

## Old Men Dreaming

*your old men will dream dreams,  
your young men will see visions.  
- Joel 2: 28b*

Hal and Lynda strolled hand in hand up the boulevard entering the Sill - Icon Robotics Soft Industrial Park. Massive oaks alternated with huge maples lining the cobbled lane. Reaching branches crossed above their heads, above the middle of the lane. Hal, a teacher of history before he retired, found himself remembering a treatise he had read on the Gothic cathedral. The writer insisted the intersecting pointed arches reflected at least subconsciously the oak groves Germanic peoples had worshipped beneath in the pagan centuries before their conversion.

"It is a beautiful day," he said.

Lynda, walking step by step beside him, seemed a bit lost. "Hmmm?" She looked up and smiled as she asked.

"I was saying how beautiful it is here."

As if on cue, a drift of leaves, yellows, ambers, reds, and deep orange, settled to the pavement and clattered lightly with the breeze.

Hal chuckled. "I thought I was the one with the hearing issues."

Lynda, still smiling, shook her head. "I'm sorry. Really. But I just wonder about the money for this."

Hal, his face set to reassure, his voice a little wearied from the conversation he thought settled, stopped, turned towards his wife, and took her other hand in his. "Five years ago, our trip to Wales for our forty-fifth cost more than this will. And we have saved. And," he cocked his head as he paused, a motion friends knew meant he had thought things through and come to a conclusion.

"And," Lynda picked up the familiar litany, "we deserve it." She smiled at her husband, stepped closer, and stretched to kiss him lightly on the lips. She stepped back and looked up still smiling. "You remain the same, sweet, impetuous boy I married so very long ago. Still can't wait to get me into bed, whatever the cost, can you?"

They resumed their stroll.

Hal looked straight ahead and said, "No man, seeing you, could blame me."

"You are sweet," said Lynda. "But we are getting so damned old. Seventy-four," she said, shaking her head.

"Isn't that what this is all about?" asked Hal.

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In the lobby, aqua-green marble flowed down from the distant, pale blue ceiling to the floor. That floor was marble also, but swirled in shades of browns. Lush plants, all tints of green, with flowers in most imaginable hues filled huge pots and garden spaces cut from the marble floor. Hal forced his eyes down from the distant ceiling. He noted that the seeming plants actually were sculpted bronze installations. The lobby comprised an enormous work of art. Apparently the installation included the receptionist - Afro-Asian? - wearing a watered silk batik print. She rose behind her intricately carved teak desk.

A badge named her *Malya deFleur*, and Malya smiled as Hal and Lynda approached. "Mr. and Mrs. Laurens? Here for your Honeymoon Renewal Package? Of course," the young woman standing already exited from behind the desk to shake hands, Lynda first, then Hal. "So good for us finally to meet you in person." Malya glanced to her left where one elevator in a bank of seven opened.

A young man, Hispanic or Mediterranean, wearing black slacks and a green blazer over an off-white crewneck exited and, smiling, walked towards them.

Malya explained as she motioned towards the man, "Leonardo, one of our Inductors, will escort you up to your suite and reprise the arrangements with you."

Malya's apparent pleasure at the occasion was infectious, and Hal noted his wife's sincere and deep-felt smile as the handsome young man joined in the handshaking, an odd reunion of friends who had never met.

"Mr. and Mrs. Laurens, may I call you *Hal* and *Lynda*? It is a pleasure." Leonardo smiled, then glanced at Malya who smiled back and nodded. He motioned towards the open elevator. "We'll go together up, then. Just a few formalities to review."

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Hal looked around the black matte room. Across the black matte desk, Leonardo continued on, reviewing their arrangements.

"So, you can see, we've based perceptions on this collection of photos, copied from the wedding album you generously lent us three months back. And your honeymoon destination, Fiji, is one of our many programmed experiences. So far, does everything sound as you wished?" Leonardo looked from Lynda's face back to Hal's. Lynda nodded, and, almost without volition, so did Hal.

Leonardo took a breath then continued, "Now, here's where we have a few additional papers for you to sign. Oh, nothing unexpected, just some ordinary disclosures and clarifications, and our legal staff says we need your signed agreements on file." Again, Leonardo looked back and forth at the two of them, concern but reassurance on his face. "Any questions so far?"

Hal spoke up. "So, our Fiji honeymoon really takes place here? in this suite?"

"Uh, yes," Leonardo nodded. "That would be correct."

"Of course, that's satisfactory. We understood that from the beginning," Hal looked to his wife.

Lynda glanced back at her husband. She seemed a bit impatient. Hal smiled at that.

"But," Hal continued, "why not actual destinations? I mean, I'm just curious."

Leonardo nodded, clearly familiar with this line of inquiry. "We did, uh, try that in the beginning, in our earliest beta testing. Actual destinations actually were Dr. Sill's original thought. We found that, uh, real places led to not infrequent, we'll call them 'miscalculations' on the part of our guests." Leonardo looked back and forth from Hal to Lynda and back to Hal. "A few of our guests found the nano experience so realistic, so...sensual? Yes, that's the right word. So sensual that they forgot their actual age or condition and took on...more...than they should have? There were some unfortunate consequences." The young man looked down at the paperwork.

"So," Hal asked. "We'll be experiencing a hologram?"

"Not exactly." Leonardo looked up with a slight smile. "That's the beauty of this aspect of Dr. Sill's nano technology. Once the nanobots have secured their places in your nervous system, their interactions with the computerized Fiji environment will do more than simulate experience. What you see, what you feel, what you taste or smell, what you hear, everything you experience," here Leonardo looked from Hal to Lynda, "especially what you two experience together, will, as far as you can tell, be real. You will physically move about, walk, play, swim. You will physically and sensually interact with the environment and with each other. Of course, as the days pass, the nanos re-cycle, just like your blood cells. Daily nano renewal comes through an eight ounce beverage with your breakfast. For Fiji, we use a coconut milk base. Very

tasty. But the whole time, you'll be safe. You will have the benefit of full medical telemetry. Your vital signs will be monitored remotely, and, if any problems arise, we can help and take care of them."

Hal remembered the real breakthroughs in nano technology Dr. Raymond Sill had reported almost ten years earlier. Since then, nanobotic surgery had become practically routine for cancer, even in its advanced stages. The reports seemed almost science fiction, but a friend of his, Bill Reinhart, had his stage four colon cancer go into remission after the full nano treatment, surgical nanobots digesting the main tumors and flushing them out of Bill's system, ranger nanobots locating cancerous cells that had spread throughout his friend's body and isolating them for removal, all of this while engineer nanobots re-directed cell growth and rebuilt damaged portions of the digestive, lymphatic, and circulatory systems. All of that with none of the side effects of the now antiquated chemo-therapy Hal's parents' generation had to endure.

"This more recreational use of the nanobots came as a side effect?" Hal asked.

"Correct. We found, just as our logo shows," here Leonardo pointed to the crest on his pocket, then to the seal on the letterhead on which the documents had been printed. The crest consisted of an old-fashioned sash window frame, half opened, curtains stirred by a gentle breeze. "We found that we had just opened the window on what nano-technology might do for people. We found that the nervous system nanobots we developed were more variably programable than, for instance, the surgical bots. It makes sense when you think about it. The nerve nanos emulate nervous system cells, brain cells for instance. And," here the young man winked at Hal, "we were pleased to have some fun with this technology. Of course, Dr. Sill's Nobel came from the medical applications. But the recreational apps are really just beginning."

A bit impatient, Lynda asked, "So what happens now? After we sign." She picked up a pen. "You have to inject us? that's right, isn't it?"

"Simply and a little crassly, that used to be what happened." Leonardo shook his head. "But now we make it more pleasant than that. A number of our guests made follow up suggestions. After you sign, I'll leave you two to our Honeymoon toast." He motioned to a cafe table with two chairs lit just as Leonardo spoke, maybe ten yards from where they sat. The table held a chilling bottle of champagne with a few cookies and some grapes and two flutes. "Be sure you drink all of the coconut frappe first. That contains the nanos. Afterwards, enjoy the champagne. That does contain a mild sedative, just enough to help you sleep. Then," another light came on highlighting a bed a little further away, "you two retire, as if for a night's sleep. The nanobots flow into your digestive system and from there throughout your body. When the two of you awake, everything will be working."

"You mean?" Lynda asked.

Hal listened.

"The two of you will awaken in our Fiji Honeymoon Suite. To each other, you'll seem, in every way imaginable, in your twenties again, the ages when you married. You'll feel in your twenties, to yourselves and each other, you'll look in your twenties."

"It's really not some programmed video game? some virtual reality?" Hal asked, still incredulous even after having read the prospectus and the various testimonials.

Leonardo smiled and shook his head. "As miraculous as it sounds, you'll experience this honeymoon as real. You'll not be sleeping or dreaming. You'll be up, active, moving, enjoying Fiji. Just a couple of kids, kids, of course, with the memories you share of your," here he looked

down at his paperwork again, "fifty years of marriage. And all the knowledge of each other that entails."

Hal felt himself grin at that, and he saw Lynda swallow hard then smile broadly as well.

Their marriage remained good and sound, satisfactory in every respect, including the sex. But he and Lynda had daydreamed over the years about what things might be like if they could somehow combine their experience and knowledge of each other with the bodies they had when they first married. Hal looked at his wife.

They had both seen articles in the science pages of their news boards and read blogs on these new aspects of the breakthrough nano-technology. First stories involved sensational experiences like a couple becoming Clark Gable and Marilyn Monroe. Then they both saw an ad for what was called *the Sill Icon Honeymoon Experience*. That had brought them eventually here.

Lynda, of course, remained beautiful. But, while during those most intimate moments, Hal looked at his lover through eyes wrapped up in memory and deep, abiding love, Hal knew objectively his wife no longer claimed centerfold physicality. Not that her modesty would have encouraged it, but in those younger years, Hal often caught other men undressing his wife with their eyes.

"Okay." Lynda signed one form, smiled at her husband, and nodded. "Let's do this."

Hal nodded and signed.

Leonardo collected the paperwork and put things in order. "Okay then. I'll leave you two alone to begin. Just a couple more things, reminders really. Human interactions will, for the most part, be part of the program or robotic. That way you enjoy greater privacy. Now, clothing and amenities. First, Lynda, the wardrobe including the lingerie you specified you'll find in the bureau and the double closet in your room. We have included a few gifts, perhaps surprises. Try

them. See if you like them. And Hal, the same's true of your wardrobe, but you're in the single closet. Lubricant," he looked down to avoid blushing, "you'll find in the drawer. You do still have your actual bodies. And remember the door - the one odd thing you'll note is, wherever you are, there will be a door. Black. On the other side of that will be one of our compu-medics. He or she can shut things down instantly if you request."

Lynda asked the obvious, "Does that happen often?"

"Never happened with any of my guests, and I've been working in this capacity for some years, literally hundreds and hundreds of guests. I...have to admit, I have heard of it. Whatever the reasons the guest had are, of course, confidential."

"Of course," Hal replied for the two of them.

"Well," Leonardo stood, bounced his paperwork to square in its blue file folder, and said, "congratulations. Please, enjoy yourselves. Your pleasure's our greatest joy."

Hal and Lynda rose and walked towards the cafe table as Leonardo left the room. The light over the desk dimmed as they walked away.

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When they woke the first morning, both initially felt lost in a dream. Tropical sunlight poured in the French doors and open windows. Sheer linen curtains resembled sails in the trade winds. They heard the surf crashing on the beach. The ocean and hibiscus scented the air. Tropical birds called in the distance.

And then they had touched. Hal wondered at the power of their discovery, at least his. This was no dream. As a test, he pinched himself. He of course remembered waking with his bride fifty years ago, still reeling from the pleasures of the night before. But this seemed...more powerful.



Touching led to exploration led to foreplay. Eagerly, they had made love quickly and powerfully then slowly and tenderly. Hal knew so much more of his wife's body, of her needs, of her pleasures. How well Lynda, his wife, knew him.

Afterwards they showered together (a tropical waterfall their very own), dried each other, and dressed - he in white trousers and an open shirt, she in a strapless bikini with a gauze wrap at her hips - breakfast arrived on their veranda. But as they had dressed, as he opened the door for Lynda, he had to remind himself this was his wife, his long-time bride, not some stranger. The coffee was rich, the orange juice fresh squeezed (accompanied by the promised coconut beverage), the pastry flakey, the eggs, hash-browns and bacon cooked perfectly (Hal's fried eggs on his hash-browns, the way he liked them, and he didn't need to ask). They'd walked on the beach afterwards.

Hal and Lynda spent that day in exploration. As they passed through a village along the way, Hal couldn't help but remember a note he'd read in a history of Fiji, on the confluence of French architecture with the building techniques of South Pacific Islanders.

They'd found lunch at a beach hut cafe staffed with native servers. Local caught fish (some name he tried to pronounce, Lynda had laughed), sliced mangos, ice-cold water. On their way back up the beach, Lynda played in the surf. A wave took her top down. When Hal offered to help her, his hands seemed to remove it the rest of the way on their own volition. And she hadn't minded. On their return to their room, they showered again to remove the sand.

The next day, picked up in a mo-ped rickshaw, Hal and Lynda traveled to a different beach and snorkeled with impossibly colored tropical fish and hawksbill turtles.

The two days sparkled like diamonds, the nights included magic. Yet the magic remained...awkward. As much as Hal enjoyed this beautiful, young woman, as much as he enjoyed feeling young and fit himself, something, somehow, felt tainted.

The third morning, as he lay in bed looking at his young wife, Hal had, at first, felt quiet. Then he noticed his wife looking back at him. A tear formed in her eye. It grew, collected near the bridge of her nose, then ran. Other tears followed. Hal reached out, touched her. Lynda inched closer, and Hal pulled her towards him and held her. In moments Lynda was sobbing.

“What’s wrong?” he asked. He released her enough that she rolled back a little.

“Nothing really,” Lynda choked back her sobs and lied.

“Now,” his voice softened, “that’s not true. Tell me.”

“I’m afraid,” Lynda’s eyes, both moist, opened wide at her husband. She swallowed and continued, “I’m afraid you won’t want me when I’m old. When I’m old again.”

“I remember this conversation,” Hal said. “We had it first before we married. I feel the same now as I did then. Time only brings us closer together.”

“But won’t it be different?” she asked. “I mean, I’ve enjoyed feeling sexy, looking sexy, and...it’ll all wear off...”

“You still don’t get it,” Hal smiled. “You are sexy. Not this body I see and think I feel. You. I’ve been lying here, and I realize now, I miss you. I miss seeing the woman you’ve become.”

She looked at him with question.

“I mean, every wrinkle, every...I don’t know, everything. The woman I loved when I first married her, the woman who bore each of our children, the woman who encouraged me to retire, the woman I held hands with walking green fields in Wales, that’s the woman I love. The

woman I love so much more than that girl I married.” Hal paused. He felt tears in his eyes as well. “I miss seeing the woman I’ve spent my life with.”

“Really?” Lynda broke into the beginnings of a smile. “I...miss my old man too.” She touched his hair. “I’m fond,” she said, “of every one of those gray hairs.”

So after breakfast, showering, and dressing, Hal and Lynda sought the black door. They found it up the beach in the beginnings of the jungle, between two palm trees. Hal knocked. The knob turned, and a young woman opened the door. Lynda looked at Hal, looked back at the woman, and said, “We...uh...need to talk to Leonardo.”

Hal added, “Or whoever is working our case just now.”

The woman looked curious.

Lynda smiled. “We wonder if we can change our plans.”

“Come through in fifteen minutes,” the woman said. “I’ll make sure Leonardo’s here.”

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Three days later, as they sat back in the chairs at the black matte desk, Hal had to admit, he looked and felt pretty good. His musculature felt and looked firm. When he touched his scalp, his fingers ran through a full head of hair. And, thinking back through those days, Hal grinned broadly (no bridgework! all his teeth felt real!). Lynda, well, she looked better than she had in his dreams. Better because she was tangible. He knew when he touched her, when she touched him.

Hal looked at the young woman next to him. Her long hair, honey blonde, she had pulled back into a simple ponytail for this meeting. She wore a sun dress of white eyelet, cut-outs displaying her trim waist. Her legs, arguably her best feature, smoothly rose, ankles to calves, knees to thighs, thighs to...

Hal and Lynda waited. They had agreed upon the words.

They had been sitting for a couple of minutes when the young man arrived carrying their folder.

“Is there a problem?” he asked, clear concern in his expression.

“No,” began Lynda. “Not really.”

“Well, yes,” said Hal.

Leonardo looked confused.

“We wonder,” Lynda picked up, “if you can change the nanos. I mean, we don’t think we want to be...”

“...to feel...” interrupted Hal.

“...so young.” Lynda smiled at her husband.

“We’d like to stay in Fiji...” Hal said.

“We are,” Lynda continued, “having a wonderful time. That shower...” She smiled at Hal.

Leonardo remained confused but showed some relief. “So, you’re not unhappy? dissatisfied?”

Hal spoke and Lynda smiled and nodded. “No. It’s been really fun...”

“We’ve learned so much and had...such a good time,” Lynda said.

“We just...” Hal paused. “We just want our years together back again.”