

Corrective Rejection

by J. Mykell Collinz

I'm trying to make love to her but she wants to talk.

"It's a coronal mass ejection with a huge magnetic field in direct opposition to Earth's polarity allowing charged particles to penetrate our protective shield. High energy neutrons, also ejected from the sun, are being absorbed into our water, increasing the concentration of heavy hydrogen isotopes, deuterium and tritium. Our planet is evolving into a gigantic hydrogen bomb, some experts believe."

"What are you gonna do?" I reply: "Why do you even want to know about it? If it's gonna happen it's gonna happen."

She gives me a silent stare.

Struggling to control my exasperation, I say: "Are we going to sit around all evening worrying about things over which we have no control? Where's the romance?"

"How can you be thinking about romance?" she wants to know.

"How can you not be thinking about it?" I wonder aloud.

"We're here for a purpose," she says: "We can't just make love all the time. We need to do something, become somebody."

Yeah! I get what she means. Like I ain't somebody already. I'm just a big cock with no brains. I guess she's done with me for now. Yet I love her just the same. Don't ask me why. No rational explanation. It is what it is. I live for her smile. And I'm ready whenever she calls.

Meanwhile, standing at the kitchen sink, washing the breakfast

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dishes, trying to think about words and writing instead of heartache, I look out the window and notice a greatly increased number of birds and squirrels around the feeders in the backyard. They're feeling the economic slump like everyone else, along with the freezing temperatures. My last 50 lb bag of mixed bird seeds is almost empty and the local store has gone out of business, again. Which could explain why all the other feeders in the neighborhood are empty.

The big bore hemi V8 engine in my 1958, faded pea green Dodge pickup truck will not start after sitting for a prolonged period in cold weather until I warm the oil with an electric dip stick. I measure the time required by cleaning the spark plugs, the distributor cap, the rotor, the battery cables, and the ground connection. When I'm finished, it cranks smoothly and starts immediately with a loud roar on the first try.

While I'm out, I'll do a full shopping trip, gather supplies before the really bad weather arrives. Side streets aren't bad yet, but with record snows predicted, it's guaranteed to get worse.

The rundown condition of the remaining houses on the block contrasts sharply with my childhood memories of a thriving neighborhood.

"Why am I still living here?"

I rarely think about it anymore. Only when I'm forced to go out, or catch the local news on TV: increasingly less for both. Thank God for the Internet, you can be living anywhere and get the same results. Millions of people around the world, together in real time, all the time: it's humbling, for me; but, yes, it's also inspiring.

I stop at the stop sign when I reach the main street and I notice someone in a hooded parka approaching on my left. There's a bitter

wind howling outside so the hood is not surprising. Nonetheless, I reach under the seat for my hand gun. It's a woman. She opens her parka for a quick instant to flash a well dressed trim body. She's either crazy or she's a drug addict, I conclude. Curious to know which, I tell her to get in.

Once inside, she pulls a gun and points it at my heart. I raise my gun to her head and tell her to get out. She hesitates. I see desperation in her eyes and I'm afraid she'll shoot first but I can't pull the trigger.

I start breathing again as she slides out the door. In my rear view mirror, I see her getting into a waiting car with a man in the driver's seat. They speed away in the opposite direction. Highwaymen and women are feeling the economic crunch, too, obviously, for them to be out in this weather in this neighborhood on these deserted streets and to pick on my old pickup truck: which runs fine once it's started, but looks like it belongs in a junk yard.

The network of high arching sheds at the farmer's market is packed with shoppers and venders, despite the weather. I know what I want, and I know where to find it, so I'll be in and out. Some of my earliest memories are of being here with my mother while she shopped. The overhead sheds have been rebuilt and modernized since then but the crowded walkways, the food vendors, and the atmosphere are almost identical. I remember being terrified when she put me down while selecting vegetables from a produce stand. I threw a fit and she smacked in the mouth. I've never totally gotten over it, apparently, since I can't forget the feeling. The ghost of that experience haunts me every time I return to the market.

