

Among You
a short story by Phyllis Gotlieb

Rain wakes in semiform as always, rising out of oceanic twilight and sharpening his senses. Above him is the skylight, color of dark water. He stretches his arm, opens his fingers for the keypad, touch, the dome depolarizes and the room fills with blue morning light, like a well.

It is rare now that he lets himself relax into trueform. He has never lived on his own world, and has never known more than three or four of its people, his siblings. He recalls flashes of green in the skies he dreams of, and jagged white, yellow or grey growths that surge upward at sunrise and fall blackened toward night, and he dreams of himself in his true form among them. But there is no way to live in that shape on this world.

Rain gets off the bed and straightens the covers that are barely rippled, then goes to the bath unit where he washes his skin gently with froth and sprays it with a fresh coat of dermfix. So he can bear to put on the shirt and pants and those ugly shoes.

He stands with eyes closed and slowly reshapes the cartilage of his night face, his lax body, into his daily image, but he does not look at himself in the mirror until he has put on the wig and eyelashes. They are both fine-textured and an inconspicuous dark blond. He studies himself there for a moment, decides that his nose is too pointed and broadens it a bit, then colors his lips a very pale pink. He appears much the same as he has done the day before, and the years before that. He snaps a holo of his head and graphs it against the standard in the 3-D plotter. It matches well enough, and is different enough to keep him from freezing into that one shape, let him keep earning his living.

He takes his breakfast, a jug of cloudy liquid, out of the cooler set in the wall beside the bed and drains three mugfuls. "Ambrosia," he says, and snickers, because he seldom jokes, even to himself. A firm called FLUX delivers it three times a week.

The door of his bed-sitter leads to his studio. There are more electronics, holos and screens, a deck with pads, rollers, dials, lightpens. He taps a screen and finds his three appointments listed. Business nowhere as good as those early years. A chime sounds and he flicks the screen again. It flares to show a middle-aged woman coming into his foyer and sitting down, gloved hands folded on the bag in her lap. He feels déjà vu for the thousandth time. She looks as she did on the viewcomm when she called. Debora Pivnick, one more in a long line of Deboras and Pivnicks. She is very plain and has mixed grey hair.

He pushes a button to call up the file she's given him. Husband Albert, another in the line. He is dead seven years; Rain hasn't had to do much aging on Albert's holo, or work very hard replicating Albert. He presses one more button and the door to the foyer slides open.

He calls, "Come on in, Mrs. Pivnick," and she appears in the doorway, gripping her bag with both hands, her mouth pinched so that her smidgen of lipstick becomes a red dot.

"Albert?" she says doubtfully.

"You'll see him in a little while. My name is Rain." He offers his hand.

She touches it without clasping. "I thought it would be Albert."

"No, I can't do a sim-form before I can be assured my client knows it's an assumed identity. It's a safety precaution." In case Albert's been banging some woman whose husband likes to carry a gun. He has only narrowly

escaped that one. "Would you like to take off your coat?"

"No thanks, I'll keep it on ... it's cool here, you know."

"Yes. I find it more comfortable to work in." He says carefully, "Did you have something in particular you wanted to discuss with Albert, Mrs. Pivnick?"

"I want to know why he left me."

"Your husband is dead. I can't tell you why he died."

"He died after he left me. He didn't have to--" She cuts herself off.

"Never mind. I want to see him, I just want to see him."

He knows all of it, really. But she's paying. "Are the colors in the hologram accurate?"

"Yes, as far as I can remember."

"His hair would be grayer now, I think."

"No! I want to see him just the way he was in that holo picture."

"All right. I have to prepare myself and I'll be back with you in just a few minutes."

"I thought you'd just--be him."

"I could do that, Mrs. Pivnick, be all of him, if I had to, but it's hard work and I wouldn't be able to do anything else all day. So I use wigs and clothes to help me--and you."

"Uh--I guess I understand."

"You'll see him in a few minutes."

"He used to call me Deb."

"Yes."

He has seen the camcorder film record, he knows how Albert walked and talked, and in his wardrobe for a long time he's had the grey-templed wigs of all the other Alberts, their dark suits with shiny seats, their thick black shoes and the loud ties with the soup spots. He takes a little longer than necessary pushing down the height and thickening the waist. He hates poor Albert.

He reappears from behind the shuttered screen of his work-cubicle, comes up to her and stands there, hands in pants pockets rattling change as Albert had done. "Hullo, Deb. Here I am."

She raises her hand to her mouth. "Oh my God, Albert." Shaking her head in wonder, just a fraction. "You are Albert." She doesn't try to touch him.

He stands waiting and she keeps staring at him until something desperate grows in her eyes.

Rain waits. His Albert has no clues. He says finally, "Well, Deb, you must have wanted to say something to me after seven years."

Tears gather on her eyelids. She whimpers once, swallows and says, "I can't! I can't!" She finds a handkerchief and wipes her eyes.

He relaxes just slightly, into a neutral face. "What am I doing wrong, Mrs. Pivnick?"

"You aren't doing anything wrong! It's just I--"

"Have you never had sym-therapy before? With Thorbian World practitioners like me?"

"I've had it three times! One was too young and didn't know how, another one didn't care how he did it, and the last one wasn't one of your people, just some old actor who used to do impressions on the TV." She blew her nose. "They couldn't make me believe at all, but you--you're really Albert, and I can't--" The tears gathered again.

"Too good?" He's never been accused of that before.

"It's not your fault, I don't want my money back or anything, I haven't

got any complaints, I just won't ever try it again, that's all. I should never have come. My children think I'm crazy wanting to see him again." She wipes her tears and blows her nose one last time.

"What did you really want to say?" he asks hesitantly, not to open up a can of worms. He's had one in his own history, Can of worms, definition: ship from Thorb full of Thorbian embryos; message: HELP! Save our children! Last desperate hope! Silence, From seventeen known extrasolar worlds, four or five incoherent signals, no message but one, and nothing ever heard from that world again ... Albert had been silent, had sent no messages, he guesses.

She shakes her head.

Carefully he shifts back into the form. "I know I never got in touch with you, Deb..."

She lifts her hand, palm out, to say no, or nothing.

"And I haven't very much of an excuse for--"

She opens her mouth with a little stuttering sound and slips into the track, almost in spite of herself. "I never wanted to hear all that much from you, Allie." Tasting these first words as she speaks them. She pushes herself. "I got pretty tired of your tricks after all those years, and then Lily and Jake moved away, and Buck got sick and you wouldn't look at him. All that happened when you left was that I got a full-time job so I could get him into a hospice," her eyes flick at and away from him, "but when they found you rammed up a street pole with that hooker in the car--everybody started to laugh at me, you know, people next door and down the street ... or I thought they did, you know, it was like eating away inside me like termites in a wooden timber." The echo of her shrill voice hangs suspended.

She swallows. "I stayed a while in a hospital--Buck was dead by then--and somehow I got my mind back, and I can see straight, or nearly. But sometimes I think I just want to yell at you, that's all, for all the good it would do."

She looks straight at him and he speaks quietly, "I guess I haven't got much to say to that, Deb." She begins to stiffen and he goes on without missing a beat, "You know I've never been an apologizer, but I wouldn't ever have wished any of that on you."

"That's true enough." She looks away for a moment and licks her lips, and as she glances back at him he is already fading away from Albert into Rain, taking the wig off, rising up into his thin shape so that his clothes hang, to keep her away from the level of anger where she would be trapped.

"You see," he says, holding up the pants to keep them from dropping, letting himself look a little ridiculous to help her down.

But she is already spent. "You must think I'm awful."

"No, no, Mrs. Pivnick." Just human. But he can't say that or she will start looking at him strangely. "You only wanted him to listen."

"I wanted more than that," she mutters. "But I guess I got to say a few things," she says, and smiles faintly.

"You can come again, you know. Second sessions are cheaper."

"I don't think I want to see Albert again. Not for a long while."

On Tuesdays at noon Rain goes to see an old man named Beveridge, who lives in an upscale Seniors' Home, one of several that pays Thorbians a little money to imitate loved ones lost many years back. For Beveridge, Rain

becomes Berenice, the daughter who ran off with a married accountant thirty-five years ago. In this case it is important that Rain appear right away as this remembered daughter, and he does not mind walking down the malls as Berenice, a cheerful red-cheeked girl with bright eyes and mouth, and a smooth helmet of dark brown hair.

Berenice always takes one of the old man's trembling hands while the nurse removes his lunch tray, and says, "Hello, Dad."

"Berenice! You came back! Ohh Berenice, girl, you got to forgive me for cursing you like that, I didn't mean it! Say you forgive me!"

"Of course I forgive you, Dad! I never took it to heart!"

"You always were a good girl, Berenice." And he drifts into his afternoon sleep.

This day the door to the old man's room does not open, and the message plate in its panel flares with a sexless holo face that says, "Report to Secretary 3. Mrs. Hustring."

He pushes button 3 on the panel and Mrs. Hustring's face flicks on in seven colors.

"Oh Bereni--I mean Mr. Rain, didn't we call you? Mr. Beveridge passed away last Thursday, poor old man. So we won't be needing you for him any more, though we may call you later. Of course we'll be glad to pay you for your trouble today--unless you'd prefer to donate the money to keep services like yours alive."

"I think Dad would have wanted me to have the money," Berenice says.

He's wearing a trouser suit and turtleneck so it's only a matter of finding a washroom, carefully wiping off the makeup, flipping wigs and doing a quick refinish on his face. He pulls off one earring, and packs Berenice away forever.

Too quick a cure of Mrs. Pivnick, and now out of another job. But that's how they come, like any kind of acting. He has never believed he could sustain an actor's part, every word and movement almost the same every time, again and again, allowed to change only the subtlest of gestures. He climbs out to the street from the glassed-in places, for air, and a look at the few people on the sidewalks. They are walking hands in pockets, blinkered with shades or plugged into one-eye vids, kicking at piles of trash as a child will kick leaves in autumn. A dog sniffs at him and finds no scent.

The wall of the building across the street is a giant screen bursting with turbulent movement, a commercial promo for the newest triV sensation, holos of faces and bodies morphing in burning colors through all the numberless characters, human, animal, phantasmagorical combining, bodies twining and thrusting into a thousand orgies at once, wound with serpents, chimaeras, sphinxes and hippogryphs, Rain cannot help himself but must stop and watch. Arms, legs, heads and hooves leap out at him, the faces pulsing, bleeding, howling, teeth become tusks and noses swirl into grotesque trunks, eyes become mouths, spit stars and embryos, each with its screaming song, it gapes and engulfs, becomes Leviathan in a million cascading scales--

He gapes, he is the scaled Leviathan--

Someone who has not been blinded or deafened is watching him, he sees himself in those eyes and, startled, catches his reflection in the glass panel of a door: rigid carp mouth opening into the whale's ribbed cavern, pearl eyes and opalescent scales scattering down his jaw, the monster. He recoils in terror, does not know where to run.

"Rain, is it?" the face says. "Thought I recognized you, Rain."

The voice is kind. The face is Korzybski, his liaison, curly black beard and eyes popping with contacts not quite the right color. Down the street three transvestite men in Cleopatra wigs are gesturing and grinning at Rain with their blue jaws. He is shaking. Do I recognize myself? I am Rain. His face wanes slowly into the old mask.

Korzybski waits with a calm face for him to get settled. "Just taking a break." He is a neurologist and also visits patients at Seniors' Homes. "Join me in a cup of coffee?"

Earthly food will not nourish Rain but it is not poisonous either. He falls into step with Korzybski, regains his sidewalk self. It is almost time for their monthly appointment anyway, Rain's endless reorientation with the alien world.

They begin a mild discussion about Thorbian affairs. Korzybski brings up the possibility of getting funds for Thorbians from various levels of government, to help them meet each other, make more effective job placements, become a real culture among the multicultures of nations. Rain drinks his coffee iced and says nothing. He is sure that Korzybski knows how many Thorbians there are in the world and he does not know or care. Sometimes in the corridors or on the moving ramps, sometimes even up in the almost empty streets he sees others that he thinks might come from the world Thorb. There are three or four online that he plays electronic games with, or even visits at rare times. He and the others call the world "Thorb" because Earth calls it that. He doesn't know what its inhabitants call it because he knows none of its languages. He remembers reading long ago of a parrot that was the only living speaker of its owners' language. The message was deciphered by military decoders from Earth by methods used over millennia, making use as well of what had been learned about the signals from those other few worlds. Perhaps the desperate battlers on "Thorb" who were aiming their message at Earth had learned their own codes from Earthly communications. But the few adults tending the crèche in the ship were found dead, and could tell the worlds nothing of themselves except their vaguest outlines, had only broadcast their children as seeds out into the void.

Of course Earth was frightened then of the seeds taking root and there were fifteen years of quarantine when the nations stared at the children of Thorb through razor wire, watching how the colors flickered on them, how their shapes trembled and reformed. Rain had seen all of that himself a thousand times on the vid records. Nations had even stopped their warring to meditate on Thorbians. Twenty-three hundred and seventy-four religions have flared and died around them. But there was no money in them, and everyone has seen them and their shape-shifting on TriV. Unavoidably the world has found other marvels, moved away from them. Now it does not even matter if they mate, or reproduce--their bodies, not their dreams have told them how to do that.

But they are afraid.

Rain knows that without asking. And he does not think that the governments that cannot keep the streets clean and the skies clear are likely to find funds for Thorbians or their children.

He pays for his coffee, says goodbye to Korzybski and continues down the street. Perhaps one day holograms will walk down this street, superimposed on the garbage, and even visit old men in the hospital.

Home, Rain lies drowsing, waiting for the last task of the day, an evening one. Toward evening Thorb's sun sinks down its western slope, and the morning growths of white and gold in the green-flash sky burn smokelessly and fall away into blackness and hazy blue. There is no moon on this world of Rain's dreams. Perhaps the world is a moon itself, and the lights in its sky are sun and planet. Rain believes his dreams are racial memories but is afraid to tell them to the others on his network for fear they are nothing but wish-fulfillments, his World nothing more than a dream. He has never even felt familiarity with the trueform shape the vids have shown him.

At seven o'clock Rain rises from bed, refreshes his form and dresses in a tuxedo to escort a woman--who has asked him, is paying him to "come as you are"--and take her to dinner. Man of a thousand faces, which is he? He watches her head and shoulders rotating in the 3-D, her laughing brown face, neck scarfed with diamonds, and piled-high black hair with its streak of white lightning. Her earrings hang to her shoulders and glitter as she turns.

As you are, he summons his hopeful morning face, and hides the formal wear under a black waterproof and a fedora. It's not good to look prosperous in the malls.

He doesn't expect Lucilla Farrell to be young or beautiful; none of the employers buying his evening presence ever have been. Some vain customers want him to be a beauty, man or woman, some want a lost love, or perhaps even a double. Some only want not to be alone at dinner, theater, or gambling casino. Rain pushes the button at her door.

The panel lights up with its holo, her laughing face cries, "Come on right in!" and the door opens.

He steps into the foyer carefully among the acrylics and white leather. "Just a minute!" A rustle, a flurry and she bursts on him. "Helloo, honey, are you ready for me?"

He stands a little back from this wave of color and scent. "I hope so!" She is spangled in rainbow colors, an older but accurate version of the holo she'd sent him.

"Hello, Rain! Rain, I like that name." She rattles bracelets and stands back in turn to look at him. No need to explain; she knows Thorbians.

"Hand me that coat out of the closet there, sweetheart, and let's go!"

She wraps herself in black velvet, whisks him up to the roof, into a helicab, across the city. He listens and dares relax under the barrage of exclamation points. They are not aimed at him. Her tongue rattles with gossip and he need not answer.

The cab alights on the landing pad of the Opera House along with a hundred others, laying passengers like eggs and rising again like brilliant winged beetles. The elevator shaft is crystal, and the theater a nest of plush and carpet. He has never been among so many people, his skin prickles slightly at the closeness of all this flesh and fabric, and even the brilliant lights seem smothered by it. But he pushes down the mild terror of guiding Lucilla to her seat while she waves to acquaintances and shows off her escort subtly by giving no sign of his attendance.

Once he has slipped away from his fear he wishes his eyes were cameras to record the features and movements of all these people, the men in heavy black and the women in shimmering dresses. He has never seen any kind of live performance, Earthly music is nothing to him and he does not understand and hardly hears the opera, Montecassini's Great General in the

Gulf of Persia, with Ishiro Hoshizaki singing the role of Schwartzkopf. He watches the little figure, stamping around in gold braid, to see how his limbs move, and the gestures of his head and hands.

It is intermission, the lights come up again, and there are more people in the lobby. He wonders if there are other Thorbians here, and watches, while Lucilla waves and yoohoos. He drinks mineral water with a twist of lime, studies and imitates the attitudes of the men, hand in pocket, elbow on the bar. No one is looking at him. He is perfect.

Or nearly. There is a couple, "Hello, Lucilla dear!" A very thin white-blond woman in a dress beaded with lilies, and a bulky man with a red face and black hair kiss the air near Lucilla's ears.

"Lee and Jerry Woodson," Lucilla says, "friends of my husband. This is Rain."

This woman, Lee Woodson, really looks at him. "Yes," she says. "How do you do. Do you come to the opera often?"

"No, this is my first time," Rain says.

"Really? Well," she says. "Lucilla is very fond of Thorbians."

Lucilla looks up from her gin sling and says coolly, "Keeping track of me, are you, Lee?"

"Only as a friend, Lucie. Tell me, Mr. Rain--"

"I'm getting another drink, back in a minute." Jerry Woodson is searching around the room for another bull-of-the-woods to measure himself against. Lucilla tries to find others to halloo at, but Lee will not be dislodged.

Rain braces himself against the intensity of this vulpine woman.

"Tell me, Mr. Rain, I imagine people ask you many questions?"

"Not always, but sometimes they do." He waits for the one she is determined to ask him.

She says in a low steady voice, "Has anyone ever asked you what you've got under all those human clothes?"

"Yes," he says, smiling.

"And what do you say?"

He laughs gently, "I say, Give me a kiss and I'll show you!"

Bells ring to end intermission and Lucilla pulls him away quickly. Her hand is very hot on his arm. "I heard all that," she mutters.

He can feel rather than see Lee's sharp white face shrinking to a dot behind him. "Your husband needs some new friends." He lets the bitter words slip quickly, his guard overcome for once, and regrets them, but she shakes her head and sets her earrings swinging.

"I went along with them for his sake," she snaps, then with a grin adds, "He was a sweet guy and I gave him his money's worth before he wore out. They just think he married a long way below himself."

In his mind Rain can hear Lee Woodson saying, Poor Lucie, educed to buying Thorbs, and she used to think she was really something. He pushes that away, but there is not much to say after that, and he watches the Great General Schwartzkopf conquering his enemies and winning beribboned medals and golden crowns, and after that the great tenor Hoshizaki being draped with wreaths and garlands.

As they rise to the roof in the crystal elevator they can see the helicabs descending from above, and it is no more than a few minutes until they are standing before her door. In the mirrored hall he catches one flash of his reflection: a blond man in a tuxedo, coat over his arm.

Her door is open and she faces him. He would not go in among all that leather and acrylic if she asked. She is smiling. "Don't be hard on them.

I'm a whole other kind, and it was a good evening." You go along with them. But she is laughing and alive. "Give me a kiss and I'll show you," she says with a dirty snigger, "I love it!" then takes his face between her hands and kisses his mouth. "Goodnight sweetheart, I love you." She steps back into her world, the door closes, its panel is blank.

He stands there with her kiss on his lips, in that moment, he finds himself burning with a feeling, a passion not for her but for fulfillment and a being who would truly share it with him. No one has ever touched him like this, a real touch in which he feels whole-bodied among the aliens. It's a fearful feeling too, the threatening hope of love. He cannot afford it.

He backs off, waves away the helicab. It cannot take him where he is going. Her money will fall silently into his account, as it fell into the cabman's. He finds the elevator and descends, descends, trying not to think of this as symbolic, because he will sink into self-pity.

There are many deep levels, but he comes out at his own, even with the street. He has nearly an hour's walk through the arcades of shops, restaurants, little gardens that keep the cool air moist and fresh. He passes a holovue theater featuring something called "A Thorbian Lover," advertised in a fountain of lights promising "Dangerous Satisfactions," without pausing or turning aside, walking in the shadow with his coat buttoned to the neck and his hat pulled down. People are coming out of the theater and he keeps neatly ahead of them. There are more theaters and restaurants, bars and sex shops, a little park with a lot of hands-on lovers, then an open market selling star-fruit, marijuana plants and dried jimsonweed.

Beside it there is a Beggars' Square, an arrangement of painted squares with a tree planted in the center, and by city ordinance the beggars must keep inside the squares and not harass the shoppers. Rain keeps coins to give the beggars, it is a kind of rent he pays the world, but coins cannot liven their dead eyes, and he always hurries away after tossing a few into their cups and bowls. "Mister! Mister!" they call and wave, and he stands undecided with his hand in his pocket.

One beggar catches his attention. He is moving, but not like the others who gesture; he is shimmering. This beggar's eyes are not dead but feverish, and as they rest on Rain his body shifts and flows to become Rain, a blond man in a black coat. It seems to Rain that he has poisoned himself with weed or alcohol, toxic for Thorbians. The fever heat is coming off his body. He lifts his hands in imitation of Rain's surprise. "No, no!" Rain whispers, pulls the handful of silver from his pocket, flings it into the bowl and backs away.

Three young loungers in silk and leather have begun to tease the beggars. Now they glance aside and find this one. He looks up at them hopefully and in turn--rippling and wavering into cloudy and then distinct form--becomes the girl in leather with the blond flat-top, the teenager with slick hair in the silk suit, the man in his twenties with the blue velvet suit and beard dyed to match. As if poison has given him the energy to do endless whole-body modelling without having to think or plan.

"Look at this one!" Bluebeard says. "Let's see!" He kicks the bowl and sets it spinning, flinging arcs of silver.

The other beggars freeze, Rain feels himself shrinking in his clothes and takes an involuntary step back. The Thorbian's impetus halts. He stops in half-gesture with his hands out and his face gone featureless and slack

like the canvas face of the Scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz.

The three of them guffaw and kick at him. "What're you gonna be now, blobbo?" The other beggars have scuttled off their squares and run out of the park, no one is left but the four. The Thorbian shimmers, trying to pull away, trying to find a form that will let him.

"Who! Who!" they yell.

"Please!" he cries weakly, "My name, I am Frost." Water begins to seep from his skin, he cannot do more than wave his arms.

"Frost! I think yer melting, Frost! Look, he's peeing!"

Rain recognizes the shrinking-from-danger syndrome that he had spent so much time learning to control in his own youth.

"Look at that! That's disgusting!" They aim more kicks.

Rain wants nothing but to run away and finds himself leaping forward screaming "Stop that! Damn you bastards, stop!"

They turn on him. "What've we got? This's another one!"

Rain can smell them now, they are so close, he is terrified but he cannot stop. He flicks off his hat and crouches screaming, or roaring, his head and neck push thickly out of his collar, his shirt opens, the tie snaps and falls away, his arms reach out of his sleeves, they are fanged and furred, tawny, spotted and savage. He is sinuous in his long and awkward coat, his claws splay out--

The three tormentors freeze.

The girl swallows, licks her lips and says, "Aw, that's nothin'! That isn't real, its just one of his shapes."

Rain roars and takes a step forward, and she backs away.

They breathe hard for a moment and Bluebeard snarls, "I don't give a fuck what he is, there's a cop coming and I'm outa here."

Rain stands stupefied watching them run away while his fangs dig into his lower jaw and his milky blood trickles and drips off his chin. He is frightened at the jolt of creepy pleasure his savagery has given him, does not even know what he has been trying to make of himself, some generic cat, ocelot or lynx he has seen on the vid. His hearts are going beatbeat-beatbeat, his neural ganglions are throbbing, He feels the water beginning to run off his own skin, and if he cannot replace it in a few minutes he will be too small for his clothes and look like a clown. The beggar, shrunk somewhat but not badly hurt, is moving weakly to pick up the coins, and Rain wants to help him but does not dare. He's sure someone will yell, "Hey you! Blobbo!" and he is terrified. He also does not want the police near him.

He grabs his hat and ruined tie. Carefully maintaining what form he can he searches out a fountain. There is one just over there in that little park.

He drinks, then sits down on a bench. His hearts slow down, his head clears. No one is looking at him, no one will bother him. He's had a panic attack, that's all, rebounding from the anger, but now he is in control.

He lifts his hand to loosen his sweaty collar and finds that there are still talons on the ends of the fingers, and stubby hairs around them.

He stuffs his hand in his pocket hastily and lets it reshape, gets up and walks home. No one notices him.

The beggar haunts him. I am Frost.

I could have sheltered Frost. No he can't, not one so sickly and half mad too. Frost needs the kind of care he himself was given that time he had the fungus disease, with a specialist in that little hospital place that

Korzybski arranged for him. He will ask Korzybski, something he can do. He prepares for bed, puts the tuxedo away in his wardrobe with clothes to be cleaned, throws his shoes into the cyclor: they were wrecked by the talons that sprang through them. He washes himself, settles carefully into his semi-shape. Once he came home after a hard night, lay down as he was and woke as the same pale blond man. He doesn't want to be imprisoned in that shape.

Tomorrow there will be a live Albert wanting to tell a dead or divorced Debora how he hates her guts and misses her. Albert and Debora, Lucilla and Berenice pay for his life among the aliens.

In his dream the green sky flashes and the gray and yellow growths surge up as the sun rises.

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