

# 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

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

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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

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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.

