

# Astrological Coincidences

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Far be it from me to tell you the truths of the universe. I am merely a vagabond, wandering through this life, traveling down the crooked trail of carpentry and contractors, seeking enlightenment where I can find it, and pleasures as they come to me.

So certainly, it was no surprise that I met a witch, a self professed witch, a South Asian enchantress who enthralled me, her words, and introduced me into her coven, for what purpose, now, I am still not sure. I had known her for over a decade, we had children about the same age, and we both lived in the suburbs, and we both seemed to be trying to create a more perfect community, she in her realm, and I in mine. I had never imagined that she was a witch; I saw only a driven and highly competent human being, well educated, with a professional degree (and license).

Then I heard that she had tried to kill herself, that she agreed not to pursue her vocational practice, that she changed her name, that she shaved her head, well, I saw that she had shaved her head, and I was concerned that the world had come so close to loosing such a positive force for social change, and social good.

So I, ever the fool, chose to insert myself into her life, to the extent that she would have me, so that I at least had done something, had made some effort to assure her that if ever the world was too much for her, that she would have one friend to rely on, should she so choose, and never choose to check out, again.

Her response, and this was over a year and a half after the suicide attempt, was to enthrall me. I opened myself to her, and she responded in kind, with seduction of, if not the body, then the spirit. Of course, having

traveled all those crooked trails in my youth, I was not unacquainted with unrequited love, and entered into it head long.

It was too late. I was trapped by my own good works, put in thrall, that is, spell bound, as we met for several fine Autumn afternoons in the cemetery overlooking the Charles River, sharing wine, and cheese, and bread, and Shakespeare's sonnets, the perfect romantic afternoons on perfect Autumn days, looking out over the hub of the universe.

It was only then I learned she was a witch, a self-professed, self trained priestess, connected to a coven which had obtained some land which looked out over a magic valley, building a pentagram-ed palace designed and oriented in the correct directions, constructed of the correct materials, suitable for all manner of pagan rituals.

My introduction to this part of her life was the Autumnal Equinox. I was literally the straight man as she and her partner, her former lover, and the motley assortment of odd fellows and girls, feathers in their hair, live action role playing wizards, young families, participated in an amalgamated ritual celebrating the equinox, Rosh Hashanah, and any other holidays that seemed to be appropriate. Synchronicity in religion lives on in the pagan hill country of Western Massachusetts..

It was the first night that we slept together. We remained pure. We always remained pure. I needed to be purified, apparently, I needed to understand myself better. I was told in too much detail of her other lovers; I was told by a mutual friend, a lover of one of her lovers, how wild it must be for me. I was welcomed into the intimate circle of friends, I massaged her feet with ointment provided by one of her girl friends, I softly rubbed her back as she sat naked in front of me, fresh from the shower, and we commented on the buttery quality of her skin, yes, she had been told that by others, we intertwined our feet in the lush Fall foliage of Western Massachusetts, we smoked together, we danced together, we ate together, we traveled together. But we did not consummate, as it is most delicately called, the carnal nature of our relationship.

In response to her, I claimed magical powers for myself, and I showed her what magical powers I had, how I could soothe the savage beasts with my

banjo and song, and how the weather was wonderful when we were together, and how even my childhood home's most sacred space, violated by the corporate greed of a great university, had been hit with an apparent tornado, flinging the red pines that would have been my mountain top log cabin like matchsticks.

But never did we become intimate, in the commonly understood meaning of the word.

A friend of hers, a street musician, was her date for Halloween, and I was not to sleep in her virginal bed that night, yet we were at the same party, dancing, once together, and he, joining her, an avowed Christian, felt somewhat strange, at this most pagan Halloween celebration, complete with ritual incantations around the outside fire, and that strange gigantic beast, arising out of the dark, a railroad's diesel engine, which blasted its air-horn through the smoke and dark, not ten feet from the fire.

He slept at her house that night, he told me, slept in the other bedroom, chaste, because he was a Christian, and because she would not forswear her poly-amorous, bisexual life style.

He played on the streets in Northampton, played mournful phrases on the saxophone, and when we talked, on the street, no one put any money in his hat, yet he played. My non-magical mind wondered how he lived, how he paid rent (he lived with his mother, I was told), how he bought food, or found gas for his car ... but it is often best not to delve too deeply in mysteries such as this, because such information not freely offered will always be suspect.

The weekend after Halloween, we were scheduled to travel together to a magical dance in the foothills of the mountains made famous by van Winkle. We were to come as a couple, but with no commitment, and stay in the house of the high priestess of pussy, a nurse who made her living teaching courses named "The Map of the Clitoris" and other such exploratory offerings. It was on this trip that I showed her the trees I had planted, now forty feet tall, or more, and showed her the spot where the tornado had hit, and showed her where I had planned to build my refuge, my cabin in the hill, back when I thought that the land was to be mine.

We arrived at our magical dance, and suddenly, her magic ran out. Her son called from his Army base basic training, saying he had to get out. Her son, who had burned every adult with whom he had contact, asked, and she said yes. She wanted my help. She asked me to lie for her. I was to take her to a hospital emergency room, say she was suicidal, say she had a history of suicidal attempts, and the army would release him to her. There was no magic in that, I thought, and so I pointed out that I did not have to lie, that if she were truly suicidal, I would gladly take her to hospital, for she attempted suicide not even two years before, and all I believed I was doing with her, despite infatuation, and sleeping with her, chaste, against my will, and the endless difficulties and potential arguments, frustrations and aggravations, all would be for nothing if she did in fact kill herself.

“Why lie?” I asked. It would be the truth, and it would enable her son to get out of the military, to care for his emotionally distraught mother. She would not listen to me, so I asked that she call a mutual friend, the friend who had cared for her son when she was hospitalized, the friend who cared for her son during his psychiatric hospitalization, the friend whom she trusted, who gave her the same advice I was giving her, and we went to sleep, at first, not touching, and then she allowed me to give her the comfort of my warm body.

The next morning she knew what she had to do, she had to talk things over with her lover in New York City, she needed bus fare. I bought her the ticket, and put her on the bus. My new friends, mappers of the divine, were most accommodating to me, since they knew her well, and saw she was acting true to form, and cared for me in my abandoned state, and I drove home alone. For her part, upon getting to the city, her friend meeting her at the bus terminal, she immediately knew, apparently that she must move on, and return to Western Massachusetts.

And so for several months we wandered through this half relationship, I traveling several hours to meet up with her every other weekend or so, she making space for me in her very confused, and confusing life, always battling the authorities, always, the IRS, the licensing board in her profession, a variety of local traffic courts, but always the battle. I sympathized, and consoled, comforted, and reminded myself again, and

again and again, and again and again and again, as she battled with me, sometimes, that I was there to preach the power of universal love, to model Gandhian forbearance in her psychic struggles, to present to her unconditional love.

Once such weekend, I was early, she was busy, she was going to be late, so I went to a restaurant, a southern style BBQ restaurant housed in a de-consecrated church. I went there to try the ribs. I had heard they were real good. They were, in fact, they were very, very good. Even better was the guitar player who appeared halfway through my dinner, started playing southern (white) country blues, seated in the area that had been the pulpit. Well, he was quite large, so he was not so much seated in the area that had been the pulpit, but pretty much completely occupied the entire area of the country meeting house's holy of holies.

So, after I had finished my dinner, I walked up to him, complemented his playing, and asked if he minded if I brought my banjo in, and sat in with him. He gave me a funny look, as if to say, "if you dare," and then agreed to share the small stage with me. So I went out into the cold autumn air, brought the banjo in, took it out of its case, and as I was waiting for it to warm up to room temperature, we talked a little.

It turned out that we had tangentially known each other thirty years in the past, when he was the eponymous blues band that played in the local pubs, and I was active the student board that managed one of the clubs he played in, when I was learning to play my banjo on the pond, when my hair was down to the middle of my back, when I was a graduate student at the university.

We knew many of the same people, the management of the student complex, the personalities involved in the wholesale transformation of that management, a transformation in which I had been intimately involved, and the local long haired hallucinogener, who had lived on a very small farm in the hills. "The Rat" had trained as an attorney, may have passed the bar, but did not practice law, for reasons which I never understood, but, did not delve into, because such information not freely offered will always be suspect.

We had gotten to know each other fairly well: for example, one evening, he offered me a wink and a mushroom which had sprouted on a neighbors horses manure – it did nothing for me – and another evening, he invited me to help slaughter a rabbit, and later that evening, he invited me to help eat it. Nibbling on the leg, holding the still furry foot did even less for me. We shared intimate friends. It was rural rustic life, lived raw.

Ed told me that the Rat had died, a couple of years before, and had, as he was dying, had one of his many girlfriends assemble a quilt, with the souvenirs, pictures and more corporal remembrances, of the many women with whom, or which, he had sexual congress, and was laid out in his casket, surrounded by this quilt, if not in spiritual heaven, then at least giving the impression of being in a heaven far more earthly than imagined by all, or at least, most of the saints of the church.

My banjo warmed up, we negotiated a song to play, I chose my old stand by, John Hardy, which he of course knew, because he knew them all, and we traded verses, well, my verses were from Woody Guthrie's "Tom Joad" and his verses were more or less the words to John Hardy, and the diners in the restaurant, having been quietly eating their meals, engaging in small talk, as Ed, that was his name, played magnificently, suddenly came alive, started clapping in time, and at the end, applauded our performance.

One of the owners of the restaurant came over, with a couple of spoons, and as we played a few more old time songs, played along with his spoons, and the his patrons appreciated every minute. Myself, I was a little taken aback, because I know where I am on the pecking order of banjo players, in terms of technique, and it is pretty low, and I could hear that Ed was pretty high on the ladder of guitar players, but I certainly was not going to turn down the audiences adulation, earned or otherwise.

About a month later, I was to visit again, and again came out on a Thursday, but this Thursday, I convinced my spiritual lover to meet me at the restaurant for dinner. And I called the owner, and asked if I could again play, and he said it was up to Ed. He asked me if I knew Ed. I said yes, more or less, knowing that any musician who names his band after himself has no shortage of ego, but, as you shall shortly discover, I did not really know

Ed, at least as well as the owner meant. Ed had a history, on stage of being, in a word, labile..

My witch and I arrived, and sat down, ordered our dinner. We quietly engaged in our small talk, like the other rib eaters there that evening, until Ed showed up. Deferentially, I waited until he had played a few songs, and went up to him, re-introduced myself, he sort of smiled, and then I asked if I could sit in again. Again, the sort of smile, and, yes, I could sit in. so I got the banjo out of the truck, left it in the stage area, and went back to finish my dinner, and wait for the banjo to warm up.

The two of us, the enchantress and I, continued our small talk, like the other diners that evening, while Ed played in the background, we finished our meal, we talked about desert, she ordered tea, to sip, and I went up to the stage area, squeezed next to the owner, who had gone up to the stage to play spoons with Ed, and began opening my banjo case.

BANG!

Ed stopped playing mid song. With that same sort of smile, he launched into me, telling me to “get the fuck off the stage, and take my motherfucking, piss poor excuse for an instrument off it before he smashed it”, and on and on and on, and how could I dare come up on the stage with them, disturb their music. He publicly ranted. The owner looked at him, his mouth set, steely eyes, the owner looked at him, as Ed went on, and on, for an eternity, or so it seemed to me, as I retreated, my head spinning, to our table. I now knew Ed.

I sat down. I asked if she had seen what had happened. She sipped her tea. I told her I would be in the truck. I paid the bill. I went to the truck. Five minutes later, having finished her tea, apparently, she came out, and told me how the owner had apologized to her, and how she had told the owner she would never eat there on a Thursday night again, and how concerned for me she was, seeing how I looked as I came back to the table, how I was purple, and she, a trained health professional, thought I was getting far too upset, at least for my health ... It was the beginning of the end.

In every relationship with another person, no matter how intimate, we find opportunities to know ourselves, to grow ourselves, as we come to understand others, and our reactions to them. As I puzzled out her moods, her actions, her reactions, her playful child, her judgmental adult, her rigidity, her flexibility, I saw so much of myself, and of my relationships through the years, my own brokenness, and my own fractured relationships, and I realized that I could not really help her, unless she wanted me to help. I had tried to show her unconditional loves, so that she was never again so alone or isolated that she might harm herself, and I learned that she had not been alone or isolated, but had chosen to make some sort of statement, its sources I could never fathom, but only that it had to do with her childhood, I guess ... and perhaps, it was my own loneliness and isolation that I needed to address, but not with her.

And so I withdrew, slowly, supportively, over the next several months I withdrew. I maintained contact with her, I established that if she needed to contact me, she always could, and I let the relationship drift down several layers of intensity. I was able to establish a different sort of relationship with her, a measured relationship, measured by the minutes on the cell phone she was using, a cell phone which I controlled. My business had been slow, and I had accumulated a substantial amount of free minutes. It was her only phone. I gave her the phone, and the minutes. Within nine months, a year after our first deep connection, the Autumnal Equinox, they were all gone, and we had to renegotiate how free the phone was to be. It no longer would be free; she was to pay for her use of it, or lose it. I was able to reconfigure the relationship, so that my gift to her of the phone became not one to be that of a lover to a beloved, but a sharing of communal resource, for the benefit of all. She began to pay her way.

But I am ahead of myself.

The Spring Equinox passed uneventfully, as did the summer solstice, or so I thought.

It was about the time of the Autumnal Equinox that I learned that the BBQ restaurant had burned down, burned to the ground. According to the



owner, the cause of the fire was undetermined. The owner told my former lover, now my maybe friend, that he was not sure if he would resurrect it.

I wanted to learn more. I searched the web. I learned that the restaurant, a former church, had in fact burned down, and the cause of the fire was “under investigation” meaning, I presumed, possible arson. Sometimes business which are not doing well have suspicious fires, but this business was doing extremely well. It had burned down on a Thursday evening in June. When I consulted my calendar, I learned that it had burned down on the Summer solstice, but perhaps this was just an astrological coincidence.

[At this point, should I expand the story, you would learn of the chthonic nature of that happy valley, going back half a billion years, or millions of years, or mere centuries, or decades, delving into the seeming connections between these geologic and cultural eras ...

A draft of some of the ideas and events which would be included: I invite you to look out over the level land of Hadley, Massachusetts. Climb the Holyoke Mountain range for the best view. [See Mt. Warner.](#)

Geologically, Mt. Warner is in part Silurian, that is, half a billion years old. That was well before the dinosaurs, in fact, well before most complex fauna. I mention this only because the chthonic history of the region is ancient, very ancient.

From your same vantage point, you will see the Connecticut river snaking down through the gap in the mountains. Next time you have a chance, drive down State Route 5, from Northampton, toward Holyoke, and stop to see the dinosaur foot prints on the shore of the river.

Dinosaur footprints! You can put your foot in them, as I have, and be transported in three of the four dimensions back to the time and the place of the dinosaurs. Well, almost, because we have not yet mastered time travel, but you will, I have been, standing exactly where a dinosaur once stood. Millions of years ago.

Much more recently, as the glaciers receded, the ice dam that blocked what was to become the Connecticut River melted, and glacial Lake Hitchcock became the Pioneer Valley, flat and fertile. On its edges, the hills to the east into Pelham, the hills to the west towards Cummington, are populated with sand and gravel pits, from the rivers and streams that fed the now empty valley with their effluent.

Arriving at the same time were the indigenous peoples, the American Indians, spreading throughout the Americas at a remarkable speed from the Bering Strait. With them, of course, was their hominid culture, good and bad, including forms of politics, warfare, husbandry of natural resources, and extermination of major fauna. These peoples established their aboriginal cultures, astrological, of course, from which we can both learn, adopt, and also refine and reject. We walk in their footsteps, just like we walk with the dinosaurs. More information can be found in the piece about Mt. Warner.

Merely four hundred years ago, we Europeans arrived. We destroyed the indigenous cultures, both with our warfare, and our germs, and put in its place several iterations of Christian culture: The Great Awakening, Shays Rebellion, The Second Great Awakening, the Industrial Revolution, Higher Education, Spiritualism, and the scientific method. All these are cultural artifacts; all these have as their source conflicting world views. All these have as meaning as much as any astrological coincidence might have.

You see I have a lot to write. You see I need to be motivated to write. You will learn that I was the Bicentennial Coordinator, back in 1973/4 for the University of Massachusetts. You will learn, if you can convince me to expand this piece, that I have a collection of source papers for the course I taught, "Colonial Life in the Pioneer Valley." You will learn that I lost that job because, at the Bicentennial of the Boston Tea Party, I carried a sign that said "Dump Nixon, Smoke Tea."]

Exactly the weekend of the Autumnal Equinox, I was in Western Massachusetts once again. One evening, waiting for the Friday night dancing to begin, I chanced upon a guitar and mandolin player, playing old time music, on the Main Street of Northampton. I had never seen them before, but they were very good, and so, as if to replicate the experience of the previous year, I asked if I could join in. They said yes, and I got my banjo out of the truck, and tuned to their slightly non-concert tuned strings. Something was a little off. Across the street, the saxophone was softly playing, for no one. Everyone had their case out and open. No one was receiving any donations.

We played. They played very fast. We played real good for free, and an elderly man came up to me, telling me that he played the banjo also.

So we began to talk, his banjo was Dixieland, not five string, as I recall, and “no”, he did not have it, and anyway, he was soon to meet some friends around the corner. And I shared that I was a general contractor, specializing in kitchens, and looking for work in the area, and he mentioned that he was the former building inspector of Holyoke, a city to the South, the birth home of the father of a former lover of mine, for whom I worked one summer, whose business was selling kitchens. The circles were converging..

The conversation then took on topics that seemed, upon reflection, to have several layers of meaning. He was, as he said, the building inspector from Holyoke for many years, at the time of the collapse of Holyoke’s mill industries, at the time of Holyoke’s rash of fires “of undetermined causes.” He became an expert in detecting arson.

As the expert, he shared with me, as if to make some kind of point, he was called in all over the area, whenever there was a fire of “undetermined causes.” He paused..

He asked how I knew the musicians I was playing with, there on the street. I did not. They were complete strangers to me.

So he told me that he was part of group that met every Thursday night, a pause, every Thursday night, a pause, to play old time music, a pause. I

said that it was very rare that I was in the area on Thursdays, since I live in Boston, but maybe, if I were, I might join them.

He was encouraging me to try to come, some Thursday night, to sing, telling me to come in the back entrance, into the basement next to the police station, where they like to sing. A pause. A good group of people, he said, and maybe I might like to come sing. A pause. Every Thursday. A pause. Basement of the Police station. A pause.

“Well, I hoped to make it sometime,” I said, as he bid me farewell, saying he had to meet his friends around the corner. The fiddle and mandolin then packed up, and left. No names, no future. Anonymous contacts, young kids, superb musicians who played real good, for free. Like the scent of the season on the wind, they were there, and then were gone. Like smoke, like the memory of fire.

I looked across the street, to see the saxophonist, to say hello to him. The last time we had met was entirely by chance, nine months before, waiting in line at the State House on the day of the inauguration of the new Governor, he ecstatic, because he was to shake hands, brown hands, with the first brown skinned Governor of the Commonwealth.

Like the scent of the season on the wind, he was gone.

I stood on the street, feeling as if I were alone on a desolate beach. Nowhere to go, nothing to do, so I decided to see where this room, in the basement behind the police station, where the room was that these musicians met. The rear basement room of the police station, where people sing. Turned out to be a church social hall, outreach, mission center, with signs posted about the food distribution, and the availability, or lack thereof, of shelter for the homeless, and the usual assortment of pamphlets advertising leftist meetings and campaigns, as if the outpost of some revolutionary fragment left over from the sixties.

I left Western Massachusetts, that evening, and did not return for several months.

Over that time, I reflected on the conversations of the evening, and applied to them a variety of interpretations.

Of course, the easiest was that the evening was just what it seemed, on the surface, that there was no subtext, no hidden meaning, no agendas. Just another Autumnal Equinox evening, on the streets of Northampton.

As a carpenter, I work with my hands. I address the issues before me. I do not try to make sense of the relationship between the wood and the nail, the floor and the wall. I take each task as it comes, and complete it.

But in my relationships with other individuals, and with society, I have learned to look more deeply. I have been taught to tease out patterns, to understand psychological, and sociological, and political structures, artifices, upon which I can construct theories about why people act, and why things happen the way they do. Some of the theories are quaint and fanciful, and some are dark and demonic.

The next most benign speculation is that magic does happen, and it happens astrologically. Without any particular meaning, of course my intense relationship should begin on the equinox, and the fire should happen on the solstice, and the conversation with the arson investigator should occur on the equinox. Of course, the heavens are tuned to such events. We may read meanings into such events, and dispute the meanings, but the important piece is that there is a confluence of such events in congruence with the rhythms of the earth and its star. Astrological divination, astrological coincidences.

A great advantage of astrological thinking is that we must accept the world the way it is, because nothing can be done about the placement of the stars at our birth. We might as well argue with the tides as to try to change our fate. Preordained, and fore-ordained, the stars, as the circle the earth (or so it seems), care little what we think, or what we do. Wander as they might, those planets and moons, we can never change their even erratic courses.

Magical thinking has the advantage of always having the answers to the unanswerable questions of life. To be a successful practitioner of magical

thinking, one needs two sets of skills, intellectual and interpersonal. Intellectual in the capacity to hold, within the mind, a large amount of information, easily retrieve, to access, or not, as the situation demands. In this way, much magical thinking, or astrological thinking, is much like modern medicine, which also requires the ability to access and astounding complexity of specific empirical information, so as to make informed judgment. Of course, it is no accident that the practice of medicine used to be in the realm of magicians, because humans simply did not know, two centuries ago, that there were such things as bacteria, or protozoa, that lived within us, and made us sick, nor did they know, even a century ago, that there were elements of cells, virus, which would infect the very genetic material of the cell, and they still don't really know how cancer works, how it develops, how it spreads, other wise there would be a cure, as there has been developed for diseases ranging from rabies to cholera.

The interpersonal aspect of magic is a social skill set, bedside manner it is called in medicine, which is far more important in magic than medicine, because magic, unlike medicine, does not guarantee results.

Results are the key to modern, reductionist thinking. Results oriented social engineering, modeled after the physical engineering that has so transformed our world over the last four centuries. But we were raised in the age of Newton, one of the first to divine the order of the universe, and discern the subtle and simple laws by which the stars, and the planets, moved in the heavens. No longer were we the center of the universe, no longer were its rhythms designed to exalt and understand human inclinations, human behavior. We became but specs of sand in an ethereal world so vast that still, centuries later, it defies understanding.

Yet with our understanding of it, if not the entire universe, then that part of it closest to us, we have been able to harness not only the powers of earth, air, fire and water, but the very sun itself. We have become the controllers of nature. Mountains tumble to the sea, not because of the fates, the stars, but because of you and me.

And so we think we can understand our society, its members, in similar, mechanistic manners. We can decode the simple regularities which inform the actions of individuals, the patterns of a culture, and we can control and

change them, just as we control and change the course of the great rivers of the world.

Of course, you and I have not the power to harness the sun, nor to move mountains, nor even to change the channels of rivers. We just understand that it can be done. And, because we understand that it can be done, and have a glimmering of how, we think we can understand our society, how it changes, how it is change, and how we might be able to do that.

Now there have existed in this country, since its founding, communities set apart, created, intentionally designed to form a better world. In New England, we are most aware of this as we study the Pilgrims and the Puritans. Of the latter, it is most clear that they obtained a grant from the King of England for land in the New World, the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and, having transferred themselves to this land, intended to, in the words of its founder, establish "a city upon a hill" with the eyes of the world upon it.

These utopian visions did not end in the seventeenth century, but continued on into the eighteenth century, and then flowered in the nineteenth century, as the economic wealth of the former colonies allowed the explosion of a high culture of arts and literature. It was not just the transcendentalists, with Brook Farm and Fruitlands in Massachusetts, but a whole slew of religious sects, free lovers, like the Oneida community, and no lovers, like the Shakers, who created social institutions with the explicit purpose of cooperation for the greater good.

Dear reader, take heart, I will soon get to the point. Dear reader, trust me, please. Dear reader, what follows is not the ranting of a paranoid. Dear reader, please understand that is actually in our societies best interests for its leaders to think in such devious ways as I am about to present.

Whew!

Imagine, an elite school, at which the daughters of the wealthy, the princesses of the country come to learn the social graces, to make the connections, to meet the husbands, who will grow the family wealth, who will be successful in the worlds of commerce and finance. Qualifications for

entering this school are, first of all, money, and second of all, social station, and third of all, intelligence. The school is created to serve the eugenic interests of the ruling classes of our now wealthy country.

A century ago, it was so formed, back when class lines were quite clear, back when to be working class was to be less of a citizen, back when even to be a woman was to be less of a citizen, denied the right to vote, denied the opportunity to participate as a full person in the society and economy of the country.

But things change. Our society opened up. The unwashed are admitted to the citadels of learning. Yet the presumed virginal daughters' purity must be preserved. A steel hand must be constructed, within a velvet glove. A happy and free environment must be nurtured within the jungle of a dying mill town.

The city fathers understand that the innocent daughters may walk down the hill, to the town, to shop, to learn of life, and that they must be protected, for the sake of the town, for the sake of the survival of the town, for the college has become a central part of the economy of the town.

But they must be subtle, and smooth. If there are to be good works, the eliomistry works of all daughters of nobles, so smart, and so accomplished, must be protected, from the ruffians, and from themselves, but the daughters must never know.

It's just the way it is.

But, we need to be realists. We need to understand that insurance companies, and fire departments, and police departments, have a legitimate interest in fires of "suspicious origin," and should rightfully investigate their causes. And if a well experienced arson investigator, a building inspector, determines that there was no good reason for a fire to occur, then he might investigate leads, to see who would benefit from arson, or who might have had cause to commit arson, for reasons so mundane as the psychological disturbance known as pyromania, or as a part of some personal retribution because of some incident which had happened at those premises.



Doing a thorough job, he might have found that the guitar player had made many enemies over his life, but in particular, he had enraged one person, known to the authorities of the valley from his life there decades ago, when that persons hair was down to the middle of his back, when he was known as a friend of the then bomb throwing Weathermen, when he upset the apple-cart of “go along, get along” politics that ruled the construction of the new University, back when he publicly advocate not just the impeachment of President Nixon, but the legalization of marijuana.

This guy was definite crazy. Perhaps, somehow, he was involved in this fire of “suspicious origin.”

The arson investigator knew that, if this fire was arson, whoever started it was very good at covering his tracks, because he found no physical evidence of arson. But, nonetheless, he should investigate this lead. He should interview this possible suspect. But of course, calling him into an interview, an interrogation, would yield no useful results, because the suspect would just clam up, profess ignorance and innocence, and that would be the end of it.

So he would have to be approached as friend, a possible colleague, through common musical interests. An open air interview on the street would have to be arranged. He would figure out the next time this banjo player was in town, stage some street musicians to entice him to play, and then softly come over to stage a friendly conversation, casually mention arson, casually mention the basement room in police headquarters, assess the reactions of the suspect, be a human lie detector.

Of course, the arson inspector would have to arrange his schedule to meet, as if by chance, this suspect. Fortunately, the civil authorities of the town had established a soft surveillance system in the town. The purpose of the surveillance system was not so much to spy on the citizens, but to ensure that the town remained a safe place for the many women, the many militant women, the many lesbian women, who lived in the town, and to ensure the safety of the many young women who attended the elite woman’s college a short walk of the hill from the downtown area.

Again, this was established not because they wished to create a police state. Quite the contrary. They wanted to avoid establishing a police state, and allow the relatively free flow of non-addictive drugs to continue in town, of which they were completely aware, while at the same time, excluding the street sale of such substances, and certainly, any public sale of the harder drugs, the drugs which bring with them guns and the kind of mayhem which would destroy the pleasant town in the happy valley.

So they established a relationship with a seemingly harmless street musician, clean cut, Christian, African American, who had grown up in the neighboring town, they established a relationship with this man, a relationship of which he was hardly aware, except for the occasional conversations with his social worker, as his disability benefits were negotiated, and other services provided, and in exchange for which, he talked freely about the issues of importance in his life, such as the election of the Commonwealth's first African American Governor, or the rise of the pagan religious communities in the valley, of which he had disapproving knowledge because of his relationship with a priestess of that community, or if he had seen particular people, having been shown mug shots, truly bad people who had done bad things, who any decent, Christian, clean cut citizen would want put behind bars. He may have seen some of these, as he was playing his saxophone on the street, and he would have seen nothing wrong with "ratting them out" because they did him no good either.

Of the magical community, he disapproved. His handlers were more interested in the drug trade, for they suspected that many of the people involved in this community were participants in the ample drug trade in the area, in all roles, including producers, distributors, and consumers, but once again, the authorities were not much concerned with the non-addictive drugs, grown in some of the nearby hill towns, with the full knowledge (and a financial relationship) of the town fathers of those towns, but far more interested if some of the more vicious distributors, from the cities to the south, chose to enter into the fray.

So by chance, as it happened, this source had a relationship with the banjo player who, if anyone might, had a motive for causing the fire. They learned of the relationship after their source had attended the inauguration

the new government, for which they had paid his car fare, as a special “Christmas” gift, apparently cash out of pocket, as if a truly generous gesture, which it was, because it was truly touched their source, though they did submit it on an expense voucher as an incidental expense, they learned that he knew when this banjo player might appear in town, and so, in their meetings, they would happen to softly mention the banjo player, and then, in early September, they heard he would be in town the third week of September.

Bingo. They put another set of their community surveillance team on the street, a fiddle player and a mandolin player, hoping to snag the banjo player.

Bingo, it worked. There he was. The arson investigator lived only ten minutes away, and was able to meet approach the banjo player, was able to interview him, was able to determine, through his answers, that this man had nothing to do with the fire, and so, the arson investigator concluded his business.

The saxophone player was no longer needed, so he headed home. The fiddle and mandolin player had completed their task, and so they packed up their instruments, with not a word of welcome, nor a word of goodbye.

The banjo player, the writer of this story was left to puzzle the long threads of paranoia that grew in his mind.

And puzzled ...

And puzzled ...

And concluded that if there was any reason to make sense, to construct a short story based on these factual occurrences, one might as well believe in magic as to believe in the reality of such a paranoid fantasy. When I have told people this story, orally, it makes much more sense to the writer, that is, to me, the paranoid fantasy part, but, having written it out, I discover what a gigantic artifice must be created in order for all those planets of the mind to be in convergence, and their moons, and their suns, and the whole

artifice tumbles down, into the dust, from which we came, and which we will become.

Or so it seems. As a friend of mine, a university professor of sociology told me, "Just because you are paranoid doesn't mean that they are not out to get you."