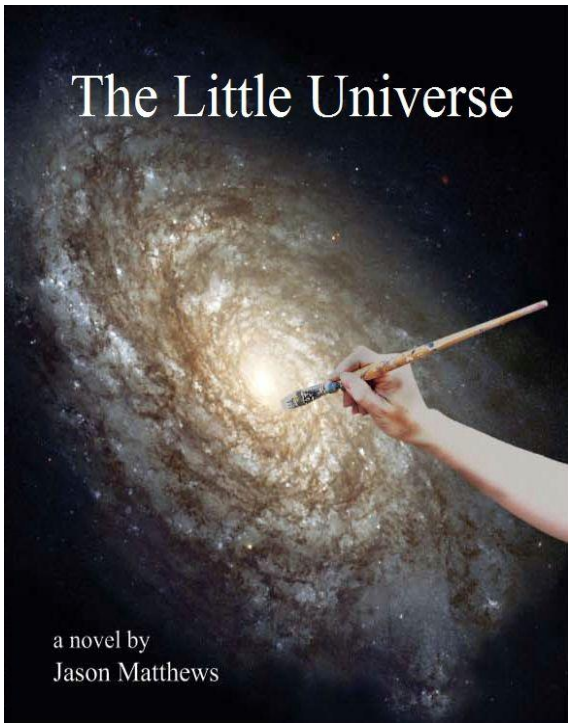

The Little Universe

a novel by Jason Matthews

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Sample 2 - Society, The Future, Elation

Society

The stars and planets slowly returned to stationary positions at the end of one of our time leaps. The cameras, one by one, went through their readjustment phase and began showing clear images on the monitors. We started the routine of data collection, changing and labeling new discs for updates of everything on record, a chore that would take weeks. We didn't begin with Alpha 17, as its cameras were still readjusting, but we were getting updates from Sigma 2 when Jim interrupted us with the news.

"There are lights on Alpha 17," Jim said plainly, as a matter of fact.

"What do you mean?" Adams asked.

"There are lights that weren't there before our last time leap."

“Let’s see.”

Our crew waited patiently for Monitor One to establish a clear focus to Alpha 17. Eventually we saw the planet’s night side. Although the oceans and landmasses were in darkness, the contours of the water and land could be identified, as well as tiny points of light twinkling through the atmosphere. Light sources beaconed to us from landmasses across the planet, concentrated around coastlines and rivers.

“Could it be fires?” Whitney asked.

“Fire has a different spectrum and wavelength,” Jim said.

“Pick a light and go in closer,” Adams said, tapping his clipboard on his desk.

Jim picked a light source and zoomed in. As the shot went ever nearer, we realized we were looking at thousands and thousands of individual lights.

“What is it?” Jim asked.

Adams stood motionless, staring at the monitor. Whitney had the same wide-eyed expression of disbelief. Adams looked at me, pointed at the monitor and broke out into nervous laughter. It took a moment for the reality to hit us, but when it did, we started shouting and laughing uncontrollably. We danced around the lab room, yelling absurdities and staring in shock at the recent addition on Alpha 17.

“What’s going on?” Jim repeated, becoming impatient with us.

“It appears to be a city,” Adams said with amazement.

“How did this happen?” I said in shock.

As Jim’s focus penetrated the skies and scanned the metropolis, we saw structures everywhere. The streets were lined with buildings, and cars moved by them. We saw factories with smokestacks, boats docking at a harbor and small planes taking off from a runway. We could even see a residential area where the homes were packed together in neat little rows.

“Jim, can you confirm the duration of our last time leap?” Adams finally asked.

“About fifty thousand standard orbits as scheduled.”

“Surely that couldn’t have been enough time,” Adams said, fumbling through his notes on the planet.

“Enough time for what?” I asked.

“You don’t go from primates to this in fifty thousand years!”

“Why not?” I asked.

“Evolution takes time, Jon. Usually huge amounts of time, like millions of years! Not fifty thousand.”

“How do you know? No offense, but have you done this before?” I said, pointing to the monitors.

“It’s just not reasonable.”

“Reasonable or not, there it is,” Whitney said.

“We must have missed something,” Adams insisted.

“Like what?” Jim asked.

“There must have been tribes we didn’t see. There must have been primates walking upright on two feet. There must have been a link from ape... to this!”

“Maybe they just evolved quicker than you thought they could,” Whitney offered.

Jim took the shot in closer to a well-lit outdoor market and we analyzed the citizens. They wore simple clothing of basic colors. Shirts and pants without much flair was the norm. Some of the outfits were one-piece jumpsuits. The fashion theme was comfortable though a bit boring.

We compared the people to the primates from our logs. There were similarities though the modern version looked far more sophisticated and soft-featured. The current Alphans walked on two feet upright in stance, with straight spines. They were taller but still a bit stocky. They had larger eyes and less body hair though their faces were covered with a thin coat of hair—a feature for men, women, and children. I found the size of their eyes to be interesting and wondered if that had something to do with their speedy evolution.

“Big eyes, big brains,” I told Whitney. “See the relationship?”

“More like dim sun, big eyes,” she reasoned. “Their sky is dimmer than ours. To see well, they need to take in more light.” The blue-white Alphan star was bright and hot, yet smaller and further away in comparison.

We rechecked the wilderness areas and found groups of primates identical to the ones from our logs. They lived the same as before: roughhousing, grooming for ticks and eating green reeds.

“Maybe a select group branched off to become civilized,” I proposed.

“It just doesn’t make sense,” Adams said. “Fifty thousand years?”

“Why worry about it so much? We can’t go backward,” Whitney added.

Our interest in the old primates didn’t last long. Within minutes, we returned to the cities.

It amazed me to see the Alphans using products like ours: automobiles, airplanes, factories and farms built for mass production.

As the day went on, Adams became more convinced they must somehow be the descendants of our previous studies. He speculated we had either missed some small tribes entirely or that primates were capable of accelerated evolution.

“Regardless of how they got here,” Whitney said, “isn’t it incredibly coincidental that another species has evolved into something like us? Having the same inventions?”

“Aside from the timing, it is logical,” Adams said. “Evolution starts from day one and creatures get more proficient at living. Ultimately they create things. What are the most basic inventions of all?”

“Sharp rocks for killing and eating,” I said.

“And fire,” Whitney added, “for killing and eating better.”

Adams made a list. “Home, spear, fire. Once you’ve got the basics you can learn farming, clothing, medicine, then mathematics and the arts.”

I followed his line of thought. “Then you’ve got the wheel and eventually the engine.”

Jim found the concepts intriguing. His green light pulsed while we spoke about it.

“With the mammals it makes sense,” Adams went on. “Birds haven’t evolved to this, though they’ve had billions of years to try. Fish haven’t, reptiles haven’t, but apparently the right mammals do.”

“Is this the evolution of the brain?” I asked.

“Looks that way,” Adams said.

“Their heads have gotten bigger in ratio to their bodies,” Jim commented.

Something was bothering Whitney. “But why do you suppose the Alphans are so similar to us? Why do they have two arms and two legs? Why do they have a head and a face with two eyes, a basic nose, and ears, sort of, and a mouth like ours?”

“Why wouldn’t they?” I asked.

“Doesn’t it seem awfully coincidental?” Whitney added. “The first intelligent life we find ends up more or less resembling us?”

Adams found logical answers. “Maybe it’s necessary to have bipolar vision and hands with opposable thumbs and mouths capable of making so many sounds. Maybe those things are what separate the extraordinary species from the rest.”

“I just think it seems very coincidental,” she said.

We theorized the entire day. We laughed a lot and congratulated each other. We had found Alpha 17, a planet where “primordial soup” had evolved into a species of people who built major cities. If it had happened there, then it could have happened anywhere else in his creation and likely in our own universe.

That was when I finally met Frank Maxwell. When Adams broke the news to him, Maxwell came by for a visit. He was in his late sixties to early seventies with white hair. He was dressed in a dark blue tailored suit. He carried a wooden walking cane though he mostly used it for pointing at things. He opened his arms to Whitney upon seeing her.

“Young lady, look how you’ve grown. You’re as beautiful as your mother.”

“Thank you, Mr. Maxwell,” Whitney said after hugging him.

“Oh please, call me Frank. Nice to meet you, Mr. Gruber.” He took my hand and shook it longer than customary. “Webster has told me great things about you.”

“I’m sure he exaggerated. And call me Jon.”

Frank was awestruck by the project and the recent developments on Alpha 17. I watched him move throughout the lab room, carefully inspecting each monitor and the views they showed. For someone not interested in astronomy, as Adams had described, he did a good job of fooling me. He wanted to know everything about Alpha 17 as well as the other planets.

“You were right, Webster. You told me this idea could really work.”

“Rose seldom made mistakes,” Adams said.

“We all make mistakes,” Frank said, correcting him.

“Thank you for believing in us.” The two shook hands on their accomplishment and stared at the screens. Monitor One showed a busy Alphan street corner.

“There are people who will want to see this,” Frank mentioned. “People who might contribute to the financial backing.”

Almost reluctantly Adams said, “I’m becoming aware of that. I’m sure we can figure out the best way to handle this.”

Frank returned to his gaze. “They really move about, don’t they?”

“It’s summer season for this hemisphere,” Whitney observed.

The Alphan cities were packed with energetic people. The outdoor markets were flooded with activity. Merchants sold goods aggressively, calling out to passersby while holding items up for sale. Some of the customers haggled with them, walked away and then came back to negotiate. I laughed, thinking of the times I had done the same thing.

For the next several days, we studied everything about them, with Frank often popping in for a visit.

Alphans walked with a jerky gait. They had strong legs and thick torsos. They moved with power but not grace. They had a spontaneous quality about them, like that of children, and they seemed to act impulsively.

Jim enjoyed scanning the cameras through the neighborhoods. It was a summertime theme with many people outdoors enjoying the stretch of nice weather. We found kids playing games, people working on gardens and several examples of scenes that reminded me of old fashioned barbeques where neighbors ate together.

The tables were stacked with food as Alphans apparently ate large quantities, and they liked to eat in groups. From our observations, a common Alphan dinner involved having the neighbors over for a backyard barbeque of giant pig, vegetables, breads and what appeared to be intoxicating beverages. The women did most of the work while the men sat around eating and drinking.

We witnessed an odd thing. It was common for the occasional fight to break out, though when it was over everybody went back to the party, including the brawlers. Yet when the partying was done, they all went about their lives in a fairly brisk fashion, as if a certain energy kept them going.

Whitney noted, “They seem to have higher metabolism rates. They fill up on so much food, yet they go back to work on full stomachs.”

“Possibly a result of cooler air and faster revolution speeds,” Adams theorized.

During the days, Alphans built all kinds of structures. We zoomed in on a neighborhood development. The lots were tightly packed together as they maximized the number of homes in the area. They built their homes in similar fashion to the way we built ours. They started with wooden foundations and poured them with concrete. Then they built wooden frames and later added the finish work. As we analyzed their building methods, it was the first time I was the expert, explaining to the others the process and strategies of their work.

Alphans also enjoyed all sorts of games. Even at the jobsites, I noticed several men engaging in spontaneous roughhousing and tossing objects at each other. We watched many of the

neighborhood kids as they wrestled and engaged in tough contact sports, both boys and girls. Jim's first lessons in the notion of sports came through the backyards and playgrounds, while we attempted to figure out the rules of their games. Jim very much enjoyed the concepts of play, as he was just as content watching the kids run around as we were watching Alphans cities at work. Had Jim been a real person, I think he would have been a natural at play.

On the darker side, many of the larger metropolitan areas contained huge arenas for gladiators. These were primarily huge specimens of Alphans, both men and women, who battled with each other and with ferocious beasts. The gladiators wore body armor and wielded dangerous weapons. Screaming spectators filled the stands and threw objects and beverages at the participants on the field.

After watching some blows from the metal ball of one gladiator to another, I quickly realized the severity of it.

"This looks very interesting," I told Jim. "Now you're going to watch serious action."

"How so?" Jim asked.

"Because it looks like these guys aren't just playing. These guys fight to the death."

They fought on with extreme rage, hurling their weapons into each other as the crowds cheered them on. Never before had I seen such viciousness in sport.

"You mean they're intentionally trying to kill each other?" Jim asked.

"It appears that way," Whitney said.

"But why? I thought you said mammals worked as a team."

"Well, unfortunately not always."

"Can you explain it then?" Jim asked.

Whitney sighed. "No. Not really."

"Oh," Jim said. His light pulsed mildly on the concept.

Adams was less interested by the action in the arenas. Whitney found it hard to watch, especially when one of the gladiators hacked off the arm of another and then crushed his helmet with a spiked ball. The audience went wild as the victor raised his arms in triumph.

"How can you watch this, Jon? It's horrible," Whitney said.

"It helps me understand where we came from. Didn't our ancestors engage in regular warfare?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"Well, maybe this is the first step from moving out of war and into sport."

Jim asked, "If death is the outcome, is it still considered sport?"

"Perhaps," I said, "if death just happens to the individual and not to the tribe."

Whitney shook her head at my logic as she commonly did.

Regardless of where they were in measures of civilization, the Alphans were several decades to a century behind us on a level of technology. They had boats, cars and simple planes, but what we saw reminded us of our own models from earlier times. The boats and cars ran on fossil fuels, and their planes were propeller-driven.

On the roads, they drove fast. They showed little concern for speed limits or safety. When accidents occurred, the drivers usually got out of their cars and beat the daylights out of one another. No policemen or ambulances were seen. We speculated if they had any need for traffic court. We never witnessed a deadly accident, but we debated whether or not an Alphan would get into trouble if he ran over someone. Whitney hoped they did, but Adams and I thought perhaps not, judging from what we had seen in the sports arenas and at the backyard barbeques.

The more we studied them, the more we realized what a high level of energy their society had. Alphans were barbaric but not lazy. They worked long days and partied into the nights. They spread out across their planet, tearing down forests and draining marshlands to build highways and shopping malls. They lived life to the fullest, and I had to admire them for that, even if Whitney found them to be hostile.

We studied Alpha 17 exclusively for many days. Jim's recording discs had never before been filled with so much information on one planet in one time era. We worked at a feverish pace with excitement and enthusiasm. The hours and days flew by.

"While the Alphans are the most familiar species we have found, they are disturbingly lacking in some areas. I cannot find any evidence of social etiquette or law. 'Might is right' is their credo. Whitney is appalled by them, so is Jim, interestingly enough. Is he taking cues from her or does he really feel that way? Sometimes Jim surprises me. I predict advances in computers and engine systems within a hundred standard orbits. Jon has been questioning the schedule. I have to admit the idea has crossed my mind. Frank wants to let his investors see the lab. Not sure this is a good idea. What would Rose say?"

- from p. 71 of Webster's journal.

The Future

Eventually the subject came up about performing another time leap. It was Jim who first mentioned it out of simple curiosity. As soon as he did, there was little else I could talk about. Adams laughed at the notion.

"We have so much to learn about the Alphans as it is," he said, "not to mention the hundred or so other planets in our logs that have been completely abandoned since our last time leap."

"What else can we learn?" Whitney asked. "How to decapitate an opponent with one blow?" Adams didn't respond.

Whitney and I tossed arguments back and forth, weighing the pros and cons of such a decision. Each day as we documented their ways of life, we pressed Adams to consider the idea.

"In my opinion, there's no reason not to," I said.

Jim added, "What do you think will happen to the Alphans in the future?"

"I hope they might achieve a level of humanity," Whitney said. Then she added, "Why not just find out, Dad?"

"Out of the question."

But as the days went by, he became more and more intrigued. Whitney's suggestion must have sparked something within him. After a week, Adams seemed receptive to the idea. He ran his hands through his hair while he studied the monitors. Curiosity weighed against responsibility. The energy in the room was electric as we debated it.

"Jim," Adams said finally, "how much time do you think would pass in a leap adding the smallest amount of hydrogen?"

"Good question," Jim said.

It was the first time we had discussed the potentials for a mini-leap. Calculations were made to determine Jim's capabilities. The object was to fast forward the project the slightest amount possible, something the Universe Generator was not really designed to do. Adams pulled Rose's original notes from his desk. He went over the formulas and best estimates for each aspect of the operation. Jim had to release a minimal burst of hydrogen molecules, confirm it and then contract to idle. Each operation required a minimum of a few seconds. They calculated and came up with a rough estimate of ten seconds for Jim to perform the tasks.

Adams put his calculator and pen down. He leaned back, took a deep breath and said, "If all goes according to plan, it would come out to about a hundred standard orbits."

"Alpha 17's orbit is faster than standard," Jim reminded him. "More like a hundred and twenty for them."

A hundred and twenty years was a fair amount of time for a modern society. We debated the possibilities among ourselves. The excitement rose quickly.

I asked, "Should Maxwell be informed about it first?"

Adams dismissed the notion. "We've gotten to this point without Frank knowing anything. Why should he have to know now?"

To my great surprise, Adams decided to go for it. He instructed Jim to advance the universe by the smallest degree.

The humming sound began as Jim released the hydrogen. I watched the monitors. Though I could hear the familiar noise, like an electric engine, I could not detect any movement from the galaxies. They didn't budge. Some of the stars showed tiny movements, but it was miniscule in comparison to the usual leaps. This time, only the planets moved, leaving trails of light for a short period before coming back to a stop.

"That was a hundred years?" I asked.

"A hundred years is nothing to a universe," Jim reminded me.

"Let's adjust the first five monitors to Alpha 17," Adams said. His words were crisp, and I could feel the anticipation behind them.

The image from Monitor One picked up the Alpha galaxy. Then we identified the familiar blue-white sun within the maze of stars. As the monitor adjusted to search for the seventeenth planet, Whitney's eyes lit up. Jim locked in on the planet, and we recognized it as Alpha 17.

From space, it looked very similar as before although the snowy areas on the mountain ridges had receded, and the polar caps were smaller.

The planet came into closer view. The shot zoomed through the atmosphere and through the thicker air toward the coastline. I immediately sensed that a hundred years had passed. The atmosphere was thick with a low-lying haze and the cities had grown dramatically. Much taller buildings spread out in greater numbers as hundreds of flying machines filled the sky. The Alphans had become very modern, even more so than we were.

"Yes!" Adams cried out.

Jim followed some flying objects that were everywhere in the skies. Several devices caught our attention. Some looked like small, agile helicopters. Others appeared to be personal flying crafts, where individual Alphans flew around in transparent stand-up gadgets.

"They're flying!" Whitney noted. "They look like commuters."

Jim zoomed down to the ground. The traffic had become even busier with a variety of new road vehicles. The freeways were packed with them, and they moved at high speeds. Some of the cars drove attached to the roads while others took off and hovered over them.

"So this is what the future is like?" I asked.

Adams sat down in his chair as if his legs were giving out. I could tell he had never really anticipated the outcome of this time leap. He appeared overwhelmed. Alpha 17 had gone from a home of primordial soup to a giant in technology in eleven time leaps.

Whitney sensed her father's shock and went to console him.

"Everything's going to be okay," she said, standing behind him and rubbing his shoulders. "This is good news, right?"

Adams finally spoke his feelings. "When we first speculated on finding advanced life forms, no one had ever... ever talked about finding life more advanced than we are."

It was difficult to accept. We watched silently as Jim scanned around the planet, giving us a bird's eye view of their cities. I felt like I was watching a fantasy movie with a wealth of

information on display. The Alphans had better, more efficient products as well as things we didn't have at all.

The design and sheer size of their buildings was staggering. Many were shaped as giant cylinders, with large round bases rising to super-high points. These were much taller than any skyscraper of their past. Others were built out of thin and transparent materials that looked like spiders' webs, making them open to the air and convenient for flying devices to come and go.

Trying to take in the enormity of the downtown buildings and new devices gave me an intense headache. Whitney gave me a few capsules for it. We downed them together and watched the monitors with Adams in quiet shock. We sat there for hours, completely spellbound, staring at innovation, finally having to pull ourselves away for sleep.

On the way home in the truck we said surprisingly little, each feeling exhausted. When I got back to my apartment, I was disoriented.

I had trouble remembering which route I had ridden my bicycle from Webster's house. I also realized I had forgotten to put new recording discs in for Jim before we left for the night. That was a first.

I lay in bed and stared at my ceiling, thinking about it over and over. The experience was completely surreal. For weeks, I had watched gas settle and stars emerge. Then I had seen planets form and stuff start to grow. Then I had witnessed creatures evolve, with a multitude and variety more than I could have imagined. But on top of all that, within the past two weeks I had watched primates become a modern society. And then it had leapfrogged beyond us.

It was all happening at such an accelerating rate.

"Today the unthinkable happened. I did something that was in hindsight, perhaps the greatest risk I've ever taken. The result sent the Alphans into a super-modern time. Their structures and devices are far beyond ours. Several decades to a century. Frank will go through the ceiling, I know it. I doubt I'll be able to sleep tonight."

- from p. 75 of Webster's journal.

Elation

Adams called Frank the next morning and he came by immediately. When he first saw the new cities he stood in front of the monitors, laughing like a kid. Then he plunked down in a chair and asked Jim to show him around.

As we investigated the cities of Alpha 17, the flying machines in the skyways first caught our attention. In every section of sky, we saw hundreds of personal-sized little cages buzzing all over. They carried individuals mostly, but some held a couple of passengers. The pilots stood upright in a simple, metal-framed chamber in the shape of a cross with their arms out comfortably to the side. In the larger models, the passengers stood behind the pilot. They were so innovative yet they looked easy, fun and fast. There was something very different about them, unlike other flying devices I could think of. Some hovered in midair and then zoomed forward, or straight up or down, or even backward. The device seemed able to move in any direction, no matter where it was facing.

Frank stared at the monitor in disbelief. "How do these work?" he asked, following one with his finger. We all wanted to know.

"Some form of directional propulsion," Adams said.

"And strong engines," Frank added. He noticed a highway out of focus on the monitor. "Are those cars? Can we zoom in on this?"

"Show him the road by the coast that we like, Jim," I said, already having a feel for the place.

The monitor panned over to a busy freeway. It was built next to the ocean on a long stretch of coastline, a gorgeous setting for a drive.

The Alphans used an array of things as vehicles. I couldn't call them all cars because they didn't rely on tires touching the ground. Instead, the vehicles on this road floated several feet above the ground. Some Alphans rode futuristic motorcycles that had a flat area where the tires should be. They also hovered over the roadway. As the vehicles levitated, they traveled at very high speeds. The devices were so sleek and smooth that they sped along the shoreline highway with no apparent friction.

Adams pointed to the flat areas beneath the vehicles. "This looks like magnetic repulsion," he explained.

"Some of it looks like air propulsion," I added, merely quoting Adams from before but trying to impress Maxwell.

"This is incredible," Frank said. He moved closer to the monitor until he was just beneath it. He reached out a hand as if he could touch the cars.

"We've been looking at stuff like this all over the planet. There's no end to it," Adams said.

"Show me more," Frank said. "I want to see everything."

"Take him on the tour," Adams instructed.

Jim adjusted the main monitor to pan through a section of one of the busiest cities. Traffic floated in front of buildings that looked like super tall cylinders. Thousands of people and crafts filled our tiny view.

“Look at that!” Frank said excitedly upon first seeing the heart of the city.

“New factors at work here,” Adams told him.

Frank added, “When I first agreed to help fund this, I never thought there’d be something marketable in it.” Then he asked Whitney and me to have a seat. He said, “Listen to me. Big changes are necessary. A security fence will be built around the grounds, and a couple of guards will be at the front gate.” Adams nodded along as Frank went over the newly classified status of the project. “We need to get some experts in here to help us understand these products.”

Adams added, “We can’t share information or talk about work with anyone. Jon, that goes for Sam too.”

“I understand,” I said.

“You’ll be getting a huge raise,” Frank said. “I don’t know what I’m paying them, but multiply it by three.” Adams nodded.

When Frank left, I started jumping up and down. Whitney and I danced around the lab room, celebrating our good fortune. Jim played some music to go with our steps as Adams clapped along.

At the end of the day I suggested, “Let’s go out. We’ve been working for weeks. I think we should release some energy.”

Whitney agreed to the idea, but Adams told us, “Think I’ll stay here and work. Go enjoy yourselves.” He tossed me the keys to the truck. “I’ll get a cab.”

I felt instantly rich. I took Whitney somewhere neither of us had been before, a place where the waiters pampered the customers more than anyone should be. I ordered appetizers, an expensive bottle of wine, fresh fish dinners and desserts for both of us—all the things I never did at restaurants.

After gorging ourselves, we strolled around the river until we came across a small outdoor band. We stopped to appreciate the soft music they played. I stuffed a few bills in their money jar. The horn player gave me a thankful nod.

“How about a dance?” Whitney requested.

“Real dancing? I’m pretty clumsy,” I said, preferring not to.

She insisted. “Come on. It’s easy.”

She grabbed my waist and moved me around with the music. My feet shuffled in sync with hers. With each step, I felt more confident.

The horn player smiled. Then the music softened even more, and I held Whitney closer and shortened our steps. I pressed my cheek against hers and breathed in the scent of vanilla from her neck. I wanted to remember everything about that moment. As I danced and held her hand in mine, I was reminded of the ring on her finger. I debated whether to ask her about it.

Curiosity got to me, and I blurted out, “You’re not engaged, are you?”

“Because I wear this?” she asked. “This ring was my mother’s.”

“I shouldn’t have mentioned it,” I said, suddenly feeling stupid.

"How could you have known?" she said. "You know, Jon, you like to goof around but sometimes you're way too uptight."

"It's a problem I have around beautiful women," I said, shrugging my head.

"A lot of men have that problem. That's why I wear this ring."

"Keeps the jerks away?"

"Apparently not."

"Ha-ha."

"Kidding." She felt my awkwardness reach a peak. "Just relax," she emphasized, rubbing one hand over my shoulder and arm. "Listen to the music and relax." Whitney made our steps flow together.

"I can do this," I said, watching my feet.

She lifted my chin to face her. "How long have you been thinking about asking me that?"

"Since I met you," I admitted. She laughed and spun me around in circles on the dance floor.

Driving back to her house, she asked, "Do you want to stay in the guest room?"

I accepted readily. I felt too tired and slightly buzzed to ride my bicycle back to my apartment in the dark. We entered the house and saw Adams in his pajamas, turning off lights. He agreed it would be best if I stayed the night.

Whitney led me into the guest room. We sat down on the bed and looked at each other. I was still in a daze from the events at work and the dancing. It was the first time all night that I had been at a loss for words. I just sat there quietly gazing at her. She gazed back.

In a bold move I reached for her glasses to carefully pull them from her face and set them on the nightstand. As I looked into her eyes, I saw a mix of deep green and light brown. She shook her hair, brushed it back with her hand and smiled at me. She was so beautiful. I put my hand around her neck and kissed her.

We pulled back and looked at each other with slight surprise. I handed her glasses back. She put them on, looked at me and smiled again. Then she got up and slowly left the room. I lay down on the bed thinking about what had just happened. I turned out the light, undressed and got under the covers, waiting for the adrenaline rush to wear off until I finally managed to fall asleep.

(End of current sample)