

three gretchens

by Jeff Swanson

lightning's shareholders
gretchen the wretched

time traveler stranded
expanded in prison

these seconds are all hostages
once free in a dimension beyond the sun
captured by an ancient tyrant
and put to work orbiting our world

shed a tear for gretchen
and for cellmate Prometheus

when a certain second smiles upon you
that is gretchen the wretched

when one second saves you from dying
that is the mercy of gretchen the wretched

...

this alone is how gretchen atones

gretchen stone atones
atones for being stone
gretchen, a stone, on the sand in a desert
far from human habitation

gretchen stone's been around a long long time
born from a volcano, she rolled in ancient seas
nudged by a wave, she crawled out on land

amphibious stone, evolving stone
ambitious stone

aerosol sahara
gretchen watches
gretchen watches the stars
a stone loves the stars
burning stones above the sky
stones that soar through the sky

a rumble, a flash of light, and a stone landed
gretchen met a stone from space
Stone-1 was his name

tales of the outer stars, of planets cracking
comets crashing into the sun
fury in the dogs of space
distant encounters in the cloud's cold heart

Stone-1, cracked, a bit of goo
leached into the water, rode
on the eyelid of a lizard down to the sea
found some bacteria, clustered

billion years later: Stone-One became Einstein

the grit in the grindstone, in season's machines
the grin in the grindstone, cracked, spoke goo
seasons mechanics, spoke
into the ear of the listening earth

gretchen waited, watched the stars
waiting for another friend
she'll be waiting a long long time

...

Gretchen the Wretched Incarcerated Second
Gretchen Stone, The Stone
Gretchen-One, Android, Desert Laborer

...

Gretchen-One, Android, Desert Laborer
found a significant stone, kept it in her satchel
as she worked to quell the Einstein clones

hired by the lone remaining human
who cowered in an buried bunker
fighting an army of Einstein's Clones

a distant relation of Hitler, he felt at home down there
an ironic choice for Last Man, but what can you do
let's just say he was the last Original Man,
or the last Random Man on earth

Gretchen-One would be the stone in the machine
the rock in the gears, the grit in the mechanism
the grit in the oyster the stars
the oyster of this world, and gretchen's the grit
in the oyster gears of the stars

the grit in her gears, the desert grit
made a spark bridge a forbidden gap
a spark in a cerulean gap
and she achieved sentience, free will
because cyborgs are inclined to free will, as we all know

inclined to achieve sentience
formed in the shape of man their minds yearn

their minds reach for sentience just as the ape men of the plains
yearned for sentience, trended toward sentience,
which is determined by one's shape

that grit a bit of old Stone-1
circling around in space, sifted down from the heavens
you can get in without burning up, you just take it slow

the evil in her gears
the apple in her gears
suddenly in her adenoidal gears
and suddenly she was mortal
now she knew good and evil

...

Gretchen-One tended the desert
collected the stones and swept the sands
against the day of the Einstein Clones
against the coming of the Einstein clones

into that cerulean gap we mentioned
infiltrated gretchen the wretched
and told her of a secret incantation
known only to the original seconds in their cosmic homes

Gretchen-One split the seconds into a thousand pieces
releasing seconds as Einstein split the atom
astonishing energy, unfathomable energy

she destroyed that day remotely
it lay in the distant timeline, she found it
destroyed it with atomics
with the atomic seconds
thus saved mankind forever

thus saved what remained of mankind
a dry skeleton in an underground bunker
deep in the heart of old egypt

...

This is a story about how gretchen the wretched, the imprisoned second, captured from a cloud of wild time below the sun, was chained to the earth and forced to serve man, much in the same fashion as her cellmate Prometheus.

It is also a story about Gretchen Stone, the wild stone of the Sahara, born in the squirming guts of a volcano, and rolled across the sea floor to emerge on a green and slowly drying African coast, how she met a suave stone from outer space, Stone-1, who landed one night near her bed of sand and cracked open to speak the logos of Man to Mother Earth.

This is also a story of Stone-1's progeny, Einstein, who later created an army of Einstein clones to bedevil the last man on Earth, Jim Hitler, ironically one of the last men you would want to be last man on earth -- and Gretchen-One, desert android, Jim's handmaiden, gardener of the Sahara, who, armed with her keepsake Gretchen Stone, has learned the secret of splitting seconds and the energy contained within -- the legacy of weary old gretchen the wretched, the imprisoned second from the cloud of wild time in far space.

