

Editors' note: This story has been copiously annotated by the author. We suggest that you read it through first and then consult the notes.

PAINTING BY ERICH BRAUER

RUBBER SOUL

BY SPIDER ROBINSON

But I don't believe in this stuff, he thought, enjoying himself hugely. *I said I didn't. Weren't you listening?*¹

He sensed amusement in those around him—Mum, Dad, Stuart, Brian, Mal and the rest—but not in response to his attempt at irony.² It was more like the amusement of a group of elders at a young man about to lose his virginity, amusement at his too--well-understood bravado. It was too benevolent to anger him, but it did succeed in irritating him. He determined to do this thing as well as it had ever been done.

Dead easy, he punned.³ *New and scary and wonderful, that's what I'm good at.* Let's go!

The source of the bright green light came that one increment nearer, and he was transfixed.

Oh!

Time stopped, and he began to understand.

And was grabbed by the scruff of the neck and yanked backwards. Foot of the line for you, my lad! He howled his protest, but the light began to recede, he felt himself moving backwards through the tunnel, slowly at first but with constant acceleration. He clutched at Dad and Mum, but for the second time they slipped through his fingers and were gone. The walls of the tunnel roared past him, the light grew faint, and then all at once he was in interstellar space, and the light was lost among a million billion other pinpoints. A planet was below him, rushing up fast, a familiar blue-green world.

Bloody hell, he thought. *Not again!*

Clouds whipped up past him. He was decelerating, somehow without stress. Landscape came up at him, an immense sprawling farm.⁴ He was aimed like a bomb at a large three-story house, but he was decelerating so sharply now that he was not afraid. Sure enough, he reached the roof at the speed of a falling leaf—and sank gracefully through the roof, and the attic, finding himself at rest just below the ceiling of a third-floor room.

Given its rural setting, the room could hardly have been more incongruous. It looked like a very good intensive care unit, with a single client. Two doctors, garbed in traditional white, gathered around the figure on the bed, adjusting wires and tubes, monitoring terminal readouts, moving with controlled haste.

The room was high-ceilinged; he floated about six feet above the body on the bed. He had always been nearsighted. He squinted down, and recognition came with a shock.

Christ! You're joking! I done that bit.

He began to sink downward. He tried to resist but could not. The shaven skull came closer, enveloped him. He gave up and invested the motor centers, intending to use this unwanted body to kick and punch and scream. Too late he saw the trap: the body was full of morphine. He had time to laugh with genuine appreciation at this last joke on him, and then consciousness faded.

After a measureless time he woke. Nothing hurt; he felt wonderful and lethargic. Nonetheless he knew from experience that he was no longer drugged, at least not heavily. Someone was standing over him, an old man he thought he knew.

"Mister Mac," he said, mildly surprised.⁵

The other shook his head. "Nope. He's dead."

"So am I."

Another deadpan headshake from the old man. "Dirty rumor We get 'em all the time, you and I."⁶

His eyes widened. The voice was changed, but unmistakable. "Oh my God — it's you!"

"I often wonder"

"But you're old."

"So are you, son. Oh, you don't look it, I'll grant you that, but if I told you how old you are, you'd laugh yourself spastic, honest. Here, let me lift your bed."

The bed raised him to a half-sitting position, deliciously comfortable. "So you froze me carcass and then brought me back to life?"

The old man nodded. "Me and him." He gestured behind him.

The light was poor, but he could make out a figure seated in darkness on the far side of the room.

"Who—?"

The other stood and came forward slowly.

My God, was his first thought. It's me! Then he squinted—and chuckled. "What do you know? The family Jules. Hello, son."⁷

"Hello. Dad."

"You're a man grown, I see. It's good to see you. You look good." He ran out of words.

The man addressed began to smile, and burst into tears and fled the room.⁸

He turned back to his older visitor "Bit of a shock. I expect."

They looked at each other for an awkward moment. There were things that both wanted to say Neither was quite ready yet.

"Where's Mother?" he asked finally.⁹

"Not here." the old man said. "She didn't want any part of it."

"Really?" He was surprised, not sure whether or not to be hurt

"She's into reincarnation. I think. This is all blasphemy and witchcraft to her She cooperated —she gave us permission, and helped us cover up and all. But she doesn't want to hear about it. I don't know if she'll want to see you, even."¹⁰

He thought about it. "I can understand that. I promised Mother once I'd never haunt her Only fair. She still makin' music?"

"I don't think so."

There was another awkward silence. "How's the wife?" he asked.

The old man winced slightly "Well enough, I hear. She went right back out the window a while back."

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"I'm sorry"

"Sorriest thing I've seen all day, son. You comfy?"

"Yeah. How about Sean?"¹²

"He doesn't know about this yet. His mother decided not to burden him with it while he was growing up. But you can see him if you want, in a few days. You'll like him. He's turned out well. He loves you."

A surge of happiness suffused him and settled into a warm glow. To cover it he looked around the room, squinting at the bewildering array of machines and instruments. "This must have set you back a packet."

With a lilt in his voice, the old man asked, "What's the good of being a multimillionaire if you can't resurrect the dead once in a while?"

"Aye, I've thought that a few times me-self, He was still not ready to speak his heart. "What about the guy that got me? Why'd he do it?"

"Who knows? Some say he thought he was you, and you were an impostor. Some say he just wanted to be somebody. He said God told him to do it, 'coz you were down on churches and that."¹³

"Oh Jesus. The silly fucker." He thought for a time. "You know that one I wrote about bein' scared, when I was alone that time?"

"I remember."

"Truest words I ever wrote. God, what a fuckin, prophet! 'Hatred and jealousy, gonna be the death of me.'"¹⁴

"You had it backwards, you know."

"How do you mean?"

"Nobody ever had better reason to hate you than Jules."

He made no reply

'And nobody ever had better reason to be jealous of you than me."

Again he was speechless.

"But it was him thought it up in time, and me pulled it off. His idea and enthusiasm. My money. So you got that backwards, about them bein' the *death* of you." He smiled suddenly "Old Jules. Just doin' what I told him to do, really."

"Makin' it better."

The old man nodded. "He let you under his skin, you see."¹⁵

"Am I the first one they brought back, then?"

"One of the first half-dozen. It's not exactly on the National Health."

"And nobody knows but you and Jules? And Mother?"

"Three doctors. My solicitor. A cop in New York used to know a captain, but he died. And George and Richie know. They send their best."¹⁶

He winced. "I was rough on George."¹⁷

"That you were, son. He forgives you, of course. Nobody else knows in all the wide world."

"Christ, that's a relief. I thought I was due for another turn on the flaming cupcake. Can you imagine if they fuckin' *knew*? It'd be like the last time was *nothing*."

It was the old man's first real grin, and it melted twenty years or more from his face. "Sometimes when I'm lying awake, I get the giggles just thinking about it."

He laughed aloud, noting that it did not hurt to laugh. "Talk about upstaging Jesus!"¹⁸

They laughed together, the old man and the middle-aged man. When the laugh ended, they discovered to their mutual surprise that they were holding hands. The irony of that struck them both simultaneous-ly But they were both of them used to irony that might have stunned a normal man, and used to sharing such irony with each other; they did not let go.¹⁹ And so now there was only the last question to be asked.

"Why did you do it, then? Spend all that money and all that time to bring me back?"

"Selfish reasons."

"Right. Did it ever occur to you that you might be calling me back from something important?"

"I reckoned that if I could pull it off, then it was okay for me to do it."

He thought wistfully of the green light but he was, for better or worse, truly alive now. Which was to say that he wanted to stay alive. "Your instincts were always good. Even back in the old scufflin' days."

"I didn't much care, if you want to know the truth of it. You left me in the lurch, you know. It was the end of the dream, you dying, and everybody reckoned I was the one broke us up, so it was my fault some-how I copped it all. It all went sour when you snuffed it, lad. You had to go and break my balls in that interview..."

"That was bad karma." he agreed. "Did you call me back to haunt me, then? Do you want me to go on telly and set the record straight or something?"²⁰

The grip on his hand tightened.

"I called you back because I miss you." The old man did not cry easily "Because I love you." He broke, and wept un-ashamedly "I've always loved you. Johnny It's shitty without you around."

"Oh Christ. I love you too." They em-braced, clung to each other and wept to-gether for some time.

At last the old man released him and stepped back. "It's a rotten shame we're not gay. We always did make such beautiful music together"

"Only the best fuckin' music in the history of the world."

"We will again. The others are willing. Nobody else would ever know. No tapes, nothing. Just sit

around and play"

"You're incorrigible." But he was inter-ested. "Are you serious? How could you possibly keep a thing like that secret? No bloody way —"

"It's been a long time," the old man inter-rupted. "You taught me, you taught all three of us, a long time ago, how to drop off the face of the earth. Just stop making records and giving interviews. They don't even come 'round on anniversaries any more. It'll be dead easy."

He was feeling somewhat weary "How...how long has it been?"

"Since you snuffed it? Get this—I told you it'd give you a laugh. It's been two dozen years."

He worked it out, suddenly beginning to giggle. "You mean, I'm—?"

The old man was giggling too. "Yep." He roared with laughter "Will you still feed me, then?"

"Aye," the old man said. 'And I'll always need you, too."²¹

Slowly he sobered. The laugh had cost him the last of his strength. He felt sleep coming. "Do you really think it'll be good, old friend? Is it gonna be *fun*?"

"As much fun as whatever you've beer doing for the last twenty-four years? I dunno. What was it like?"

"I dunno any more. I can't remember Oh—Stu was there, and Brian." His voice slurred. "I think it was okay"

"This is going to be okay, too. You'll see. I've done the middle eight. Last verse was always your specialty."²²

He nodded, almost asleep now "You al-ways did believe in scrambled eggs."²³

The old man watched his sleeping friend for a time. Then he sighed deeply and went to comfort Julian and phone the others.

ANNOTATIONS

In the fall of 1981, I chanced to be in New York City, and on October 9, feeling slightly silly but quite unable to help myself, I took my six-year-old daughter, Luanna, with me on a pilgrimage of sorts, up Central Park West to 72nd Street, to the elegant apart-ment building called The Dakota. I felt a powerful need to bid happy birthday to a dead man, who should on that day have turned forty-one.

Perhaps two or three hundred people subject to the same need were already present, gathered around the limo en-trance, where it had happened. It was curi-ously difficult to name their mood. Sometimes it felt like subdued good cheer, and sometimes it felt like barely concealed de-spair I stood across the street with my daughter and watched and listened to ragged choruses of appropriate songs and tried, without the least success, to name my own mood. What was I doing here?

Suddenly a black limo pulled up in front of me. Its sole passenger was a white-haired dowager. She powered down her window and addressed a group of us standing more or less together "What is going on?" she asked quite politely.

The man standing next to me pointed across the street at The Dakota, and said simply, "It's his birthday"

She followed his pointing finger, and she must have taken his meaning instantly be-cause at once she burst into tears.

He was that universally loved.

The editors believe that while most of you will get most of the references in this story it's unlikely that any of you will get all of them; Therefore they have requested these annotations,

1) In the song "God," on the Plastic Ono Band album, John Lennon recites a list of Things that he does not believe in, including Magic ... I Ching Bible ... Tarot ... Jesus ... Buddha ... mantra [and] Shita." On the other hand, he characterized himself as "a most religious fellow...religious in the sense of admitting there s more to it than meets the eye ... there is more that we still could know."

2) Mum is Julia, John's mother (run over by an off-duty cop): Dad is his father, Fred (died of cancer): Stuart is the early Beatle, Stu Sutcliffe (died of cerebral hemorrhage), Brian is the Beatles manager, Brian Epstein (accidental overdose of Carbrital); and Mal is the Beatles roadie/companion, Mal Evans (shot by police in Los Angeles).

3) John, author of *In His Own Write* and *A Spaniard In the Works*, always believed that a good pun is in the eye of the beholder

4) Paul McCartney and his family live on a farm in Scotland.

5) It seems to me that John, confronted with a Paul McCartney twenty-four years older than when last seen, would quite naturally mistake him for his father, James McCartney (pianist and former leader of the Jim Mac Jazz Band), in whose living room at Forthlin Road, he and Paul taught each other to play the guitar.

6) A reference to the "Paul is dead" hysteria which swept the world in October 1969

7) Many have commented on the physical resemblance between John Lennon and Julian, his first son by Cynthia Powell Lennon. Julian will be nineteen by the time this is published, and forty-one by the time of the story; just as likely as "Mister Mac to be misidentified by a man two dozen years dead. "The family Jules" is a typical Lennon pun.

8) The relationship between John and Julian was less than ideal when John was killed. In an interview shortly before his death, John said of his oldest son, "Julian and I will have a relationship in the future..."

9) "Mother" was John's name for Yoko.

10) Some may believe that John and Yoko's legendary love would transcend death and time. I have no idea what Ms. Ono's opinions are on cryonics. I have only the feeling that she is a very practical and intelligent woman who, her husband having been murdered before her eyes, would "declare him dead" in her mind and get on with her life, no matter what technological wizardry others might attempt. And if the attempt did pay off, I believe she would be perceptive enough to approach a reunion twenty-four years later with caution, if at all. Please feel free to disagree; this story is my own wish-fulfillment dream, and you are perfectly welcome to your own.

11) The reference is to the song Paul wrote shortly after meeting Linda Eastman McCartney "She Came In Through The Bathroom Window" This paragraph is sheer science-fiction speculation; I have no evidence to suggest that Paul and Linda's marriage will not last another twentyfour years.

12) Sean Ono Lennon, John and Yoko's son. John stopped making music and dropped out of public life for five years to be a full-time parent to Sean.

13) Mark Chapman himself claims that he overheard, as it were, an irritated God muttering. "Who will rid me of this troublesome John Lennon?"

14) The song, "I'm Scared," written during the black period when John and Yoko were estranged, will be found on the album *Walls and Bridges*. The quote here is from one of John's powerful middle eights.

15) The allusion here—"under your skin"—is from the lyric of the Beatles hit song, "Hey Jude " In October 1968, Paul McCartney paid a surprise visit to Cynthia and Julian Lennon. Cynthia was suing John for divorce. Yoko was pregnant. six-year-old Julian was confused and unhappy Paul sang him a song he made up on the way over in the car, to cheer him up, called "Hey Jules." It was later recorded as "Hey Jude."

16) George Harrison and Richard Starkey (better known as Ringo Starr).

17) In one of his last interviews. John took a few angry potshots at George Harrison. "I am slightly resentful of George's book, but don't get me wrong — I still love all those guys ..."

18) The single most famous Beatle utterance. In context. John made it quite plain in a London Evening Standard interview that he had nothing against Jesus, only against Jesus "thick" followers. "They're the ones who ruin it for me." Sure enough, one of them ruined it all for him.

19) "I Want To Hold Your Hand."

20) Paul McCartney has been quoted by a Nova Scotia newspaper as saying: "From a purely selfish point of view, if I could get John Lennon back, I'd ask him to undo this legacy he's left me. I'd ask him to

tell every-one what he told Yoko in the privacy of his own room. Yoko and I talk on the phone a lot nowadays, since his death, and what she says tells me something very important: John still liked me, after all."

21) John died at age forty; the reference here is to Paul's song "When I'm Sixty-Four"

22) John always maintained that Paul was particularly good at coming up with the middle eight—in "A Day In The Life," for instance, the inspired "Woke up, fell out of bed . ." section.

23) "Scrambled Eggs" was the original working title of the tune which later became better known as "Yesterday"