

The Madwoman Who Called on My Wedding Day

by Con Chapman

She was calling, she said,
from the bowels of a library
on a college campus where she
hid each night and slept among the
stacks. She'd been living that way
for years, moving on when she was
discovered to someplace else
where she would blend in
with the scenery and pass
undetected among the young.



I heard her out. She'd reached my name
after running through the directory,
alphabetically. Apparently no one in the
a's or b's or any of the c's before me
had done so. It was a strange tale she
told, how she'd been cheated of her inheritance—

money her father had left her—
by a trustee, distant and cold,
far off in California. She said she had no money to
live on, or even fight with, because of him.

I called the fellow, a reasonable sort.
He thanked me for my concern and
the attention I'd given his ward,
but he said she was off her drugs,
the police had been alerted.
They knew she'd come East and
were looking for her but they hadn't
found her yet. There were too many
libraries for her to hide in, in this
City of Books, a place such as Borges
imagined where for every



rational line there were rows of senseless cacophony, a library that was the universe, the librarians in suicidal despair.

I rolled over in bed to answer the phone and heard her voice again, more desperate than before. They were closing in, couldn't I help? She asked. What had the trustee said? She wouldn't say where she was—perhaps I'd turn her in.

I don't recall exactly what I told her other than to say I couldn't help her that day; another woman —the one who would become my wife— was waiting for me in a church. She was not the sort who'd tolerate a groom who'd dare to show up late to his wedding and hers, and so I demurred. You'll have to try the next name on the list, I said.



But you're the only one who's talked to me yet, she said, and those words rang in my head like overtones of plainsong, Gregorian chant echoing in the chancel up to the apse, as I repeated my vows, facing the light streaming through a stained-glass window thinking of her disordered mind, which kept her running as I prepared to settle down.

