Really?" he answered, not sounding all that thrilled to hear these words.

The other person took this response to mean that he had said something wrong, and tried to apologize for whatever insult he might have given.

"Sorry about that. I'm tired. I have been up since yesterday. My eyes aren't working right." The sincerity of his voice must have been enough to convince the older man that there was no harm meant in what was said.

"That's all right. It's not that I have anything against Real-Good Foods . . . but I was given this by my older daughter, Pauline. I received it three days ago as a birthday gift."

This remark really made the other person feel stupid. And before he could think up a phrase to offset the emotion he brought up, some way to take back the words he had said to a complete stranger about something that had nothing to do with him, the older man spoke up in earnest. And as he did this, he got up and began to take his jacket off.

“What brand does Real-Good Foods sell?”

“Ah. . . you don’t have to check, I’m sure your sweater is from Ralph Lauren or Hugo Boss. It looks very nice.”

There was a distant flicker of annoyance on the man’s face. Telling the other person he had to be given an answer right away. To this, he said quietly the brand name was ‘Simply Wonderful’. The older man bent as he placed his folded jacket on cushion in front of him. Next, he started to unbutton the front of the sweater. This lasted a while and it caused the man in front of him to feel dreadful.

At last it was done and the sweater came off. Using the same fine fingers that had been busy a short while before on the novel by Victor Hugo, the older man shook the sweat once, then again. With this, he turned to the back of the neck of the sweater and looked rigidly at the label that was sewn there.

“You said ‘Simply Wonderful’”

“Yes, ‘Simply Wonderful’” he reported reluctantly.

“This says ‘Sears’.”

“Good. Sears is a very good brand. I’m very glad that your daughter purchased it from Sears.” In response, the older man put back on his sweater and his jacket without ever looking directly at the other person while doing so. He gave the impression of someone at home in his bedroom getting ready for a busy day, straightening everything out in front of a very large mirror with nobody else around.

Then, as he sat down, the older man did something that the other person didn’t expect him to do. Considering what he had just done, and the way in which this person reacted to it, the man with the still cold forehead thought he might even have gotten up to

the other seat so he could face the other direction. Due to this calculated opinion, the younger man was very surprised to see the older man put his book away into a slender brief case that was waiting for it on the floor, a reaction that grew larger as the older man placed his face on his shoulders, as would a housewife preparing a dinner room table with a smart vase of flowers.

“My name is Dr. Hanes. I am with the English Department. And you are?”

“Me . . . I’m Charlie.” He was about to qualify himself to this older person by saying he was with the grocery department, but luckily didn’t.

“Well, considering we might be here for a while, I guess we should go by first names. Hello, Charlie, my name is Donald.” Since Charlie was feeling still a little awkward about their previous dialogue, he deliberately waited for Dr. Hanes to push the conversation forward – that is if he wanted to.

“I can’t help but notice that your forehead is very red. Are you going to the University Hospital for some treatment?”

“Treatment? For this,” he said while putting his finger right against his head. He applied enough pressure to leave a white spot that looked brilliant against the painful hue of the rest of the skin. While the mark lasted, the professor looked at it without judging its odd appearance. The contrast was very strong. It immediately reminded Dr. Hanes of the letters of a stop sign: white against red.

“No, last week I should have gone to a hospital but I didn’t. It’s there to stay for a while. I have some ointment for it, and when it gets really bad I take Ibuprofen. It makes it sting less. But that’s nothing in comparison to my arm. I could hardly move it until yesterday.”

Charlie thought about what he had just said and hoped it didn't sound as ridiculous as it sounded – what was he thinking, bringing up a skin burn in December on a train that was stuck over a frozen river?

“How did you do that? Did you go on a trip?”

“A trip? Hah, I wish - nothing like that. I went over to . . .”

“Go on. If you can ask me about my sweater, I can ask you about your sunburn.”

This wasn't asked coldly. The professor was genuinely interested. Anyway, Dr. Hanes had read, reread his book five times already, and presently was reviewing a part of it that he was going to be discussing during his 550 English Literature class. And even if he didn't get to the end of the section he had promised himself to cover, it was highly unlikely that he was going to get to his class on time.

“Have you ever been to the Pyramids? The ones in the city?”

“The Mutart Gardens? Yes many times.”

“Well last week, I think it was Monday, I went over there with the idea that I needed some sun. That's why I went to the Tropical Pyramid. Of the four pyramids it's the one with the most amount of foliage. If you increase the amount of foliage you of course decrease the ambient levels of short wave radiation. But I forgot about ultraviolet in the 350 – 400 nm range. Glass doesn't stop that, stupid me. Yet . . .”

“So what does that have to do with your arm not being able to move?”

“Oh, yeah, I didn't make the connection. Not surprising. Anyway, I go to that place quite a bit. The truth is I think I have, as well as everybody else in the city, a case of Seasonal Effective Disorder. Not enough light. The reduction of which can dramatically affect a person's mood, I think it's related to 5-HT levels.”

“5-HT?”

“Just a brain chemical”

“A brain chemical? Is it important?” Dr. Hanes asked expectantly.

“They all are, anyway, because it bothers me a lot, I go to the Pyramids a couple of times a week.” There was a pause as if he dropped something, “Oh - that didn’t make sense. I wasn’t implying that there is more light in the pyramids. Just that it feels that there is more light.”

“A better environment to enjoy it?”

“Exactly. I should have said that. Anyway, Dr. Hanes,” Charlie continued, forgetting to call this man Donald, “I have a seasonal pass - a lot cheaper than Hawaii. And because of this, I get to know a lot of the people down there. On Monday I met up with Rick, one of the maintenance guys. He does his own thing, doesn’t listen too much to his supervisor. You probably know the type. So there I was talking to Rick and he tells me that they are doing upgrades on the Tropical Pyramid. Meaning it would be shut down to the general public for a couple of hours. I joked to Rick that it would be a great opportunity to go sun tanning. Rick looked at me and said go ahead. I went in and found a nice spot, close to the tree with all the marks on it, near the water fall. And if you’re going to do it right you can’t do it with your top on, so off it went. Problem was that this made me feel so relaxed, I fell asleep. You of course have to limit your exposure to UV-B radiation. And since I forgot about it passing through glass, I am this color. It think it’s responsible for a wide range of potentially damaging human and animal health effects, primarily related to the skin, eyes, and immune system. I was asleep for an hour and a half. It probably would have been much longer if Rick hadn’t come back to say hello to me.”

Charlie always felt a certain amount of relief when he told somebody about the stupid things he often did, always after doing so, but never before. This wasn't done because he sought pity or wanted to be popular. It was his way of dealing with how different he often felt. His belief was that if he told somebody about one of his strange experiments on himself, they would react to it unfavorably. So that in the end Charlie would feel embarrassed, and through this, not do it again.

He waited for the professor to respond, but before he did, Donald's eyes swept up from Charlie and were focusing on the aisle. Charlie noticed this and made an attempt to see who it was. Before he had turned his head about, somebody was speaking at him in a tone that caused him to forget his feelings of remorse.

"Do you know there's a fine for putting your feet on the chairs?" said the transit guard, as he stood unwavering, eyebrows down and his mouth in a deliberate frown.

"My feet?"

To this, Charlie looked at the end of his legs and saw that were on the cushion in front of him.

Before he gave himself a second to think about what he should have said he blurted out, "Yeah, I know there's a fine." His tone didn't please the officer. The indifference to his words was enough to push one of the officer's thick eyebrows up and make him look coldly at the top of Charlie's crimson forehead.

"Did you know that the fine is 70 dollars?" Evidently, this person had only one thing in mind. This became perfectly clear to Charlie and Dr. Hanes the moment the security guard took a rectangular pad of paper off his belt and pulled a pen from his jacket.

“You’re going to give me a ticket?” Charlie said, thinking that there was something terribly wrong with what was happening. This caused him to imagine himself outside the car looking in. Placed high up in the air looking at a uniformed idiot giving his other self a ticket, carried out with the utmost of propriety while the train they were on was not going anywhere and the sensibilities that controlled the situation were holding onto their heads laughing at the absurdity of it all.

“By-laws are by-laws. Even if we are not moving, you are on a publicly owned LRT. The rules don’t change. I even asked you to move your legs and you wouldn’t.” He said, sounding as if he was being generous.

“No. What you said was . . .”

“I’m not going to argue. . .”

“No, you brought it up, so I’m going to explain myself. Do you have something you have to do?” The security guard stayed silent, even though he was already very annoyed.

“Well, you asked me if I knew there was a fine for having my feet on the seat in front of me. I answered that I did. You didn’t ask me to remove my feet, did you? Moreover, I am not really flouting the rule that you are trying to impose on me by having or keeping my feet on the bench. As you can see, my feet are not in my shoes. My socks are clean and no dirt is being transferred to the seating surface. Consequently, I am not undermining the reason why the rule is there in the first place. Am I?”

“What is your name?” The guard added after a pause.

“What is your name?” Charlie replied vehemently.

“That doesn’t matter, Sir. I need your name to put it on the ticket I am writing for you. What is your name?”

Charlie wasn't really surprised that he hadn't talked his way out of getting a ticket. He looked over at the professor in front of him and saw this person shrug his shoulders. Then, before studying the security guard anymore, Charlie looked out of the window and allowed a few of his thoughts to race through his mind. This resulted in the guard clearing his throat. Charlie heard this and responded by scratching his head with one hand while bringing the other one out. Peacefully, the fingernail of the right hand drew a horizontal line and then a vertical on the frost covering the glass where his head hadn't been.

Both of the lines were around two feet in length. Following this, most of the ice was flicked off the end of the nail and another line was drawn. Where the vertical and horizontal lines crossed, a curved line was started. It continued in a diagonal direction over the untouched crystals until it stretched to the other corner where no lines existed. After this was done, he drew a straight line underneath it.

When he finished there was a flattened 'S' standing on top of a line which was set at about 45 degrees to the ground, paralyzed between the angled company of the horizontal and vertical lines. The line and the S started close to the origin of this picture and finished close to the plateau at the end.

It was only when Charlie finished his work that he paid any attention to the rest of the car. This was when he saw how his causal impudence was so strongly affecting the ill-manner of the guard. Just as he thought he heard a sound crept out of the guard's taciturn mouth, another noise jumped in front of it. It was a wave of electrical static. The radio on his shoulder was awake.

“Hello, yes this is Phillips,” the security guard said in a smooth professional voice, giving it an extra edge of charisma. Of course, this amused Charlie, and he wanted to study the face of the officer while he spoke, but he didn’t have the opportunity.

Phillips had lost all interest in Charlie and was moving back toward the front of the cabin. This wasn’t far away, yet in the way he was acting, it appeared that the guard thought he was in some secretive stronghold. His eyes moved with proud menace.

“Yes, I will, yes I understand, Sir. Of course I do. There is nothing else that can be done.” Charlie made out these words and could tell that somebody important was on the other end. Then, just like that, Charlie felt oddly happy as he remembered where he was and what was going on.

It was already 9:15 am by his watch. The sun had been out for a short while. He immediately forgot about Phillips and his ridiculous behavior and shuffled over closer to the window. Even when he was scribbling his picture on the window he didn’t notice how bright it was outside. Most of the window was covered in ice, so it was next to impossible to see what was going on with any precision. All the powers of the sun could do was to make the back of the ice covering the windows glow warmly. Even the large area on the glass that was previously cleared by his head had iced over. Charlie didn’t think this was right so he reacted by finding an area where the ice was thinnest, and wasn’t part of his picture and rubbed it vigorously with his sleeve. It would have been easier if he had put his head back on the glass, but his fingers were more interested in biting into the ice.

“Do you see anything?” asked Dr. Hanes, who had been occupying himself by listening intently to the guard’s conversation.

“Not much right now. I hadn’t noticed this before, but the Highlevel (a taller bridge, parallel to the Menzies Dudley, east of their location by 100 feet) is very close to us. I always thought it was much further away.”

He rubbed harder and cleared a space almost as big as his head. Before he inserted his eyes into this space, Charlie expected to see nothing. He just wanted to get a better look at the river valley at this time of the morning. To him it should have looked especially serene considering the fresh snow that had fallen the night before.

Once he did look the picture was dramatically different. The valley was still covered in snow thereby allowing some of its tranquility to shine, however, there were hundreds of tiny black marks littering the landscape. Each of them was a person, and each of them was very still. Charlie blinked a few times wondering why so many people were in the area. He was especially surprised by the number of people lingering on the upper deck of the bridge beside them. Maybe, he thought, there was a parade or even an accident, but this didn’t make any sense to him. For all of the faces he could see from his vantage point were not directed inward, they were pointed outward, right at the train he was looking out of.

Then as he smiled to himself secretively, Charlie looked down on the ground to see if a similar phenomenon was happening. His suspicion was confirmed as he viewed a number of walking paths that meandered below the LRT Bridge. Here and there, were small aggregates of people looking up. Other groups were so large that their cautious breath turned into small pillars of steam, which combined and escaped into the air. Because he was looking out the west side of the train, the early morning sun was at these people’s backs. This caused long dense shadows to fall over the sleeping snow.

The depth of this image made it appear that all of these people had scraped the tranquility away from the ground and exposed a thick vein of dirt.

“Well, anything interesting?” asked Dr. Hanes. The crust of ice on his window had not been touched.

“It looks like people have nothing else to do than look at a broken down train. There are hundreds of people looking at us this very moment. Look. There. And there. On the bridge and on the ground.”

“Hundreds? Really.” Charlie believed that the professor would be getting to his feet at any moment to see it for himself, but he didn’t. When Charlie thought about this supposedly odd reaction, he nodded to himself and realized that this wasn’t a strange thing to do at all. That intelligent people who have experienced many things don’t have to have everything shown to them to know what can and cannot be happening.

Looking up at the ceiling so that he wasn’t staring too long at the professor, Charlie noticed the security guard was still talking. Continuing to clench and unclench his jaw, continuing to twist and untwist his face. Charlie sighed and then remembered the ticket he was about to get. This time the thought didn’t upset him as much. Moreover, when he looked back at the picture standing silently on the window, he experienced a sort of finality. The type that comes to you when you know that you can’t stop something from happening, even if you wished it wouldn’t occur. And when you really concentrate on the event, you come to the realization that it is something you had hoped for all along.

Filled by these strong emotions, his left hand went over to his left pocket and unzipped it without hesitation. Inside there was a large leather wallet that had a sizeable and sturdy zipper attached to it.

When he had first bought this wallet a couple of years ago the zipper had been much smaller. But with all of his trips on the LRT the accumulated change had worn the zipper out. It would have been easier for him if he had simply bought a pass. Yet, Charlie never did. And he probably didn't even know why.

Anyway, none of this was a concern to Charlie as he withdrew the wallet and turned it around as he palmed it over to the right hand.

"Are you going shopping, Charlie?" he was asked in a lighthearted way by the person in front of him.

"Shopping? I could. I think I saw a nice little store under the second to last seat. I'll just go on in there and buy breakfast or perhaps find a crossword puzzle book. But I won't." He ended, looking very pleased with his imaginary decision, still holding the wallet up, flat against his hand.

"And why not?"

"I'm not very good at crosswords. I like the word jumbles better." And precisely as he gave this answer, and the professor answered back appreciatively by nodding his head, the security guard put away his radio and began to straighten out his official looking jacket.

Charlie was eager to get on with what he was resolved to do, so he didn't wait for the guard to do anything else before he started, "Excuse me, Mr. Phillips." He started still sitting, "are you quite finished?"

Instead of the guard acting annoyed, he was far more sullen than Charlie wanted him to be. Nevertheless, Charlie wasn't one to turn around and do something different the second it appeared his plan wasn't going the way he wanted it to.

“If you are finished, do you have a moment to give me that ticket you had promised me before?”

Mr. Phillips’ sternness hadn’t come back to him. He stood on shaking feet. His eyes moved around in his head as they tried to follow all the entangled thoughts that were crashing through his head. “Your ticket?” he said in surprise.

“Yes, my ticket. The one you were going to give to me – having my feet on the cushion in front of me. That ticket.” Being able to digest this comment, the guard finally did manage to pull himself out of his shallow fugue, and stood more up right. And before he could take his first step, a black object was thrown at him. It was jangled in the air as it flipped into his open hand.

Charlie’s wallet wasn’t that big, nor was it thrown with that great a force. Consequently, when the somewhat astonished Mr. Phillips intercepted it, it did little damage. All it did was produce a minor thud and a weak cough that came from the coins bouncing inside its leather belly. Nevertheless, Mr. Phillips’ reaction was closer to what is expected from an abused dog who is about to be petted by a stranger.

“Nice catch. If you are wondering, you will find all my personal information in there: my name, my age and my home address. I know from experience that you guards don’t except payments, but my visa is there as well.”

The guard almost appeared to be glad that he was given something to do. He showed little reaction, except for the movement of his hands to Charlie’s blatant rudeness. Clearly, its sharpness was not enough to change the way he was feeling.

As he watched the security guard slowly open the wallet to find the information he needed, Charlie got up.

“Hold it there, young man. There is something on your leg.” There was a small booklet of papers hanging precariously off the back of Charlie’ left thigh. To this, Charlie allowed his head and upper body to slump forward, but before he could make a proper investigation of it, the object had unstuck itself and crashed loudly to the floor.

Standing there, Charlie spread his legs some more to see what it was. When his eyes and the rest of him recognized it, he brought his head and body back into alignment, and showed no more interest in it.

“Is it one of those film flyers? People always leave those things hanging about?” Dr. Hanes asked trying to get some sort of answer.

“No. It’s nothing like that.” Charlie replied abstractly, looking for the entire world as if there was a very large hole underneath him and it was only by chance that he hadn’t fallen through it. Yet, there was no relief in his eyes.

“Well is it somebody’s homework?”

“No. It’s mine. It’s not homework.”

“Oh. Does it have anything to do with your work at the Real-Good Foods then?”

“The Real-Good Foods? Hah, that’s a good one . . Donald. This – is very far from that place, very far. Very far from anyplace I am likely to go.”

“Well what is it then?” During the brief time he had gotten to know this person from Real-Good Foods, a young man who liked to sun bath in the Mutart Conservatory, and who liked to give surly security guards a hard time, Donald had admired the honest way Charlie answered questions. Way back when he first came to the university, Dr. Donald Hanes couldn’t have imagined how tedious his job would have become. Perhaps he wasn’t very idealistic back then, but he did expect there to be some rewards of the spiritual nature when

he took his post. Finding people like himself who wanted to open themselves to the world and glue it back together into a more positive and understandable way. Though he never came out and said it to any of his peers, over the last five or more years, he had undergone a private transformation. Not only did he expect, and perhaps know that most the students he saw hated to be in his class, he felt the same way.

It was like being at some murderous assembly line, hearing all those voices asking for one of two types of answers: what do I have to do to get into such and such a faculty or what do I have to do to just pass your damned course? Occasionally, when a braver and more inventive soul showed up, the student did demonstrate promise and asked questions that weren't leading to somewhere other than his classroom. But, sadly, those voices were very young, and even if the person had an incredible grasp of how to compose a sentence, or fill a piece of paper with the structure of a good argument, there were hardly any unmasked feelings in what was written or said.

Yet, here was this Charlie person.

One would have to be very dull not to know that this person had crumpled opinions written on dirty cement. The sort of filthy person you curse the moment you see them because they have sat down in front of you on the sidewalk. Yet, in truth, they weren't aware of anything else other than their moral load, and how hard the ground was. Here was somebody who was trying incredibly hard to remember what other people cared about. During his life time, Dr. Hanes had seen people like Charlie before. Having that type of person around wasn't that great an enigma. What made Charlie stand out was his age. Many things had hit this person: large, inescapable things which, somehow, didn't belong to him. They seemed to be launched at him from a place that should not have existed.

Dr. Hanes found these thoughts appealing. Having the chance to speak to somebody who appeared to be close to the age of his students, at least the older ones, who didn't just sit there trying to figure out what was the best thing to say next was extremely refreshing. Dr. Hanes hoped that Charlie would continue to show him how little he cared about self-gratification and ignorance.

Therefore, in the short time he and Charlie had innocently chatted, Dr. Hanes already had built up some assumptions and expectations. Having Charlie stand there not owing up to what was on the floor, ground loudly against those primitive beliefs.

"It's something I wrote . . . no - have been writing for a long time. It started before my tenure at Real-Good Foods." This answer seemed to take a lot out of him.

"What is it?"

"Nothing special. Nothing of interest to anybody, other than myself." The words came out of him slowly, each more sorrowful than the last.

"I can't believe that. Anything that is written is important if you have written it with a purpose."

"Sure, I think I have heard that before. Well," he started as he dropped his voice even lower. Once filled and thrown further into remorse, Charlie continued, "I'm getting very tired. As I told you before, I have been up since . . . sometime yesterday - today, I think. I'm going to go over there and get some rest. Would that be okay with you Mr. Phillips," he asked the guard, "if I stretch out? You know, put my head on one cushion and put my legs on the other? You have all my stuff. You can charge me as many times as you want."

The guard acknowledged all of this by saying ‘whatever’ a few times and grimly looked out the window that he had been standing in front of for some time. The ticket he was working on hung from his fingers.

Charlie turned and started toward the seats he had in mind. That was when he saw a large man in a white jacket sitting just behind him.

This was a surprise. All this time, he thought this end of the train was empty except for him and Dr. Hanes. He didn’t include the security guard. The air was so quite, barely untouched. During these thoughts, the man in the white jacket must have been aware of some reaction, because he too reacted in a way that had a hint of shock within it, not that the man in the white jacket didn’t expect to see the face of Charlie, but to have it looking directly at him made his eyes blink. Standing there caught by a feeling he didn’t understand, Charlie felt uncomfortable and saw the expression reflected in this other person as well. It might have been even greater for the person sitting down because the book he was reading almost fell out of his hands and the headphones on his head moved back over the top of his brow.

Charlie’s own awareness needed to be pushed back, so he looked away. As a result, Charlie looked steadily at the front of the train, to a place where the other person’s eyes would have been if Charlie body wasn’t blocking them. Charlie noticed how all of this matched the position of the security guard. Thoughtfully, he glanced back and the association in his mind seemed to grow stronger and present itself as a conclusion: this person is worried about something involving the security guard. He couldn’t but believe this thought the second he saw this person put his hand absent-mindedly into his pocket.

When he did, Charlie immediately took a liking to this man in the white jacket.

“Hey, Mr. Phillips,” he said in confidence.

The officer reacted right away. Each of his eyes seemed to be as white as the clumps of snow clinging to the iron rails outside the door.

“How much is it for not having a ticket?” The man in the white jacket trembled when he realized what was being said.

“135 dollars.”

“Really. Quite the enterprise you have for yourself here.”

Being that he was standing so close to the bench where the man in the white jacket was, the guard could only see Charlie and the sides of the person sitting down behind him. There was no way for him to see Charlie’s hand crawl inside his own pocket and bring out a piece of tattered paper. It was a bus ticket and it was still good for another 20 minutes. It stayed in the mouth of his hand for only a second, and then was flung toward the other man’s knees. By chance, it landed there.

“Then you will be really happy to know that I don’t even have a ticket.” The guard was neither upset nor moved by his words. He only blinked a couple of times and went back to writing.

“Then do you mind?” asked another voice.

“Mind?” Charlie had forgotten about the professor in his rush to confront the guard once more.

“Then do you mind if I look at it?”

“What, the paper?” Charlie answered, thinking there was nothing more to say than what had already been given on the subject of papers on the floor and what to do with him.

“The one you wrote; that paper. Could I have a look at it?”

“If you want to, but only if – but only if you . . .” he then paused.

“I’m listening, only if I do what?”

“It’s not a ‘do what’ sort of thing. It’s more of a ‘have what’ sort of thing.” He cleared his throat and settled his eyes in a place that he thought nobody could see them.

“I wanted to know if you had a red pen. You know - the type used to correct papers and the like. Do you have a red pen?”

“There is usually one in my brief case. Why do I need one?”

“When you start reading, you will know why. I just wanted to save you the trouble of not being prepared to find it as quickly as you can. As I was saying,” he started again after a pause that hung over him like a frost, “I’m going to rest. Have fun.” He glanced momentarily at the man in the white jacket and continued down the aisle.

Just as before, there was no denying the look of interest in this person’s face. But this time, Charlie had a very strong feeling that there was a quality about him that was very familiar as well. Not just a small feeling that is expected to go away the moment you have something better in your mind to do. The impression was more domineering than that. Though he was glad to find a place to rest, Charlie didn’t find sleep as quickly as he wanted to. The image of a man in the white jacket was patiently hampering his peace, and it didn’t go away until it was impossible for Charlie to resist sleeping any longer.

Ironically, the man in the white jacket was dying to turn around and see where Charlie was. And as another impulse swept this mind, a ringing sound entered his head.

“Hello,” he answered, keeping his voice low. The MOTOR’s ability to pick up and transmit signals was as amazing as ever.

“Yes, how are you doing, Allan? Where are you?”

“Oh, hello, Sir. I . . . sorry, I’m late. There is an electrical problem with the LRT. I will be delayed.”

“Why didn’t you call?” came a voice, somewhat surprised.

“I should have.”

“Yes, you should have.”

“Sorry – I was distracted by . . .”

“How are you felling?” This was a common thing for the person on the other line to be asking. But, it was too clinical in its aspect to convey any real concern.

“I think I’ll be okay. There is a guard on the train. He seems to understand what to do.”

“Nothing else to say, then, Allan?”

“No. I don’t think so. How are the experiments proceeding?”

“Just fine. If there isn’t anything else, I’ll be calling back in an hour.” Allan looked down and saw that it was already 9:30 am.

After the voice vanished from deep inside his head, Allan found himself once more pressing his lips together and fighting the urge to turn around. Unable to contain himself any longer, he gave over to this need, and without being too obvious spotted Charlie’s prone figure. Seeing this, but unaware that Charlie was struggling to stay asleep, the man in the white jacket felt relieved and put his headphones back on. Just as his mind turned more restful, his eyes looked down and saw the ticket sitting by his foot in a tight ball of numbers. Allan took a deep practiced breathe and held in perfect stasis until his nerves forced him to bring out his hand so he could attempt to retrieve it.

When his fingers were close to grabbing the ticket, his foot, in a fit of consciousness, slide up and over it, so as to cover the ticket. Allan was stunned to realize how relaxed it made him feel. His large shoulders moved backup and undid a knot of tension in his neck. Before the feeling could trickle down his back, a voice popped into his head: *Perfection can be part of anybody who is willing to grow, willing to learn. An erudite person, a person who is willing to suffer the pains of growth, will eventually be perfect. They will –*

The rest of the sentence was cut short by the man in the white jacket when he turned the volume of his headphones up three more levels.

Excerpt from the paper, Seventh Paragraph

The act of learning can change the way we view both the world and ourselves, because it permits us to be affected by the environment and as a result, understand the rules that may govern it. By this, we become better able to obtain our needs from our surroundings. Sometimes learning and responding to stimuli are treated as similar, but in this section a distinction between them will be strictly held. Learning will be defined as the production of a new status quo. While those who merely respond, are following hard-wired reaction patterns hence, maintaining the status, even in those cases where a regulated response changes, it is not a new response if it occurs within its range of outputs. As long as the behavioural changes that are due to an interaction are a result of a new kind of association between stimulus and response, the response can be qualified as learning.