

Model Home

by Matt Rowan

In the living room of a model home, Mr. Jorgensen lived. He was a mannequin. He spent his days in display windows. He spent his commutes displaying the latest model cars. He spent his nights in his model home displaying its various uses, like how one would watch television with the arrangement of furniture there, so that it all looked nice. Life went on like this. Mr. Jorgensen modelling repeatedly in predictable fashion, never caring about the monotony of his predictable existence.

He knew he didn't want change to occur, not that the idea of change and his not wanting it had ever truly crossed his mind. Things can be known without actual, sit-me-down, honest-to-goodness thought, and this was one of those things.

He remembered trips to the beach during which he would be propped up, feet buried in the sand, body facing the water, mind imagining distant shores. All the while, he displayed his very comfortable summer wear. The sandals, the unbuttoned Hawaiian shirt, the yellow shorts. He stood next to an ornamental red and round Weber Grill facsimile.

So for Mr. Jorgensen it was unfortunate the day he observed the man in the flight suit stumbling down the block, yelling, "is anyone there?"

The man in the flight suit was not a mannequin. He moved too easily.

He saw Mr. Jorgensen in the window of his home, where Mr. Jorgensen stood inert. "You, in the home there. YOU!"

The man in the flight suit brazenly opened Mr. Jorgensen's front door and marched inside, telling Mr. Jorgensen "you just gotta help me." You weren't invited into my home, Mr. Jorgensen thought.

"Another mannequin!" the man in the flight suit dropped to his knees, pulling at his hair and then punching the carpet with his fists. Mr. Jorgensen thought this was a pitiful display the man put on. He decided not to help the pitiful man.

The man in the flight suit for some reason chose to stay in Mr. Jorgensen's home. Mr. Jorgensen soon realized he could do nothing to rid himself of the man, who was no longer wearing the flight suit but instead Mr. Jorgensen's clothes. He'd just raided his closet. Mr. Jorgensen was not happy. Why couldn't he have found Mr. Henry, the mannequin down the street, who was even closer to his approximate size?

The man had squeezed into Mr. Jorgensen's favorite suit jacket and vest ensemble. Damn that he had some taste in clothing.

He'd also begun to talk to Mr. Jorgensen. "I'll start by telling you my name. At least, I think it's my name. Major Nelson Demille, U.S. Air Force. I crash landed somewhere east of here, a flat plateau of space that afforded me a relatively soft landing. At least, for a crash landing, right? Never very soft."

You ought to get out of my civilian's clothes, Major, Mr. Jorgensen thought.

"Anyway, I've been wandering for what must be miles, radio dead, compass broken, absolutely cut off from contact with command. I'm without a tether, and I worry I've walked into some kind of social experiment or worse."

GET OUT OF MY HOUSE! Mr. Jorgensen thought. He thought this with such force that he tipped over.

"Weird," Major Demille said, but helped Mr. Jorgensen back to a standing position. "There you are, much better this way, right?"

Much better, Mr. Jorgensen thought.

He didn't hate Major Demille, really.

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In the weeks that followed Major Demille became preoccupied with watching the sky for passing aircraft. He'd also begun to notice that someone, somewhere, was moving Mr. Jorgensen around. He was never able to witness this person (or people or disembodied force) in the act of doing so. But Mr. Jorgensen was constantly in new places around the house, often with a different outfit on. Major Demille noticed too that food would come in and go out. The major ate what he liked when he saw it, but the foods he didn't touch were

gone sooner or later, too. Onions. He remembered smelling pungent onion smells around Mr. Jorgensen.

He noticed a car in the garage -- the keys of which he couldn't find and the engine defied, somehow, hotwiring -- would disappear at the beginning of the day and reappear at the end, during which time

Mr. Jorgensen went missing and reappeared, as well. It would be one thing if the major were living in a world of the rules he'd previously understood and abided by, but he wasn't living in that world. And though this one was curious -- and somewhat frightening too -- he denied his fear as much as he could, knowing this instinct was not of much help, danger being evidently minimal. He focused on the little he could control, the little he could do to rediscover his fellow living and animate beings.

"Where do you go every day?" Major Demille asked Mr. Jorgensen.

"I go to work. You should try it! HA!" Mr. Jorgensen imagined himself smirking.

"I'm beginning to think if there's any way for me to get out of this place, you somehow hold the key. Don't you?" But Major Demille had already tried to follow Mr. Jorgensen. It never worked. He always had to sleep at some point, and during which time, no matter when that was, Mr. Jorgensen always managed to move himself or make himself scarce. Major Demille's memory was beginning to get clouded. He found he'd forgotten huge spans of the day. His waking hours were becoming increasingly fragmented and difficult to make sense of, which he began to attribute to his extremely unusual circumstances. How long could anyone maintain their grasp on sanity?

Mr. Jorgensen, meanwhile, felt changes of his own. Where once he was always inert, and true, never really noticed how his physical person was able to move into new positions and model different things, he'd begun to experience palpably the onset of physical abilities. For example, his fingers were capable of drumming against things, individually and apart from the rest of each hand.

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Then Mr. Jorgensen found Major Demille sitting on his couch, and he felt certain the time was right to demonstrate his newly developed physical abilities. He drummed his fingers on the couch, but Major Demille didn't stir, was not roused or made interested by Mr. Jorgensen's fingers. He just held his head in his hands, facing the floor. He'd gotten so sad, so morose. Mr. Jorgensen was hopeful he could help. He must, because he must repay the major for all he'd done.

Mr. Jorgensen realized he was now on his back porch. He must have carried himself there while he'd been distractedly thinking about his, well, yes, his friend. His new friend; his only friend? Major Demille.

He turned around. He caught a glimpse of his foot moving in front of the rest of him. But it can't be? Mr. Jorgensen thought. "But it is," he said aloud. "HOLY CRAP!" Mr. Jorgensen yelled, perceiving the echo of his voice where there'd never been one before.

Mr. Jorgensen raced to the living room. He was here. He was among the living. He felt air rush to his lungs. And there he saw Major Demille, staring at him, stonily, vacantly. There was nothing behind his eyes.

"No, no, no, Major Demille," Mr. Jorgensen said. He knew it was too late. Major Demille was a statue. A Major Demille statue. Tears rained down Mr. Jorgensen's cheeks. He didn't like the feeling, but he knew that it was a feeling he must feel. He just knew it was, intuitively.

"I'm going to get you help, Major. You wait." He crammed Major Demille in the backseat. "You wait and see," he said, his little car now speeding westward toward the purple and brilliant of the setting sun.

