

Chapter 29

Now Frank found Missile-Tits and the old woman again

While Frank, Dick, Les, Martin, and Mahmud shared their adventures, reasoned about the physical and moral nature of the universe, and argued about cause and effect, freedom and necessity, and the value of the consolations one can find working as a custodian on a Turkish ferry, their boat put in at a tumble-down resort upon the shore of the Sea of Marmara. The first thing they saw was Missile-Tits and the old woman hanging towels on a line to dry.

Dick turned pale when he saw his sister. Frank was taken aback, as his wife's face had become weather-beaten and her arms red and scaly, while her breasts had taken the first steps on a journey south. Recovering himself, he stepped forward and embraced her. There were hugs and introductions all around, then they all helped the women finish their chores and made their way up to the resort, where Frank negotiated the release of his wife and the old woman.

Pooling the last of his funds from his Swiss bank account and the proceeds from the sale of the remaining slivers of diamond in his pockets, Frank bought a small farm nearby and invited his friends to live there with him while they waited for their fortunes to improve. Reunited with his wife, the fondest wish of his heart now for so long, Frank felt a great weight lift from his shoulders. Another weight soon replaced it, however, in the form of his wife's unhappiness. She had not forgiven him, indeed continued to blame him for all of her suffering. Frank never got a clear picture of what had transpired when Mahmud came to rescue her from the governor's palace in Iskenderun, but he held a strong impression that the details reflected poorly on all three parties. As Frank's funds had been exhausted, there was no money for the powders and creams and ointments that she hoped might restore her beauty, which continued to decline.

Eleanor, meanwhile, had advanced to that stage of old age in which every part of the body registers pain with each motion at every moment, and the only relief comes from a detailed verbalization of these experiences. Exhausted by the old woman's incessant harangue, Dick developed a habit of speaking over her, often choosing the subject of Frank's short-comings as the husband of his sister. He persisted in his observations until he began shouting, and turned red in the face, and got asked by everyone to shut up.

One particularly unpleasant evening, Frank meditated upon these circumstances in the hope of divining greater peace. He went to his room and closed the door and turned off the lights and sat upon a cushion and folded his feet atop his knees, and let his wrists arc gently out from his elbows, palms up and fingers curled. At length, Frank's head lolled in repose. He lost his sense of presence in his room in the farmhouse; no sense of the silk of his night-robe or the soft breeze in the window, or even of the cushion beneath his ass.

He remembered his friend from the mountain, and the lesson of calling each person by the name they preferred. He noticed that it was time to start thinking of his wife as "Melissa", which proved a deep root that took a lot of focus to extract and reshape. Then he noticed that, his whole life, Richard had chosen the name "Dick", and he thought about what that might mean. The next morning, while Mi-; while *Melissa* was bathing, everyone else walked Dick back down to the dock below the resort, and put him back on the ferry, and told his supervisor that he wanted his old job back.