

**PAMELA ZOLINE**

*Instructions for  
Exiting this Building  
in Case of Fire*

**McPherson's Fortnight**

*Series One N° 10*

FORTNIGHT SERIES ONE, NUMBER 10  
www.mcphersonco.com/fortnight.html

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Published in April 2020 by McPherson & Company,  
P.O. Box 1126, Kingston, NY 12402

“Instructions for Exiting this Building in Case of Fire”  
is borrowed for this occasion from the author’s  
collection *The Heat Death of the Universe and Other Stories*  
as published by McPherson & Company.

The cover patterns of the Fortnight series have been adapted  
from the tartan notebooks created by Waverley Scotland of  
Glasgow in association with Kinloch Anderson of Edinburgh:  
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## Instructions for Exiting this Building in Case of Fire

**F**irst and primarily the reader is asked to radically visualize a particular child. Employing extreme breathing, sensory looping and the usual bio-psyche techniques, please call up into vivid present a real boy or girl, one whom you know well, and preferably one with whom you enjoy a largely positive relationship.

(If given the partitioning of modern life you do not know any children, you will have to borrow one from literature or painting, or perhaps from the movies. One candidate, an archivist, recently utilized the younger Shirley Temple, and another fastened on the tiny blonde Infanta Margarita looking warily out from the Spanish court, at Velasquez the painter and past him into the middle distance.)

We have found it useful to provide some framework devices to assist visualization. Initially, call up the brute dimensions of the child: mass, weight, reach, height. You will find that you can revive, through whole-body recall, the received pressure from those occasions when the child's body has rested against your own. The next array includes the color and fragrance continuum. Fill in hair color, eye hue, the pigmentation of the skin and particularly the shades of mouth, cheeks, the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet, and the skin beneath the fingernails. Please be as exact as possible. Numbered swatches and color chips are enclosed. Try next to specify the smells relating to mouth,

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hair, skin and gaseous emissions. What textures do you associate with this child's skin and hair? Characterize the teeth.

We have found that the reconstruction of auditory *sensa* are especially difficult for some. It facilitates to summon up the image of the child in action, bending, turning, pausing to speak—insert here a typical utterance, coming from lips of such and such a shape, with the head tilted how many degrees from the perpendicular, and the brow set with just these curves and arcs, the nose at such and such an angle, the gesture, the gaze, the tone of voice.

Now quickly, at a grosser matrix, fill out the time-space context around the individual: specifying surroundings, time of day, presence of others, color inventory, humidity and pressure, noises, smells, emotional tonus. There is your child now, squarely placed in an amply detailed continuum (I am reminded of the exercises in “particularization” in the Creative Writing Syllabus at Chicago Tertiary College), and there we leave her (my resolutions for gender-neutral language break down—when *I* tell this story, I see a little girl).

She is sitting athwart her young brother whom she has tickled into hysterical submission, they are wrestling in our back garden, sending up gusts of yellow aspen leaves which litter the ground like coins of fairy money. She is wearing hand-me-down denim overalls and a red sweater on which the motif ducks and rabbits have gathered for a pre-Easter meeting though it is only October. And one's sense of her person is of a highly variegated surface so covered is she with her usual rents, tears, bruises, paint marks and other smudges and her fine brown hair escaping every which way from the double security of braids and barrettes. Her earnest and passionate researches into the nature

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of things leave her decorated with testamentary marks of contact, stones and worms in her pockets, twigs in her hair, blue and green daubs across her cheeks and chin. She has the aspect of a tribal citizen, very powerful and intact, with an extraordinarily direct and unabashed intelligence. In the broad sunlight it is warm, though there is an autumn chill in the plum-colored shadows. Her eyebrows are drawn with a two-hair Chinese brush, her eyes are blue. Now her brother is bawling over some rough justice, and to soothe him she delivers a new rhyme, a choosing device which she has learned, she is shouting out, "My Mother and your Mother were hanging out the clothes/My Mother gave your Mother a punch on the nose/What color was the blood? Shut your eyes and think/Green! G-R-E-E-N spells green and out you go/With a jolly good clout upon your big nose!" Successful solace, and they are both laughing uproariously and will not stop.

\* \* \*

And now, patient reader, without at this point questioning the mechanism, let the Goddess Hariti act as *dea ex machina*. She who began as a child-devourer but was converted by the Buddha into a cosmic nursemaid will whisk that altogether palatable child to Moscow, to Gorky Park. It is spring and the ice is continually melting and freezing, and what is this child, my child, my luminous girl doing in Moscow, on a park bench, wrapped in foreign winter gear and licking a chocolate ice cream?

It was as the Middle East rent itself mortally, the crazed wolf in a trap biting his own flesh. And it was as the pendulous Siamese twins of Africa and South America, now separated, seemed still continuous in their joint misery and suffering and accelerating fren-

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zy. There were so many wonderful and urgent reasons for dissent, and only the one overwhelming reason for accord which was both absurd and too vast, so that most of the *homo sapiens* population, up on our hind feet, sundered from biology, found it invisible. The little wars flickered and acted as beacons to the larger interests; the global theater was filled with acute excitement. The situation became daily more extreme. It was when the minute hand on the Domesday clock fluttered and hiccupped in those rare seconds before midnight that we finally acted on this set of premises, to change history.

*Angleinlet, Minnesota*

Anyone viewing the video of Dakota Saltz and Michael Benjamin, the newly-sunburned Saltz-Benjamins, making the beast with two backs in the 60s Nostalgia Room of the Hotel Sands Susie on election night would have concluded that her attention was only partly taken up with the bumpy union of their bodies. The camera, though expected, was tactfully secreted in an expensive lighting fixture which mimicked live candles. The decor featured hanging strands of beads and bells, souvenirs of Vietnam, political posters in four languages and voluminous folds of Paisley cloth. Spotlight and bolted to the floor was a display case in which a bit of moonrock set in a Incite block was on show, and the theme was picked up by a “one small step for man” photo mural.

“My mother was a hippy,” Dakota snorted, on top, lazing back and forth, she sneezed at a drift of smoke from the automatic, everlasting, self-igniting joss sticks. “She believed that a creative and spiritually

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evolving life-style would save the planet.”

The television blatted out the terrible and expected results, the bright and dark forms of the victorious flickered across the lovers' substantial flesh, bad news, bad news. From all over the globe the media shepherds and shepherdesses rounded up and brought forward their unnatural flock, the members of the world's various governments, to react and reflect upon the American elections. Mesomorph, ectomorph or endomorph, bald or hirsute, rhetorical or confiding, pompous or humble, religious or secular, dressed in emblematic duds, they all bared their teeth at one another and uttered patriotic formulae and threats.

Moaning, Dakota willed herself to focus on trans-actions between her body and her husband's. She called on some partially understood tantric discipline to transmute the corporeal into the spirit, to map the personal body onto the cosmic body, she meditated on a terrible form of the Goddess Kali seated in intercourse on the male Corpse-Siva, resting upon severed heads. The fanged and bloody goddess is the same as the beautiful Mother and Lover. The images flickered and incremented, Michael's red mouth shaped an O, the pulses of orgasm married the opposites for a moment. Panting, grinning, tasting the sweet oxygen, the newsflash immobilized them as though it had been a jolt of ball lightning zapping through the room:

*The young son of a top Russian General and the four-year-old daughter of a US Senate leader had both been kidnapped from their homes within the past twelve hours.*  
BEGIN!

\* \* \*

Dakota found herself standing in the middle of the room, holding some socks and underwear, starting to

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pack, standing still, tears flooding her vision. Michael side-stroked into view, looking preoccupied.

*“Kismet Hardy, or Kiss me. Hardy, pie in the face,”* she babbled. *“Here we go!”*

The news bulletin is repeated on the screen. The relatives of the kidnapped girl are being interviewed, they seem hardly to be able to construe the reporters’ questions, so deeply absorbed are they by the enormous event which has overtaken them. The father’s brows leap and punctuate independent of his sentences. Dakota’s mouth is a hot cave from crying.

*“Crossing the Rubicon, I can’t remember the Latin for the die is cast,”* and she wept and roared for a few moments, into the labeled hotel pillows, and then she was calm again. They had their instructions with them, a micro-dot mole on her right shoulder-blade. *Eat this note.*

The shaman reconstruction ritual was an eclectic and corrupt piecing together. About fifty women were bussed from St. Paul, through the vast acres of sleeping suburbs, through the farmland, into the northern woods, and then deeper and deeper until they stopped at a place that looked to the untutored eye as leafy and indefinite as all the surrounding landscape. Dakota wondered afterward whether the hot drinks passed around in polystyrene cups had been drugged. Certainly the colors in the nimbus around the fire began to vibrate brilliantly in distinct bands. They took off their clothes, undressing in the bus, joking and talking in the instant equity of bare flesh. Outside their breaths formed steamy clouds but the big fire heated them at least one side at a time. Silhouetted against the tall flames the organizers read out bits of potted prophecy from Hopi and Kiowa texts, from the Bible

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and the Koran, and also from Nostradamus and other dubious sources. Then all were encouraged to run around the fire circle springing and roaring, leaping, barking like a dog, sniffing, lowing like an ox, bellowing, crying, bleating like a lamb, grunting like a pig, whinnying, cooing, imitating the songs of birds, and so on. It is said that the descent of the spirits often takes place in this fashion.

And so, the preconditions having been satisfied she was now an “activated agent.” Outside the snow had begun again. Carrying messages too secret to entrust to technology, Dakota was on her way to Florida.

\* \* \*

No one invented this, everyone did, all at once, like a miracle. No one is the leader, we all are, and it just happened that way. That’s right. And if that all seems odd, unlikely, too much the paradigm of what used to be called new age organization, then you will have to find out for yourself, if there’s time, if it seems important. The stories we tell ourselves are whatever is necessary for going on. Personally, I’ve never really thought of myself as a group player.

In the crisis room in Kansas the red crisis lights are on, and the sirens blast at frequent but random intervals rendering all thought impossible for that period and leaving an auditory after-image suspended in time for a little like the ghost flash bulb that hung over the head of the importunate school photographer. I am explaining this to you just as I find I am explaining it to myself, over and over, since I made the initial, irreversible commitment; since we began.

The very notion of approaching a family situation, and invading that family and violently removing a young child from that family and taking that child away

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so fast and so far and promoting so many changes that any future connection between child and family is uncertain; even the idea of that action is disgusting and abhorrent.

And so I come to you with unclean hands. And also, in the midst of so much distress and tragedy, I speak with authority of my own, of our family's tragedy.

\* \* \*

It was during the early months of the exercises, I had returned from Florida, we were aping normality and even the pretense was precious. Judith, our middle child, second daughter, first-grader, our blue-eyed indomitable, always joking darling, is late home from school. It's Halloween and we're going to carve the pumpkins and then go out trick-or-treating, so she wouldn't be late. The costumed figures of the smaller children stumble from doorstep to doorstep, the bigger children are readying themselves, and yelps and calls escape from the upper windows. Where is she?

Checking the bus stop, which is on our side of the street, a two-minute walk. Pacing up and down the street, making the phone calls to friends' houses to see if she has, please God, broken the rules and gone over to play without permission; walking around the empty school, the deserted playground, the town park full of children but not that one special bright face, green jacket, fast runner, good climber. Talking to her teacher, to the bus driver, the school head, to the police, the FBI, and for those few hours, until it grew dark, sustaining a hope that some reasonable logic was still operating and that she would be home for supper, our radiant girl! But the dusk gathered and the clouds grew bright, never have I dreaded more the sunset's gorgeous rose and cadmium sacrifice, so quick.

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We had known, of course, that in order to remain covert, and also to maintain a basic justice, the members of the organization would have to be part of the big computer's horrid lottery, along with everyone else. And now I think of Judith always, every hour, every time I look up at a peripheral flicker which isn't here. My dilettante's essays into non-attachment have been worthless, of no value whatsoever.

What could justify this offense to Person, Family and Natural Law? Only this. The extreme and growing likelihood that we are finally about to do it, blow ourselves to kingdom come, extinguish our species along with the multitudes of others that journey along with us, and perhaps the planet itself as a life-sustaining venue. That, coupled with the dreadful, finally unavoidable conclusion that sane, liberal, powerful, even very evolved persuasion cannot any longer save the day—simply because we've run out of time!

At the ultimatum meeting in the buried solar motel at the Kansas headquarters a fat Polish woman stutted through the pandemonium to the heart of things.

"Suppose yourself in a burning building, full of confused adults and children, a trickle of blue smoke, the intoxicating scent of roasting hydrocarbons, soon it will turn into an inferno but the inhabitants seem not to notice. The only way, *the only way* to set off the alarm which will alert the crowd is to lower a child, yours or another's, out of a window and drop it to the ground to its probable destruction. *Would you do it? 'Yes.'*"

*Key West, Florida*

The "living diorama" Seminole village, which was said to be on the site of the actual Seminole village,

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was made up of two rows of structures that looked like giant, stripped-down four-poster beds minus the or-gandie. These Seminole dwellings were open on the sides and covered on top, some with a kind of rough thatch, others were roofed with sheets of galvanized metal. On the platform, families in antique dress were assembled, playing Canasta, cooking fry bread, singing to babies who were slung in hammock-like devices fixed to the corner uprights. In short, going about all their domestic business before the eyes of the delighted tourists. These Indians were, on close inspection, a savvy blend of warm humans and androids, the mix favored by the most successful modern theme parks.

Pearled, striped and blotched with sweat, Dakota followed behind a group of heavily swathed Jordanians, and was herself followed by a cadre of handsomely equipped Japanese. She limped along on her sore ankle, viewing this odd, highly artificial and decadent interface between cultures, of which there are no others. Peering along with the others into the faces of the native Americans, first to make the rough division between humans and subs, then to enter behind the opaque gazes of even the living Indians. "How can I find my 'contact' if no one will look back at me?" Just a trill of panic, had she spoken aloud? Their eyes were obsidian. And so, not paying attention to what lay immediately underfoot, and limping on her left, the ankle was swollen and still swelling, progressively, a chronic sprain, *damn!* and so she was next a victim of the instantiated national characteristics of the tour packs who surrounded her. The Jordanians, intrigued and amused by the quaintness of the exotic infidel, dallied. They hung back to point and discuss, they stopped to open picnic baskets and napkin sacks. They planted themselves just so to clean the face of one of their

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spotless children, they retraced their steps to catch another look at some special sight; they gossiped, they lingered. The Japanese, hung about with all manner of mid-tech recording devices, pressed forward with determined enthusiasm. They photographed, videoed, filmed, taped, they pushed. And so Dakota is caught up between the aggressive Orientals and the dilatory Arabs, the light dazzles her eyes and her leg is hurting and she is getting too much sun and how would she ever connect with her contact.

*Thump!* she is knocked flat into the pink dust, coughing; a large pyramidal shape looming above her resolves itself into a heavily draped Arab woman. Bending over the topsy-turvy “agent,” she lifts gauzy purdah and speaks directly into Dakota’s large-lobed left ear “*Follow the squaw who overcomes the dragon-reptile.*” She then shows the sign which marks her as indubitably part of the exercises, the sisterhood, the Mothers of Invention dubbed by some old lady who did or did not remember the 1960s. Spitting out dust, Dakota picks herself up and moves forward. “Not a particularly glamorous bit of espionage.” Had she spoken aloud?

And there at the end of the street which is formed by the two rows of houses, a dusty widening, trampled clay pricked out with weeds, a primitive gas station with one pump, closed, and a cafe-type highway restaurant which had fallen away from its chipper franchise crispness and exhibited curl all along its perimeters. The multi-cultural crowd thronged and surged, according to their deep natures, toward a deep, flat-bottomed pit fortified by adobe walls. Dakota was bundled along with the crowd, pushed forward on a wave; she could see at the bottom of the pit, crouched on the fissured red mud, the green, segmented, long-jawed, quizzical alligator, ticking its tail in display to impress

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the young Indian woman who crouched opposite. The woman looks both tough and oddly casual. Her blue-black hair is cut very short, her face, in concentration, contains but does not reveal. A fat Indian man in a Hawaiian shirt printed with orchids and parrots gives the signal for the 'gator wrestling to begin.

The woman enters within the attack range of the animal and then must immediately, avoiding both the switching tail and snapping jaws, move to hold the jaws shut with one hand. Then with a sudden twist she flips the animal onto its back and maneuvers to sit astride the beast, and then, most amazingly, she proceeds to rub its belly in a clockwise fashion. And thus did the reptile fall into a hypnotic sleep which continued until the young Seminole woman ceased in the stroking of its stomach's pale, shining skin. And then its eyes unbuckled and its body kinked and jerked and its tail began to pendulum again and the woman leaped off and out of reach and scrambled up from the pit to much applause and electronic whirr. It was only at the last that Dakota remembered she was to follow this woman, and she dodged through the crowd after her, into the cafe.

Having attracted the attention of her quarry by pouring Bourbon on the rocks into her lap, the lap that is of Laverne BitterWing who, as a radical feminist 'gator-wrestling Seminole had seen more politicking than Dakota had had hot dinners, Dakota apologized and bumbled out the password, which was "authenticity," and felt herself blushing head to toe as Laverne looked on with a kind of irritated tolerance. Drinking the replacements, seated in a red naugahide booth, Dakota gave Laverne the message, whispering about an exercise that involved Manila and Peru with Florida as the third critical point. She hissed the names of

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the children who had “won” the lottery; she outlined the network for each child’s retrieval. Laverne’s perfume rose up into her nose, she was thirsty from the dust and heat and the whispering, “another Scotch, or rather Bourbon, that’s what we’re drinking. “ And Laverne tells Dakota the scary stories about the “hot” submarines nosing in close to the Florida coast, playing games of chicken. Recently military chemistry has covered the beaches with stinking, phosphorescent fish. Obsidian.

\* \* \*

Sometimes it seems to us that there are signs that the exercises are beginning to take effect. In the boardrooms, the factories, the bedrooms, in the chambers where governments grind out their extraordinary decisions, everywhere human creatures act and move, there is now this enormous consideration. With the kidnapping and the “specified” resettlement of all these many little children, increasingly, the *we* and the *they* have become irrevocably, irretrievably confused, all mixed. This mixing, this sense of shared consequences, is not of our making. The exchange of the innocents simply points out what is in fact already the case, that finally, at this extraordinary juncture of history we are members one of another, not in some abstract rhetorical sense but at the most practical level of survival. “The bottom line.” Who spoke?

We remind ourselves that some small initial success is not sufficient for us to do what we all long to do, to stop this terrible work. The danger of absolute conflagration is immense. We must not weaken. We must be resolute.

Yes of course there are casualties. The child who fails to respond adequately to surgery, the anaesthe-

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tised child who aspirates vomits and suffocates, the families ruined beyond repair, the child who goes mad. Please refer here to your own illustrated file on the after-effects of nuclear war.

*Lubec, Maine*

Flying to Lubec, Maine, the Saltz-Benjamins, diminished with Judith missing, no longer fill the five-seat middle bank of the airline's economy class, and Dakota finds herself between four-year-old Max who, naturally exuberant, has been numbed and practically muted since the kidnapping of his sister, and an extremely elderly man. This gnarled and transparent gentleman introduced himself in heavily accented English as the proven and established oldest man in the world, a claim he substantiated by drawing out of his wallet various laminated newspaper clippings which pictured him and explained that, as a political prisoner in the Soviet Union during the 40s and 50s, not a young man even then, he had undergone repeated hunger strikes which had provided just that periodic shock to the genetic material which was required, as science has since demonstrated, to extend the human life span dramatically. The old man chattered on about his history, stories of doves and hawks and the species' ultimate games. He entertained Dakota with the recitation of a menu from a great diplomatic dinner in Geneva—oysters in truffle sauce, smoked swan, beef Wellington, eight vegetables, world-wide cheeses, six wines, black bread, baked Alaska, pumpkin pie, and a whole living peach tree wheeled in so that the guests, all now deceased save for her interlocutor, could pick the fruits with their own hands. Dakota yawned until

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her jaws creaked, she was desperately tired and, of course, it should be Judith sitting there.

Jenny, their eldest, turned pale and Max grabbed at his ears as the plane banked and made for Ape Island, the teardrop-shaped artificial bauble of land which had become famous as an exclusive resort and tax refuge, it winked up at them out of the foaming, Guinness-colored Atlantic.

\* \* \*

Fragmentation of directions is necessary to confound our pursuers. Dakota walks, with family in tow, through the Theme Park of the Evolution of Culture, "*just pretend to be ordinary,*" on the lookout for a sign. Displays, rides, exhibition halls, museum complex, *son et lumiere*, the mother and father point out the items of interest to their children, see the walls, the cities, the gardens, the modes of transport, the sophisticated techniques of warfare, all the works of art and culture which make up the inspiring models of *homo sapiens* achievement. Jenny was paler still at the Rembrandt Arcade, and finally threw up just outside the Lincoln Compound, observed only by a group of robot darkies. *And on this hand is the special activated genuinely scientific demonstration and statistical display.* They walk under an arch lettered in Revival Nouveau vegetable cursive MONKEYS TYPEWRITERS SHAKESPEARE. A "living exhibit" organized according to the premise contained in the "archaic humorous saying" *Put enough monkeys with enough typewriters for enough time and they will produce the complete works of William Shakespeare* (which see).

No doubt the recent cataclysmic events have interrupted the day-to-day running of organizations even so far from the epicenter as this bit of hypostasised

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pastorale. Notwithstanding the fascinating character of the display, the monkeys and apes disporting in a charming conjunction of nature and culture, there was on every hand the evidence of neglect and order distressed. Citizens goggled at the primates interacting with all manner of typewriters, word processors and computers. They applauded the drama of these hairy cousins reinventing culture in picturesque vignettes, "the taming of fire," "clothing our nakedness," "invention of the fishing hook," "the commencement of poetic diction," and so on. But, as father commented to mother, despite the lavishness of this rhetorical Darwinism, there were, to the observant eye, many signs of "making do." Since the cancellation of Malaysia the severe interruptions in supplies and personnel have resulted in a certain amount of barely adequate habitat and noticeable psychological dislocation among some of the animals.

They come upon a group of gorillas dressed in rough tags of Elizabethan costume, laboring away at the construction of a replica of the Globe Theatre. Max and Jenny press forward in a gang of children up to the barrier to watch the action. They have taken up with a charming, peach-skinned, French-speaking blonde child, smaller than Max, and Jenny struggles to lift her to the top of the barrier so that she can see. The apes move gracefully about the building site, there is a sense of mock decorum about many of their movements. Dakota noticed that they seem to build and unbuild with almost equal assiduousness, and they frequently stopped in the midst of some effort to act out a line or two from one of the plays, or to quote a mangled couplet from a sonnet. Their language was vastly imperfect but it was language. They glimpsed Hamlet and Ophelia in conversation under a willow

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tree. Ophelia seems upset, and Hamlet grunts and plucks at her, then turns away. And then a massive young silverback male catches Dakota's attention. He is standing on a precarious cantilevered joist which swings, barely pinned, from the top of the north wall. He is mouthing a speech: "*Lie with her!—We say lie on her, when they belie her.—Lie with her! 'Zounds, that's fulsome! Handkerchief—confessions—handkerchief!*"—he gabbled. "*Pish! Noses, ears and lips. Is't possible?—Confess?—Handkerchief!—O devil!*"

"Act IV, Scene 1, " says a voice at her side. She jumps sideways, startled; it is the certified most ancient man. "His name is called Otello, in the Italian manner. " Dakota watches *as though in slow motion* the gorilla Otello moves down through the construction and over the grass and rocks to the barrier, and, at more frames per second, clambers over the moat and simply bounds to the top of the barrier. Voices cried out "Otello, Otello!" And then, as Dakota realizes that she has known that this would happen, with grotesque but inescapable logic, Otello reaches down and lifts the little blonde from Jenny's arms. "*Daphne!*" An ear-splitting shriek from two throats, French, the armaments magnate and his spouse who are ravening bootlessly at the edge of the crowd. "Daphne!, Otello, Otello!" These two musical names curl out over the scene as the gorgeous Otello mounts the heaped elements of the theater, the wailing baby in his arms. Perched on top we can all see that she is in grave danger as he dandles and dangles her and teases her with the unsecured space. There is nothing anyone can do without spooking the ape and endangering the child further. "*Otello, Otello!*"

What are these words in her mouth? Dakota is calling to Otello, he listens, he replies. This woman who has always disliked and avoided heights is climbing

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the structure, scaling the walls, she has gained the top, she is facing the gorilla and flailing child. "*I'm terrified of heights.*" Had she spoken? "*Otello,*" she said through dry lips, and he made a dignified nod and handed over the little girl who was rigid and purple with continued screaming. Dakota held her tightly and climbed, bit by bit, shakily, carefully down. As she touched the ground she heard the crowd sigh collectively, the parents were coming toward them. But Dakota felt with her hurt foot for the trigger to the trap door in the burned knoll. *How had she known it was there?* and it swung open to let them in, then snapped shut, decisively. The hammering continued against the massive door which fitted seamlessly into the bank, it held steady. Dakota exited, down and out. She injected the wretched child and watched her twitch into unconsciousness. As they transited, Dakota was apologizing to the ashy, crumpled baby in her arms.

*Cape Alam, Washington*

We delivered Daphne to Cape Alava, Washington. She was to undergo further training, briefing and "conditioning" which is a dump word for surgically and drug-induced consciousness alteration. Drop-off was a veterinary clinic in a shopping mall. Anaesthetic music accompanied their progress through the bland reflective corridors constructed at a giant's scale. Daphne held tightly to the collar of the bumptious Newfoundland puppy, her decoy. He terrorized hamsters and kittens in the waiting room, a distraction, until they went through to the examining room where the agents stood with sad, drawn, severe faces that Dakota recognized from the mirror. Then the child was screaming again,

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and trying to hold on to her, and the huge puppy was barking and leaping, and people were falling on the slippery blue linoleum, and Max yells out in a rusty voice, "*Daphne, Judith! Daphne!*"

\* \* \*

Now, gentle reader, please call up into your mind's eye your selected child as already visualized. Go through the reification processing and mass out significant traits as indicated earlier. (Refer to instructions.) Remember, having filled in the broad descriptive categories, it is often the subtle level of detail which strongly evokes an individual child's presence.

What is this child like in silhouette? The typical thrust of shoulders, the gait. What kind of temper does the child display? Describe the child's appetite, singing voice, mood spectrum. It is of utmost importance that you carry out this program of recollection with maximum thoroughness, as recent evidence indicates that the psychic numbing of which we have heard so much cannot withstand this kind of focused attention to vital, loving detail.

How does the child look when asleep? What is the sound of your child crying? And now, place the child here, right here at this place in the text. PLACE CHILD HERE. It is *your* chosen child being viewed, stalked, snatched, taken.

As I write there are sounds of hideous wailing coming from the isolation ward above. And it is your child, your little Nan or Ted or Mary, your Miguel, Saleem, Makmuda, Ku, your Jonathan, Joseph, Mario, Zephyr, Chen, Boris, your Alice, your Sam who will be "adjusted" to the fabric of another nation and culture.

And please let Judith play along with it, like a game, and not turn magnificently stubborn, our radiant girl!

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And please let the big computer remember so that when we may find her, we can.

Some of the operatives have killed themselves.

*Osborne County, Kansas*

Good times, bad times. And now here we are, autumn on the Great Plains and the wind howls down through the high grasses, juddering and wailing over Canada, all the way from the North Pole. In the grounds of the Best Western Motel which we have taken over as headquarters the gardens are being organized as a didactic and formal mechanism. To walk through its lanes and avenues, and to look upon its sculptures, ruins, topiaries and fountains is to move through the powerful arguments, logical, aesthetic, political and metaphysical embodied in the artifacts made by angry, grieving, grimly optimistic women.

Was Clio, the Muse of History, a mother? Did she grieve while the necessities of process destroyed her young? Now so many children have been shuffled and transported: Israeli children have been taken into all the Arab countries, and there are defiant Jordanians, Syrians, Iranians, Libyans and so forth now living in Israel and in the West. As for the super-powers, Russian, American and Chinese children have been scattered all over the planet like grains of rice; in Northern Ireland such is the nature of the horrid conflict that Catholic and Protestant babies have been exchanged and re-worked so that they are often living down the street from the biological parents. And so throughout the world, every barrier of nation, race, class and religion has been crossed and recrossed with our tender future citizens. And all over the globe, along with the massive

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grieving and anger, there is a kind of stirring consciousness, a kind of glimpsed recognition of this pattern, the strategy and its point. Can humans, we sapient ones, come to take care of our offspring with the same concern and good sense shown by the other beasts? If a nuclear missile aimed at my "enemy" is now, also, by definition, aimed at my children, will it stay my hand?

\* \* \*

We strolled through the white garden, the red garden, the scented garden, the garden of physicks. We picnicked quietly by a vast turf maze. Max seems calmer, here in the open. He and Jenny are braiding weedy flowers together into a chain which they put around my neck. A bent figure bundled against the blustery wind approaches us, and as he unwraps several layers we recognize the "oldest man." We offer to share our lunch with him, and he sets to with gusto, launching with a full mouth into one of his rambling stories about past days and the adventures of his prime, about the cold wars and the biological wars.... As he talks we finish our meal and decide to wander together through the maze. The path winds round the reproductions of the Sphinx and Camel Rock, then through the water garden. Max is tired and I pick him up. Carrying one heavy, silent baby, longing for the lost one, we push on until we come to a life-size statue of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva Mahasativa of compassion, eleven-headed, and there our ancient companion regales us with a tragi-comic tale of another elaborate conference on disarmament which had once again finished in histrionics. He told of a subsequent feast of fools in the Embassy and ended, "*I was at that feast and drank beer and wine, it ran down my moustache but did not go into my mouth.*"

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Michael laughs *haha* at the ironic and habitual Russian ending to fairy tales and fables. Max is snoring softly. And here we are at the center of the maze, a niche, a minor cave carved into the side of a hill, an invented hill in the flatness of Kansas. And in the cave there is a grotto, lined with seashells and fossils, and inside the grotto is a robot facing a bank of TVs which are showing the 24-hour news from all around the world, burning buildings and etc. Jenny says amazed, "the robot is weeping."

Mothers, forgive us.

*Mothers, join us!*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pamela Zoline or Pamela Lifton-Zoline (born in Chicago in 1941) is a writer and painter living in Telluride, Colorado. In addition to *The Heat Death of the Universe and Other Stories*, she has written a children's book (*Annika and the Wolves*), libretti for two operas (*Harry Houdini and the False and True Occult*, and *The Forbidden Experiment*), and original science fiction radio plays for the Telluride Science Fiction Project. She is often cited as being central to the 1960s New Wave of Science Fiction with fellow writers Tom Disch and J. G. Ballard. A novel is in progress.

*The Heat Death of the Universe and Other Stories*, <https://tinyurl.com/yajz3lca>