

Eric Seiley

Burning Bridges As We Go

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### The Politics of Eggrolls

Betty and I always meet at Wang Chi's Dragon of the Black Pearl Teahouse downtown. Not because our first date was there, but because in the small town of Capitola by the Sea, the Black Pearl is the only place that sells eggrolls – pineapple and avocado eggrolls to be precise, with a side of duck sauce.

Inside Wang Chi's, I hit the bar, order the eggrolls, and sip on a pilsner while Betty discretely excuses herself to the ladies room to make hotel reservations for the afternoon. Very clandestine and decadent. Even downright exciting the younger we feel.

When she returns, I ask, "Which illicit brothel have you chosen this week, my little honey pot?"

She gives me an annoyed look, which sadly is starting to happen regularly now because she doesn't find me very amusing anymore.

"The Grand Astor," Betty replies. "Did you think to order me a gin and tonic?"

"Sorry, I didn't know if you were drinking this week. Last week you said you were starting your marathon training and would be cutting back. I thought it'd be more considerate to ask first."

“Of course. Heaven forbid you make a decision where I’m concerned. I’ll just order for myself,” she said flagging down the bartender. He brought her drink just as the waitress pulled up moments later to drop off the eggrolls in a wax paper sack to go.

“The Grand Astor Hotel, huh?” I said changing the subject. “Very upscale, what with their doormen, bellhops, concierge, and plush lobby. A little extravagant, but I suppose it’s good to be unpredictable. Go where we’re not expected. Griffin will certainly love it for obvious reasons.”

“I was choosing alphabetically. The Astor was next in line.”

“Oh. Well, maybe we should re-think that system. We don’t want anyone sensing a pattern or catching on to what we’re up to. Maybe a little more imagination is called for under the circumstances.”

“If anyone is paying attention,” Betty fired back, sipping her drink, “which, well let’s face it, why would they? I doubt they’d even remotely believe what we are actually up to. They’d just think we’re screwing. Which we aren’t, for obvious reasons.”

“Ouch! Too mean.”

Before Betty, I honestly didn’t pay attention to such details. Now I do.

The uniformed doorman at the Grand Astor obligingly opened the door for us as we stepped off the sidewalk and turned to go in. He was quick, but not so fast I didn’t catch him admiring Betty, running his eyes up and down her body before he noticed I noticed and dropped his gaze to a more discreet level. And I certainly had no difficulty translating his, “*Man, would I like a piece of that!*” look. I admit I was both jealous and pleased. Pleased because Betty was with me. Jealous cause, even though she was, she wasn’t. Not anymore. It didn’t help that Betty’s looks had begun to blossom again and I was starting to feel, shall we say, the old desire *grow* anew. She had been a real beauty back in the day and our passion had once been palpable. Of course, that was before the

disagreements had taken over - who should pay for the room each week, the disparity in income, why we were even having an affair if neither was willing to leave their respective spouses, and who only wanted sex while the other an incessant need to feel wanted. All those paranoid arguments that break the passion between two lovers long before their actual relationship is called quits. And when it's over you realize the true consequence of being so vulnerable to another person -- all that passion has to go somewhere. For the rejected, bitterness takes over till all you know is you want to hurt her for hurting you. But that was all a very long time ago. And we both moved on with our lives. That is till Griffin found us and brought us back together six months ago.

"That's a pretty dress you're wearing," I say walking through the lobby, "The doorman certainly noticed." It was a new dress - a little powder blue number with empire waist that looked very sexy and accentuated her figure nicely.

"Thank you," Betty replied.

I, for my part, was still partial to my beloved white Cubana shirts over beige khakis with black Chuck Taylor high tops. A suggestion from Albert Einstein who claimed wearing the same ensemble every day eliminated wasting brain power when deciding what clothes to put on each morning. Seven identical white shirts, seven identical beige khakis, and seven pairs of Chuck Taylors left little choice to the imagination. Check. No energy wasted. Brain power saved.

"If you'd like, I can pay for the room this week," I say. "I don't mind. Several articles I wrote on the migratory patterns of *Teratornis during the Paleolithic era* were published in the Journal of Economic History and I earned a hefty royalty from the publisher. The fees should last me a few months at least."

"That would be helpful," Betty replied. "I'm still working things out financially."

She sounded normal, but I got the impression she was still mad over our rekindled argument from the previous week about gender and sexual equality. We'd come out of our "*time heals all wounds*" phase and quickly fell into old patterns again which was causing a few ripples during our weekly sessions. And I'll be honest, putting a damper on my hopes to rekindle a little of the old passion too.

When I checked us in, the hospitality clerk – Millicent according to her name tag, who obviously identified as Christian based on the large gold cross she wore– slid the room key across the counter with what looked to be thinly disguised contempt. She looked Betty up and down as the doorman had, but with a decidedly different opinion as to what she was seeing.

"Here you go, sir," Millie said over brightly - obviously suspecting Betty and I are having an affair and trying not to let her disapproval show. "You and the, uh, *missus* can reach the elevator there to your right." Here the corners of her mouth keep twitching down while she tried to smile. "If you'd like, I can call for a bellman to assist you. Though I see you didn't bring any, umm, *baggage* for your stay." Here she gives Betty a look.

"Thank you," I say, "We can find our way from here."

"Well, y'all have a nice afternoon then."

In the elevator, as the doors closed, Betty stared daggers at Millie. "I should've scratched that insipid little clerk's eyes out for smirking like that."

"Betty, you know that wouldn't have changed her opinion. She's too young and doesn't really understand such things. Plus, as you've already mentioned, we do have the distinct appearance of being a middle aged couple checking into a hotel off season in the middle of the afternoon. What else was she supposed to think? Especially with you

looking so lovely and refreshed this week. I know I've entertained a few carnal thoughts once or twice lately."

"Don't try to charm me. I'm still mad at you. And stop defending that stupid little clerk with her giant, cross-laden chip on her shoulder. Could her necklace be any bigger? Yes, we get it, sweetie. You're a so-called Christian."

"Got it. No compliments. Christian judgment bad."

"And don't patronize me either. You sound idiotic."

"No, ma'am. Wouldn't want that."

Once we get to the room, Griffin is already waiting for us inside reclining on the sofa. It's been six months of weekly meetings with her and she always knows which hotel and room we'll be in. She wasn't a mind reader as far as I could tell, but she always knew. And waited for us. All seven feet of her with leathery wingspan, scaly skin, and that odd, child-like face transposed over grossly muscled body.

"Here are your eggrolls," I say placing the bag of food next to her on the couch.

"Eggrolls. Always eggrolls," Betty growls, still bothered and spoiling for a fight. "I don't know why she can't ever try something new. Like the pork dumplings or the almond chicken or whatever."

Betty walks over to the mini bar and pours herself a gin and tonic. One of many I have a feeling she will be drinking that afternoon. A habit she claims "relaxes" her, but generally has the opposite effect. "But here you go, eggrolls in duck sauce every week. Rain or shine."

"I think she likes what she likes. Why question that?" I mention. I was beginning to worry over the careless way she was antagonizing Griffin so early in our meet up.

Especially since past experiences revealed Griffin had a short temper and an intolerance for sarcasm.

“Because it’s all she ever eats. How does she know what she likes and doesn’t if she only ever eats the same order every time? There’s so much more to offer.”

“What does that matter? It’s her choice. It’s not like it changes anything in the grand scheme of what we’re doing here. Right?”

“How do you know whether it matters or not. We’ve only ever done it the one way.”

“Oh for heaven’s sake, Betty, you’d argue with a stump.”

“And you’d kiss that stump’s ass.”

When the alligator came flying through the window and landed on the rug, snapping its powerful jaws at us, we knew Griffin had become annoyed with our bickering. Last week she materialized a boa constrictor and threatened to let it swallow us and digest us alive for a thousand days.

“Shit, shit, shit,” I yelled grabbing Betty and jumping up on the bed while she laughed and Griffin scowled. “Sorry buddy. So Sorry. Really! We’re good. No more arguing! I promise. Right Betty?”

“Speak for yourself, you annoying fuck.”

“Betty! Let’s not upset Griffin further.”

“No, let’s not. Wouldn’t want that.” Then to Griffin, “Sorry for arguing Griffin.”

The alligator waddled into the bathroom letting Griffin close the door behind it. She returned to the couch and her egg rolls. Dipping one after the other into the duck sauce, cramming them into her gaping mouth, and crunching down in obvious gastric delight.

“Umm, ugg, ohh, ahhhh!” Griffin moaned sounding like a woman in the throes of true ecstasy.

Betty and I had seen this before so simply sat on the edge of the bed waiting for her to finish eating. Experience told us nothing more would happen till she finished her snack.

“You ever try these?” Griffin asked holding up her last eggroll.

“Sure, of course. They’re good.” I reply.

“Well, to answer your question, Betty, I have tried other foods before. You two aren’t my first couple experience here on earth. Or my first time. But, these. Oh, there’s something so good about pineapple and avocado egg rolls that hit my taste buds perfectly.”

“So you have taste buds,” Betty asks.

“Of course. Odd question.”

“Not really. We don’t really know much about you. Your history, physiology, epistemology. You haven’t revealed much about yourself in our time together and there aren’t any textbooks dealing practically on the subject. Lots of conjecture revolving around fantasy, but no specific details. I mean you’re basically a living genie, angel, and gargoyle all rolled into one. And yet, in all this time, we barely know more than what we see. You aren’t exactly common. Or a font of information. Even though, according to you, your kind has been interacting with our kind since the beginning of time.”

“True. Don’t take this the wrong way, but your kind, as you call it, aren’t the easiest to deal with. And when we do make the effort, as I am now, you either confabulate the point or outright do the opposite of what is best. Something in your wiring makes you contrary. So forgive me if I’m not very interested in sharing who I am with you. To me all you are is research. A job to do. No different than if I went to an earth library and

checked out a book to read. You wouldn't explain who you were to a book you were reading now would you? Or consider that book a friend."

"No. But that doesn't mean I would act so smugly patronizing."

"Am I? Since when is the truth patronizing to an intelligent being? If I didn't have this job to do, you wouldn't be here. Case and point. And it's not like you aren't being well compensated for your service. I know many a human who would jump at the chance to reverse age and receive the benefits of a fifty-two year redo on their life from the fountain of youth. All for the low price of one meeting per week for one year to discuss your prior relationship with each other. How old are you now? 50 years old?"

"I'm 42 as far as I can tell." Betty replied.

"And how old were you when we started this project six months ago?"

"72."

"And how old will you be when we finish? If I let you live that long that is?"

"20."

"Not bad for a few sessions revolving around your human interaction, right? And the price of a few eggrolls."

"Being younger doesn't solve our problems like you think. In fact, reverse aging imposes all kinds of different challenges. My family no longer recognizes me because I don't look like their grandmother or great-grandmother anymore. My husband is dead and all my friends old or deceased. You can't get to know anyone for too long yet because, if this continues, I'll reverse age to even younger years and it'll bring up too many questions and cause too many problems. Not to mention, I still have to feed, clothe and shelter myself. All those financial issues come back again, you know. As do menstruation and reproduction concerns. And then there's the legal difficulties. I mean



I can't even use my birth certificate or driver's license because the dates and photos no longer match. Let alone put to use my advanced degrees. I was a well-respected physician once. Now I'm a waitress on the night shift at a local diner. Do you think anyone would believe who I was then today? Especially since I look 40 and not 72? What happens when I reach 20? I'll have to start all over."

"And there it is," Griffin growled. "Always the same human contradiction of ingratitude. Give a gift and you find a way to be contrary and complain. Twist the positive into negative results. The essential esoteric duality of humankind. It always happens with each couple project I take on. Human disaffection. Human selfishness. It's so upsetting. Just once I'd like meet a couple who thank me for all I've done."

"Well, thank you very much," Betty replies performing a little curtsy. The effect enhancing her sarcasm.

"Is that what we'll be discussing today, then?" I interrupt, trying to divert attention from the increasing tension between Betty and Griffin. "Reverse aging and the esoteric nature of mankind?"

"No. That's a side distraction. A slight annoyance. Come then, let's get started." Griffin says wiping her mouth with a napkin and tossing the empty food bag across the room into the trash.

Betty and I move to the two chairs facing the couch and settle. Griffin leans forward, puts down a sand clock, flips it over to start the timer, and then waves her clawed hand over the coffee table making an apple appear. The sand clock will release sand for the next hour till the top is empty and the bottom filled. Then our session will end and we'll be free to leave, having experienced another biological year dropped from our age.

"Today," Griffin advises, "I would like to discuss theology of a more original nature. Specifically religious metaphor versus literal interpretation. Behold the apple."

Betty leans in and picks up the apple, turning it over in her hands. "It's an apple. Of the red delicious variety I believe."

"Yes! You see. You see! Curiosity. No hesitation. Good Betty. Just like Eve. She had a great deal of curiosity too. And very little restraint." Betty looked annoyed and put the apple back on the table. "I was just looking. I assure you I have no immediate plans to partake of your apple. Even though I now suffer the curse of Eve again."

"Well Eve didn't plan to eat the apple either. Of course, she wasn't smart like you. But, here's the question I pose. Did Eve eat a literal apple before offering the same physical fruit to Adam in defiance of God's order? Or was the apple more a metaphor representing something else entirely."

"How do you mean?" I asked not really following. Unlike Betty, I hadn't been raised in any conventional Judeo-Christian home nor had I attended church or been educated theologically at any school or university. I was raised agnostic and adopted humanism as my primary belief system early on while studying psychology and anthropology at the University of North Dakota. Which continued through most of my life as a tenured professor of Humanities and Cultural Studies at the University of Santa Cruz before retiring and moving to Half Moon Bay where I spent most of my remaining days writing pithy little cultural articles for various websites like "10 Ways to Understand Your Partner" and such. What Betty called my "click bait sellout phase."

"Do you know the story of Adam and Eve?" Griffin asked interrupting my memory flashback.

"I know the general story, I suppose," I mention. "Basically God told Adam and Eve not to eat the apple, but they did anyway. Which is why they got into trouble with God, who punished them by casting them out of the Garden of Eden. But I always took that

as a childhood Jewish fable intended to teach children to obey their parents even when they don't know the reason why. Is that not what it means?"

"No. Not even in the least. Betty, do you know the story?" Griffin asks.

"I believe so. Centrally in the Garden of Eden, God created a great tree, but He forbade anyone from eating its fruit. Adam and Eve lived in the garden and were given access to everything, but told the tree was off limits due to its special properties. They were never to eat from that particular tree. Which they did anyway and were cast out because of it."

"What was that particular tree?"

"If I recall it was the tree God imbued with all His knowledge concerning good and evil."

"Crude, but sure. And why that particular tree? That particular fruit? Do you know?"

I felt in the dark. None of it made any sense to me. So while Betty pondered Griffin's question, I asked, "Can I read the bible story first so I can catch up?"

"Why not," Griffin replied, "Don't all hotel rooms in North America come with a bible thanks to the Gideon Society?"

"Yes, I believe they do," I realized. I walked over to the end table, opened the top drawer and, sure enough, a crisp, new Gideon Bible was waiting there.

"Bring it over and read it to us please," Griffin suggested. "You'll find the story in Genesis one, chapter three.

I opened the bible and read:

### **The Fall**

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" 2 And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that when evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

"What do you make of that, my little humans? Was God specifically referring to a literal apple from a literal apple tree? Or was the apple a religious metaphor representing something far more insidious?" Griffin asked.

"Metaphor representing what exactly?" I asked, "The text I just read was pretty specific that the apple was the object and eating it imparted wisdom. But when you ate, you died apparently."

"Did it then? Are you sure?" Griffin asked.

Betty took a drink from her refilled gin and tonic before replying, "Well, God obviously intended Adam and Eve to eat the apple otherwise he really didn't understand his creation. I mean why include it in the Garden, then alert them to its presence in such dramatic fashion, and then insist they avoid it? Maybe His intention was to punish Adam and Eve all along for their pre-determined disobedience by setting them up."

"That sounds a bit cynical," I mentioned to Betty.

“No. Not in consideration to how God often operates in the bible. We’ve talked about this once before. The bible is a book written by men for men and is hugely misogynistic. Just look at how the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene are depicted. The original Madonna and the Whore. The classic male trope every woman is saddled with unfairly from birth till the end of their days. Men always blame women for their troubles.”

“Do we have to go back to that argument again?” I suggested, “It didn’t come off very well last time.” Griffin had taken exception and threatened to have specific appendages removed from our bodies.

“Right, cause heaven help us if Griffin doesn’t like it when I disagree with her. Or you have to deal with conflict because you don’t have sufficient balls to stand up for what you know is true unless you’re hiding behind your typewriter. Am I right?”

“Hey, easy there, Betty. You’re getting worked up over what has, up to this point, been a discussion. Maybe you should slow down on the gin and tonic. No need to antagonize if you don’t have to. Okay?” I plead.

“Like I give a fuck.”

“You used to.”

“And you used to be a man.”

Griffin interrupted, “Yes, another interesting point, Betty, for sure. But let’s not go backwards just yet. Or devolve into tirade. Let’s stay with the apple. Literal or metaphor?”

“I say literal,” I eagerly conjecture. “The bible spells out pretty clearly that it was an apple tree, that the tree had purpose, and the rules surrounding it. Namely that eating the fruit of the tree, the apple, would bring punishment if they did what was forbidden and broke the rules.”

“When has the bible ever been literal?” Betty retorted, “The apple tree must be a metaphor otherwise it doesn’t make sense.”

“Representing what?” Griffin asks.

“God’s need to be right. The imbalance of power when man violates God’s rules. A veritable ‘do as I say, not as I do’ trope of confusion for us to puzzle over and God to punish for. Who knows? Though I admit I don’t know to what purpose. Or even why such a thing as good and evil had to be included in the garden in the first place if God only wanted man to be good.”

“And just what is evil? And what is good?” Griffin asks.

“Good is that which puts good in the world. Evil destroys that good.”

“And you Roger? Griffin asks, “Your definition?”

“By human standards, I would say good is decency in our attitudes, behavior and acts which embolden humanity. Love, Equality, Care and Decency. Evil detracts. Hate, Jealousy, Envy. Inequality and Ignorance.”

“You two are being a little broad this week considering your personal history. Thinking in such generic terms,” Griffin continued. “I have an opinion on the matter that should clarify.”

Betty smirked. “Of course you do. So now we get to the real reason we sit through these sessions.”

“Easy,” I whisper.

Griffin smiled, “You’re a smart one, Betty. I like your cynicism. It suits you.”

“You were positing a theory,” I suggest.

“Yes. The apple is religious metaphor for the human orgasm. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is God’s metaphoric explanation for sexual intercourse that leads to procreation. The ability to create life. In this case, between a man and a woman.”

“The apple is sex?” I ask.

“No the apple is the symbol for orgasm,” Griffin explained, “as in the juicy, sweet fruit of the tree. Or simply put, the result of sexual stimulation growing till excitation turns to release. The apple of the tree. The tree represents sexual intercourse. Individually and as a couple.”

“So why is that good or bad in God’s mind?”

“Because if Adam and Eve engaged in orgasm through sexual intercourse, the likelihood of impregnation would be all but assured. The creation of life. And, as anyone who has sat through high school sex education class knows, unprotected sex between teenagers can lead to pregnancy and early parenthood. Adam and Eve, as far as God was concerned, were teenagers not yet ready for parenthood. Or knowing the secret to creation.”

“Well, that’s a new one on me,” Betty laughed heading back to the mini bar to pour herself another drink. “My lady parts are an apple for teenagers to avoid.”

“Betty, have you not wondered why sexual politics dominate so much of your species attention?” Griffin asked, “The constant wrestling over who controls whom? Who saves who? Man wanting one thing while women acquiesce in order to get something else? I know you have Betty. You and Roger lived it. The carnality. The lust. The betrayal during the affair after he impregnated you and you had your abortion.”

“Abortion?” I asked. “What abortion?”

“Ah, Roger,” Griffin sympathized, “Did you not know that was why Betty finally broke off her affair with you in the end? And refused to see or speak to you after?”

“Betty?”

“This isn’t the time for that Roger,” Betty said. “I’m sorry you found out this way, but that was a very long time ago and it’s far too late in the game to bring that subject back into the light of day. Over a half a century has passed. Ancient history as far as I’m concerned.”

“It doesn’t feel like history to me right now,” I replied, “It feels like brand new information.”

“Ironically,” Griffin replied, “Such events are a recurring theme throughout human history between couples. The desires. The contradictions. The lies. And it all starts with the metaphoric apple. The attraction to a woman by a man. Betty, do you not realize the power a woman has over man in how she expresses her sexuality? You said it yourself -- the Madonna-Whore concept. That originated with Eve.”

“Oh, I call foul on that one!” Betty laughed sardonically, “WHAT power has a woman ever held, in all the history of the world, that wasn’t summarily taken by force the minute some man has the desire to? Has it not escaped your attention that even you, Griffin, appear in male form down here on earth though you claim you are a female of your species? Ask yourself why.”

“This IS the female form of my kind, thank you very much!”

She was definitely pushing Griffin, but to what end I didn’t know. I was still reeling from the time bomb I once sired a child and that child had been aborted.

“Betty, the gift God granted to all women was to be eternally desired by man. To gain union from what was given. Her to be the head of household and hold that union



sacred. Put into proper use, a man will worship a woman; give her love and affection for all her days. Protect her and care for her. That's his purpose. Her power over him is to guide and hold their union sacred. But if a woman becomes prideful and vain, as most human women often do, there will be inequality. If she applies her sexuality improperly, there will be imbalance. And if she abuses her power, she sows discord among men causing men to become a scourge to her. Did not Roger try to hurt you after you broke it off with him and never explained why?"

"I never tried to harm her physically or otherwise!" I exclaimed. "I just wrote a letter expressing my feelings of betrayal."

"In which you threatened to expose her affair to her husband, her children, her friends and neighbors, her church, and to the nuns who ran the hospital she was employed at. Did I forget anyone?"

"I was upset."

"And she and her family uprooted and had to move away as a result."

"I'm sorry, Roger," Betty said turning to me, "I honestly thought I was doing the right thing for both of us back then. It was a terrible decision I had to make, but I knew it was mine to make and I didn't want to burden you."

I knew her better than that. "You may say that now, but I knew you then, Betty. You didn't want to face me with your decision. Nothing more. I would've wanted the child, sure. But I would also have carried that burden with you if you had let me."

"I didn't want you to."

"Why?"

"Betty," Griffin interrupted, "You destroyed the consequences of your own carnal lust at a time when you would were a full grown adult. How do you think Adam and Eve

would've dealt with the same situation. Especially since, at that time, they were still children emotionally and barely teenagers physically for the most part. Such situations have always been determined by how a woman applies her sexuality from the very beginning and, therefore, is a woman's responsibility."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because a man's emotional and physical capacities were designed to be simple. He was designed to be a protector of the family, not the "head of the household."

Remember it was Eve who reasoned why to eat the apple from the tree, not Adam. And Eve who, having decided to do so, influenced Adam. Eve would've carried the child that resulted. And been the one to make the decisions regarding that child. Adam was the provider, as his role was intended to be. The conclusion being a woman's power determines what good or evil will be put out into the world. Whether applied honorably or destructively in the form of a child. A huge, sacred responsibility. Sadly, history tells us most women tend to be attracted to their darker, negative impulses in this matter and allow themselves to be subjugated."

Betty and I looked at each other. Her in anger, I in alarm. I could see the red rising in her face from the perceived insult and, like the previous week, could tell she expected me to align myself with her.

"Maybe we can end the discussion here," I suggest, "and pick it up next week. This has been a fairly demanding session for us all."

"Look at it this way," Griffin continued ignoring me. "I know a little something about this because I have been studying the power of the apple among humans for some time. Not to mention, I am descended from the angel referred to in the Garden of Eden. It is part of my lineage my ancestors passed down in which God asked my tribe to watch over yours. But my earliest ancestor in the garden realized the effect this would have

on her own generations. We would be subjugated to Adam and Eve as servants for eternity. Which didn't sit well with her. So, she orchestrated the truth to be revealed which set into motion God's wrath. We were cursed as a result and having been trying to restore the balance ever since."

"Restore what balance?" I asked."

Betty laughed. "She wants to put the genie back in the bottle."

"Yes, Betty," Griffin replied, In so many words. And it has been a challenge, let me tell you. You humans are obsessed with carnal pleasure and slow to the upkeep of your proper relationships. God's anger hasn't relented, only not toward you. Toward my generations. And here we are still trying to re-balance your kind so we can resume our proper place in the heavens."

"So you want Roger and I to be, what?!" Betty chirped. "Like Adam and Eve?"

"No. Adam and Eve were basically children living in the garden. Not ready to understand adult concepts or adult relationships. Oh God had plans for them to eventually understand and populate the world at a later date when they grew up. And for us to watch over them and their growing family as they did. But only after they were instructed in the secrets of the tree of knowledge properly and God judged them mature enough to handle the responsibility of the apple. God was a bit of a control freak in those days you see. Your basic, benevolent, helicopter parent. To protect Adam and Eve and preserve in their innocence till they were ready to understand the physical and emotional responsibilities of sexual intercourse and procreation. They weren't ready for that then. But you, their descendants, should be."

"I'm starting to get some kind of a picture here" Betty whispered, "of just exactly who and what the real problem is."

Griffin ignored her and continued, "It is my responsibility, as part of my tribe, to continue the restoration project and achieve the proper balance between human men and women that begun all those years ago in the garden."

"That's what YOU say," Betty exclaimed, "I think I'm on to you."

"Easy Betty," I warned, "Don't get too far ahead of this. We haven't heard the end. And we don't want Griffin too upset. She can still be dangerous."

"Certainly. We wouldn't want that," Betty smirked. I gave Betty a look before turning to Griffin.

"Go ahead, Griff, continue. I'm all ears."

Griffin gave Betty a look I couldn't interpret. "There is a reason I choose you two. But you aren't the first couple I've chosen. I've had several, shall we say, efforts. Unfortunately not all of them turned out to be as I had hoped. I told both of you I had previous experience with humans and this wasn't my first time on earth."

"So, you want us to have a child together, don't you!" Betty confirmed in a stunning leap of logic. "That's why we are reverse aging and you've brought Roger and I back together again."

"Yes," Griffin replied.

"Why? Is our child supposed to be special in some way?"

"Each couple I chose has potential to re-balance human relationships to their proper interaction with God's benevolence through their child."

"Wait," I say, "I'm still a little lost? We're *supposed* to have a child together?" The look Betty and Griffin gave me made me feel like an idiot.

"I think," Betty replied, "if I miss my guess, each child Griffin orchestrates from a couple she chooses is supposed to bring balance back into the world and right the relationships between man and woman as God originally intended."

"Yes! Exactly," Griffin exclaimed. "I knew you were clever! And the right choice!"

"And yet she hasn't succeeded? Can you tell us why?"

"I suppose it wouldn't hurt to tell you. I've only been responsible for the last two centuries when I came of proper age," Griffin explained, "but in that time, I chose the couples who sired Jane Austen, Florence Nightingale, and Dolly Parton to name a few. All successes. Along with Marie Curie, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Amelia Earhart."

"Okay. So who were the poor choices?"

"Sadly, Nelly Bly was one. And the whole Kardashian clan was not what I had intended when I paired a famous jock and a debutante cheerleader. I thought I would get the female version of the *Kennedy's* from those two, not a gaggle of women whose only claim to fame has been the men they slept with. Hell their father understood more and look what he did to himself! Very frustrating!" And I about lost my lunch with the whole Elizabeth Holmes, Theranos debacle! I had hoped she would end up like Sigmund Freud. He was also confused with that whole "*tell me about your mother*" dream stuff, but his daughter, Anna, certainly made things better."

"Are you hearing this?" Betty asked staring at me, trying to see if I was following what Griffin was saying.

"Let him finish," I say, "Let him get to the point and be done."

"Well, I sorta am finished," Griffin said, "Now you know why I brought you two back together. I see the sand clock is about to run out, so let me give you a head's up. The next six months will focus on you two becoming parents. The kind of parents whose

progeny will impact the world positively. With my guidance and support. After that, you'll have to live the best versions of yourself that you can."

"Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle," I said looking from Griffin to Betty and back seeing if she caught what Griffin had just said. "Did you hear what she just said."

"I did. I figured it out ten minutes ago. Where have you been?"

"Okay, so why the pretense?" I asked Griffin. "Why this whole charade of bringing us in for 'human research' while granting us the fountain of youth again? Why not just come out and say what you wanted from the beginning."

"Because I know humans. And I know you two. You both would've rejected the whole endeavor outright. And sabotaged where you could." Griffin spoke, "You're a contrary species. Always have been. Always will be. Difficult to teach and slow to the uptake. You're really not much better than the beasts of the field yourselves with barely enough discipline to stop rutting long enough to feed yourselves. Let alone gain the knowledge of the universe. Basically, you're an immature species who lost all semblance of control once you experienced sexual intercourse. Arrested development as they call it. Yet still you live under God's blessing while my tribe remains cursed. How can that be?"

"Is that why you're really here?" Betty asked, "Cause you're jealous over your role in life through God's eyes?"

"Don't you see? This is not *us-versus-you*. We are not siblings experiencing a rivalry. We are separate beings bound together by God's Will until He allows us the freedom you still experience. And to accomplish this, your children must realign their relationships which, in turn, frees us all," Griffin laughed. "God, for some reason, still loves you and tolerates your constant mistakes, but I don't. This will be my opportunity to complete the work started by my ancestor all those centuries ago and be free of you."

“Well, I’ve heard enough and refuse to cooperate further,” Betty slurred, her last gimlet tipping her over. “Damn your consequences. I can make my own decisions from here on out.”

“Betty, are you sure? Have you considered how Roger wants to do this. How you are responsible for more than just yourself? Plus, it’s a chance to live a young life again with all the knowledge of your previous self. Who wouldn’t want that chance again?”

“I’ve heard enough. Even if I believed you, and I’m not saying I do, there’s no guarantees a second go around with Roger would be better. Not to mention giving up on the life I’ve already achieved. It’s over for me.”

“Betty,” I said, “I think you want to do this. And I do. Please. You’ve had children, but I never did. I never had any. And I never got over you. I know I messed things up terribly back then, but it was you I always wanted. Losing you was the hardest thing I ever regretted.”

“Well,” Griffin smiled, “you certainly have an opportunity here, Betty. You get a second chance, you get to run the show, I promise you that, and Roger will be a happy man again. I believe you once loved him, but life’s circumstances got in the way. Here’s your opportunity to do it different. In your own way.”

“Great. Fantastic. But your smile bothers me. And I think you have something more going on then what you’re telling us,” Betty spat.

“No, nothing like that. I just know human nature. And I’ve been up front about what I expect from you. Here’s your chance, Betty. Your only and last chance.”

“And if I say no.”

“You will be returned to your age of first contact and sent back to your nursing home to wait out your life. And I will begin talking to my next couple.”

“Please, Betty,” I plead taking her hand.

“And if I say yes?”

“You will be granted your age reversal in full, given an established place anywhere you choose, within reason, and you and Roger start a family together anew. With a little guidance, if you follow my blueprint for the proper alignment of relationships between you and Roger, you both will be happy. And your child will flourish.”

“Please Betty. I want this. Please join me again. We won’t make the same mistakes again. I promise.”

“Please, Betty,” Griffin mimicked.

“Fuck it. What do I have to do?” Betty sighed.

Griffin smiled that bothersome, crooked smile again and gestured toward the apple sitting on the end table between us.

“Easy,” she said, “all you have to do is take a bite of our little apple here. Both of you. Take one small bite and you will have your youth returned and leave here with the full knowledge of our encounter together. No strings attached other than the preceding stipulations.”

“And if we don’t?” Betty asked.

“Your journey ends today. Here and now. No more days, no more life. Poof.”

I looked over at Betty. I wanted to live. I wanted my youth back. I admit I wanted her to be part of it. But I was afraid to make that call so I decided to cast my fortunes with her decision. “Whatever you do, Betty, I do too. You’re not alone in this.”

“Choose,” Griffin growled.

“You son of a bitch,” Betty cursed while reaching for the apple.



Griffin smiled. Another success. These humans were so easy to manipulate. Her ancestors would be proud of her having achieved another victory in destroying God's beloved little creatures.

The End.