

Here, Eyeball *This!*

David Heddle

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For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. (Romans 1:20, ESV)

“For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.”

Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers*, 1978,
W.W. Norton, NY.

CHAPTER ONE

Friday, August 25, 1989

Acetone.
Aaron hated that sickening, fruity smell. And even if he didn't, he'd have grown sick of it by now.

He took one last look around the lab, to make sure he hadn't left anything plugged in that might cause a fire over the weekend. Satisfied, he shut off the lights and stepped into the seventh floor hallway, letting the door close behind him. He waited to hear the telltale sound of the lock engaging. Good. Now it's off to his room down in Oakland, where cold beer sat in his fridge and a half finished Clive Barker novel waited for him like a loyal bloodhound.

He had endured a summer of working for Professor Rusk, drilling pin holes in two meter long aluminum strips that would form the frames of charged-particle detectors. After drilling the holes, he sanded the pieces to remove any burrs. As a final step, he wiped them clean with cheesecloth soaked in acetone, the solvent of choice. Over three months, he had completed more than a hundred strips. The boredom was palpable, but at least this was his last day. If he never saw another strip of aluminum, he'd die happy.

Heading toward the bank of elevators, he brought his hands to his nose and sniffed. Not good. In spite of scrubbing them with Lava

soap in the lab sink, to the point where his knuckles felt raw, they still had a chemical reek.

Forget about it. After today, he'd no longer have to deal with acetone.

He dropped his hands from his nose and looked up, just in time to avoid colliding with Becky Lindstrom. Great. She must have seen what he was doing. Should he bother explaining why he was sniffing his hands?

Lindstrom didn't give him the chance.

"Did you get my email about the reception for the new grad students?"

The fall semester, his first semester as a grad student, would start on Monday. Tomorrow, on Saturday, the department would hold a get-acquainted luncheon for the newcomers. Lindstrom had emailed him, asking him to attend, but he had decided to skip it. He liked parties and lunches, but with people he knew. Meeting a group of new students, most of them foreigners, made him nervous. He preferred to spend the last carefree, summer weekend with his returning undergrad buddies. By tomorrow afternoon they would be arriving on campus in droves, carting cardboard boxes full of clothes, CDs, and snack food up to their dorm rooms. And they would relieve the late August Pittsburgh heat with cold suds.

It was all a question of *being* himself, which was easy, compared to *acting* like himself, which he felt like he had to do around strangers. That he found almost impossible.

Rather than email Lindstrom an excuse, he had chosen to snub the request. But he hadn't counted on Lindstrom cornering him in the hallway. He should've worked later or left earlier.

"Yeah, I got it. I just haven't had a chance to respond."

"I see. Well I hope you'll stop by. Most of these kids are taking their first trip abroad. You'll be on *terra cognita*, a twofer, not just an American, but a hometown. You'll make them feel welcome."

"Actually, I did have something else planned. What about Ken? Is he around?"

Lindstrom scowled.

“Look, we both know that Ken Dolittle isn’t the first American classmate that the foreign students should meet. I need you there; I hope you can get out of your other commitment.”

Lindstrom, the chair of the department, was the only woman on the physics faculty. She was in her mid forties, short and husky. She had curly brown hair with golden highlights, hazel eyes and a wide nose. She folded her arms across her belly as she spoke, and her emotionless expression and unwavering gaze made it clear that she had made a request in name only. He knew that she could see through him, knew that he just wanted to blow it off, and that his other so-called plans were a fiction.

“I’ll be there,” he said. As if he had a choice. Man, she was one imperious broad.

“Good,” Lindstrom said, with a victorious nod. She shifted gears into mop-up mode. “I especially want you to meet Hiroshi. Hiroshi Yoto. He’s the new Japanese student. I put him in an office with you up on the eighth floor, the one next to Suskind. His English isn’t too good, so I’m hoping you’ll help him out.”

Wonderful. Who elected him as Lindstrom’s guy Friday? Still, she had delivered some unexpected good news. She had assigned him the student office next to Professor Suskind, primo real estate on the eighth floor, complete with windows. New grad students usually got the interior dungeons.

“You’ve already talked to him?”

“No, but I know it’s bad. He scored four-twenty on the TOEFL.”

Aaron squinted. “Four-twenty? How’d he get in? I thought we had a five-fifty minimum.”

She turned her head and looked to the side, at nothing in particular. Then she turned back once again to stare at Aaron.

“For one thing, he smoked the physics achievement test. And he got a strong recommendation from Arima, who called from Tokyo to talk to me. So we decided to waive the requirement.”

That would do it, Aaron knew. A phone call from a world-class physicist halfway around the globe carried a lot of weight.

“Why’s he coming here?” As soon as he said it, he wished that he could take it back. He didn’t mean to insult his own department right to the chair’s face. “I mean, Japan’s grad schools are as good as ours. It’s not like he’s from China or India.” Most countries used America to train their graduate students. Japan was an exception.

“That’s true. But you have to remember, no graduate department smaller than ours is rated higher.”

Aaron had heard Lindstrom’s slogan many times before. He hated it. Someone should tell her it doesn’t work. You have to think about it too much. No way would a top Japanese student come to CMU just because of our reputation. This guy must have pissed someone off to get himself banished.

“Right,” he said, just to say something.

“Okay then, that’s that, and I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Lindstrom turned and headed back to her office. Along the way, she looked over her shoulder. “Oh, and Aaron, go wash your hands.”

The next day, Aaron arrived at the reception a few minutes late, pretending not to notice Lindstrom’s icy gaze. Looking around, he decided that she didn’t need him. She had invited some of the senior foreign grad students, and the newcomers had gravitated to their older countrymen. The new Chinese students had gathered around Kevin Chang, a second year student from Taiwan. Prabakhar Misra, a third year student, held court with the new Indian students. Go for it. Maybe there’d be nothing here for him to do.

The department held the get-together in the undergraduate lab. Someone, probably the lab supervisor, had stowed the equipment that usually sat out—oscilloscopes, balances, and power supplies—into huge tan and gray metal lockers. A wall-sized periodic table, with a corner torn off, and a poster from San Francisco’s *Exploratorium* describing the four fundamental forces of nature served as the only adornments on the drab olive walls.

Maria had put out a spread of cheese, veggies, and crackers on a large, silver faux-aluminum tray, which she placed on the dark granite

countertop. She also filled the deep double-sink with crushed ice and buried a variety of sodas and bottled water.

Two Caucasians stood talking over in the far corner by a rack of obsolete electronic equipment. Aaron fished a bottle of water out of the sink and headed over in their direction. He hoped they were Americans and not Europeans.

Their conversation stopped when they noticed him approaching. They both sat their paper plates down on the countertop and started wiping their hands on paper napkins.

“How’s it going? Aaron Dern,” he said. He extended his hand first to a huge bearded fellow in a blue blazer, and then to a fit, muscular, but unhappy looking guy with longish hair, between light brown and blond. The muscular guy didn’t have a beard, but he could have used a shave.

“Patrick O’Neill. Nice to meet you,” the big guy said. He had a pleasant expression, almost parental in its concern.

The other student chimed in. “Bernie Roche,” he said. He seemed reluctant, or maybe suspicious. He looked tense in an aggressive way, like a coiled spring, or one who expected a fight.

What’s up with that?

An awkward moment of silence followed: a subconscious probing of one another through body language and flitting eye contact.

“Where’re you guys from?” Aaron asked. Even that simple question took effort. Nobody, except maybe Lindstrom, mistook Aaron for a people person. Never good at making small talk with strangers, he’d rather be over at Donner drinking a cold brew, even an Iron City.

“I’m from Penn,” O’Neill said. He had understood that, in this situation, the question meant *where did you go for undergrad?* not *where were you born?*

University of Pennsylvania. That’s trouble for sure. Penn is a damn good school.

He noticed that O’Neill wore a silver necklace with a nicked and tarnished cross. Too cheap to be jewelry, it must represent a commitment. He’s a real Catholic. Odd. How could someone aspire to be a serious scientist and be religious at the same time?

Aaron turned to Roche.

“Pitt,” he said.

That explained the belligerence. Most Pitt students were defensive regarding their alma mater. Just a stone’s throw west of CMU, The University of Pittsburgh’s credentials as a party school exceeded its academic reputation. This Roche was a real piece of work, but at least he’d be no threat. CMU students referred to Pitt as *U. Pitiful* and mocked Pitt’s gothic, forty-story Cathedral of Learning, the tallest academic building in the world, as the *Tower of Ignorance*, all of which was unfair. Although it enjoyed a better reputation than Pitt, CMU wasn’t Ivy League; it was nothing more than the top-dog in Pittsburgh. But the CMU students loved to make fun of their neighbor. Just like in high school, when the sophomores lorded it over the freshman, as long as no upperclassmen were around.

“I went here,” Aaron said.

“You went to Carnegie Mellon undergrad?” Roche asked.

Roche pronounced it car-NAY-gie. That’s a dead giveaway. He’s a native. The rest of the world, taking its cue from New York, mispronounced it as CAR-neh-gie.

“Yeah. Hey, so you’re from the Burgh?” Aaron didn’t expect to find another Pittsburgher in his grad class. Then he took a closer look at Roche and saw that he shouldn’t have been surprised. Tall and thick, with a five o’clock shadow four hours early, Roche looked truer to the Pittsburgh blue collar image than Aaron, who was fit but short and baby-faced, and shaved only once a week. He could imagine Roche, no farther back in time than the previous generation, emerging from a steel mill, black-faced with soot, a maul slung over his sleeveless sweat shirt. What was “Roche” before his grandfather shortened it? Rochakowski? Must have been something like that.

“Well, Greentree,” Roche answered, naming a suburb just west of the city.

“Nice, me too.”

“From Pittsburgh? What part?”

“Northside, just by the stadiums.”

Aaron identified his neighborhood, part of the inner city just north of the Allegheny River, known for decrepit streets and violent crime. Like the other kids growing up there, Aaron had to know which

streets were safe and at what part of the day; where you could go alone, and where you needed backup.

Roche's head kind of bounced upward, in a *whoa, that's surprising* gesture.

"Northside? Cool." He nodded and seemed to relax, his features softening. Aaron had seen similar reactions many times before, when people granted him a kind of urban respect.

"I grew up just outside Philly," O'Neill said. So Penn was a hometown school for him. None of the three had ventured far from home for college.

Roche needled him a bit. "Oh, you mean the side of the state that *doesn't* win super bowls."

Pittsburghers still try to milk civic bragging rights from those fading Steelers glory days. It's getting harder all the time.

"I'm from Seattle. University of Washington."

The three men turned in the direction of the scratchy but identifiably feminine voice. That's odd, she stood no more than five feet away, but somehow she had hovered there unnoticed. How long was she there? She was ghostly pale and rail thin. In every way straight lined and right angled, with scraggly, colorless hair, and thick, round glasses. She wore a red tee shirt, denim shorts, and leather sandals. Aaron suppressed a shudder when he noticed that her knobby-kneed legs needed a shaving.

So she's from Washington. Good grad school, but lousy undergrad. Almost open enrollment. Just like Pitt. She's no threat.

"Sorry. You guys were about to get into, you know, a pissing contest about sports teams. Just wanted to save you from embarrassing yourselves. I'm Maya, by the way. Maya Dupree. I know your names. I heard you talking." She held a clear plastic glass full of coke and ice and lifted it in a casual, halfhearted salute.

"So why'd you stay here for grad school?" she asked, looking at Aaron.

A fair question. Most students go somewhere different for grad school. But he didn't want to get into that discussion.

"Complicated," he said, and then tightened his lips.

“I hope she’s worth it,” Roche said, showing good but unwelcome insight.

Aaron shrugged. “As it turns out, she’s not.”

He knew they wanted some details, but for once Becky Lindstrom helped him out by interrupting the awkward conversation. She called for everyone’s attention, only to give a vapid, forgettable welcome to the new students. *It will be hard work, but I promise it will be fun too, and you’ll make many new friends. You’ll never again learn so much in such a short time.*

After Lindstrom’s speech, Aaron avoided the previous topic by using the excuse that Lindstrom wanted him to mingle with some of the new foreign students. He walked over to the Chinese group. They looked the least intimidating, having dwindled down to Kevin Chang and two new students, an impressive looking guy with a wrestler’s physique wearing a green sweat suit, and a cute, petite young woman dressed in peach capris and a sleeveless black blouse.

As he approached, he could hear Kevin Chang speaking Chinese, although he could make out some English words and names sprinkled in the otherwise impenetrable sounds.

“Bu shi. Tim Krabb yo Wisconsin shi-ze bei-che...solid state experimentalist... Ta mei-yo na-dao research grant ... Mike Jacob, yo Cal Tech...particle theory... Jacob, zemme hao tzo-ming.”

When Kevin saw Aaron approach, his conversation shifted to English.

“Oh hello, this is Aaron Dern. He’ll be your classmate. He was an undergraduate here.”

Aaron was surprised that Kevin Chang even knew his name; he couldn’t recall their ever being introduced. All he knew of Kevin came from his polaroid on display, along with pictures of the other grad students, in a case mounted on the wall across from the fishbowl. Soon Maria would have more mug shots to add to the array, including his.

“Aaron, this is Grace Chen from China, and this is Yen from Taiwan.” After making the switch to English, Kevin Chang spoke so quietly that Aaron found himself leaning in so that he could hear him.

Grace was chomping on a Triscuit, topped with a square of cheese: Havarti with dill.

“Nice to meet you,” Aaron said, shaking Grace’s tiny hand. She barely reached five feet in height and must have weighed all of ninety pounds, sopping wet.

Then he turned to Yen, whose crushing grip did justice to his fearsome appearance. “Yen, is that your first name?”

“Just call me Yen. Just Yen.”

Okay, that worked for him.

“He likes to play the inscrutable Chinese,” Grace said, and then she wiped her mouth of a few stray crumbs. Was she making a joke? She had just the mildest accent. If Kevin hadn’t introduced her as hailing from China, he would have pegged her as American, an ABC from California.

“What means by *inscrutable*?” Yen asked. Aaron was thinking how to reply when Grace supplied the answer.

“Mysterious. Difficult to comprehend. It’s how the Americans used to portray us in the movies before transforming us into *Gong-Fu* champion drug lords. At least now they use Asian actors.” Then she added, as if in way of an explanation for Aaron’s benefit, “My father teaches American Literature and Film at Beijing University.”

It surprised Aaron that Beijing University offered such a field of study.

Kevin Chang shifted his weight from foot to foot and looked at the ground. Aaron guessed that Grace’s style made him uncomfortable.

“What means by *drug lords*?” Yen asked.

“You know, people who smuggle and sell illegal drugs. Think opium and gunboats. Think the British,” Grace said.

“Ehh-heh-heh.” Yen laughed by inhaling rather than exhaling. It sounded throaty and almost lascivious.

Grace bit into another hors d’oeuvre. “Mmm, fantastic. These are the best crackers in the history of crackers.”

After some more chitchat with the three Chinese, Aaron made ready to leave the party, having, in his mind, fulfilled his obligation. Then he noticed another Asian, who must have arrived late, standing by himself over by the veggie tray. Instinct caused Aaron to look for Lindstrom, and he found her engaged in a discussion with a couple of

Indian students. She caught his eye, and then she pointed with her head in the newcomer's direction.

Aaron cursed himself for his mistake.

After excusing himself, he walked across the room; this must be the new Japanese student Lindstrom had told him about. He could tell Japanese from Chinese, through some set of cues that he couldn't put his finger on. Often they dressed more on the leading rather than the trailing edge of fashion, although that wasn't the case here; this dude wore a plain yellow tee shirt, jeans and flip-flops. No, it was something else, a greater composure and more self confidence. Something of a *who cares what you think of me?* attitude.

"Hello, I'm Aaron Dern."

The Asian bowed his head, just enough that Aaron noticed, and said, "Hiroshi Yoto arriving NEWLY from Tokyo, Japan." The volume of his voice increased when he spoke the word *newly*. He talked with a staccato cadence. Aaron half expected him to add *at your service*.

The two shook hands.

"Hey, we're going to share an office."

"Arhh-WREH?"

The strange, guttural response made it clear that Hiroshi didn't understand. No surprise there, Lindstrom had warned him about Hiroshi's poor English. This was going to be a pain in the ass.

"Um, we'll sit in the same office, up on the eighth floor." Aaron slowed down his delivery, although he knew that there was no point in speaking louder.

"VERY good, REALLY good," Hiroshi answered, smiling and nodding, causing his just-woke-up style black hair, long enough to reach his collar, to bounce up and down. The reply did not convince Aaron that Hiroshi understood. No need to press it. If he's satisfied, that's all that mattered.

Hiroshi shifted on his feet. "Any more extra to drink?" he asked, pointing at the sink with the soda and water. Somehow Aaron knew that what he meant to ask was: *is there anything else to drink?*

"I don't know. I think that's it," Aaron said, transitioning from shrugging his shoulders to a sympathetic nod.

Hiroshi grunted. Then, without looking around to see if anyone was watching, he pulled a silver flask from his hip pocket. He unscrewed the top, tilted his head back, and drew a couple fingers worth of the contents.

After wiping his lips with the back of his free hand, Hiroshi offered the flask to Aaron.

Why the hell not. Aaron took the flask and drank. At first he nearly choked, but then it tasted warm and smooth. Scotch. It made Aaron think anew about his undergraduate friends, unpacking in the dorms, and no doubt already partying a bit. Not with Scotch, but with the drink of choice for American college students. He returned the flask to Hiroshi.

“Do you like beer?”

“Yeeeeesssss! REALLY I like beer GREATLY!”

A speech pattern was emerging: Hiroshi cranked up the volume on certain words, adverbs mostly. No doubt but that he understood that question. Maybe he won't be such a pain after all.

“Good. Come with me.”

They left the lab. Aaron didn't look for Lindstrom. He was just doing his job.

CHAPTER TWO

The next day, Sunday, Aaron woke up with a headache, and a dull sound, like a dial-tone, bombinating throughout his skull. Too much beer. He made his way to the bathroom. After undressing, almost as an afterthought, he stumbled into the shower. Tilting his head back, he surrendered to the rejuvenating, chilly spray hitting him directly in the face. He wondered what happened to Hiroshi. The last he saw of him, he was slamming down boilermakers in Jeffrey's room in Donner with two guys and two gals Aaron didn't even know. It looked as if Hiroshi had no trouble making friends.

Classes would begin the next day, but the department had one more hoop for them to jump through, the annual barbeque picnic out on the lawn between Wean and Baker. The department opened the feast to the entire physics community, from incoming freshmen to grad students, postdocs, faculty, and staff.

Aaron looked forward to this annual event. By tradition, Professors Lee and Rusk pit-roasted a huge slab of pork. The delectable aroma filled most of the campus, but posted signs announcing *Physics Department Picnic* kept envious interlopers at bay. The two cooks pulled the meat from the bone and piled it on to trays, one for each of the six portable tables set up for the occasion. You doused the pork with your choice of barbeque sauce from a mild Kansas City to a scorching Memphis. And you could gorge yourself on the standard sides of grilled corn, potato salad, and sweet cornbread.

Aaron arrived at about one o'clock, just after Professor Lee had supervised the distribution of the first wave of pulled-pork. The day was warm with only a few high altitude clouds. A funnel breeze, like the kind that circulated between downtown skyscrapers, always formed on the great lawn between the two rival rows of academic buildings, Doherty and Wean to one side, Baker to the other. In late August the moving air refreshed, but by December it would brutalize.

Aaron sat down on a tan folding chair next to Grace Chen, the diminutive new student from China. His chair wobbled on the uneven grass. Grace slouched forward, over the table, eating a piece of cornbread held in her left hand while she cupped her right hand under her chin, trying to catch the inevitable wayward crumbs. Her mouth full, she acknowledged Aaron with a nod.

Two other newcomers he had met yesterday, Bernie Roche and Patrick O'Neill, shared the table. As did two CMU student veterans, Ken Dolittle, who, like Aaron, had been a CMU undergrad and was now starting grad school, and Etienne Guidal, a French grad student. Professor Mike Jacob had joined the students as well. He sat across from Aaron, next to Roche, and was typewriting his way through an ear of corn. Aaron hoped that Jacob's wife Vivian would join the group, but he spotted her mingling at another table.

Etienne had short, curly black hair with a peroxided streak. He had round glasses with turtle-shell frames and was wearing jeans and a striped shirt that emphasized his short, thin build. He had nearly finished his thesis, under the supervision of Professor Lee, and planned to graduate in December. As it turned out, he made a typo that would distinguish his dissertation. In the acknowledgement, he expressed "tremendous gratitude to Dr. Lee for his patients" rather than "his patience." The typo sailed through the spellchecker, and since neither Lee nor any of the proofreaders bothered to read the acknowledgement, it made it into print. Every time Aaron thought about it, he envisioned Etienne, busily working on his research, while a handful of Dr. Lee's "patients", wearing open-backed hospital gowns, swarmed about offering helpful advice.

Aaron soon realized that Ken and Etienne were in the midst of some inane nationalistic argument.

“Why do you Americans hate the French so much?” Etienne asked.

“I don’t hate the French,” Ken said. “I think they’re very reliable. Anytime they need us, they’ll be there.”

The tired slam elicited groans from around the table. Aaron felt some embarrassment that Ken represented the homeland in this discussion.

Aaron thought about how Ken never fit in. He tried to conjure up some gracious thought. At best, he could concede that Ken was a minor rather than a major irritant, like a mosquito bite. At least Ken didn’t *want* to fit in. His independence somewhat redeemed him. You didn’t have to avoid Ken. He avoided you, although once in a while he injected himself into a conversation just to make an obnoxious point, only to withdraw without waiting for a response.

Once, a couple years back, Aaron and a few classmates huddled in the lobby of the main entrance to Wean, just outside the computer lab, engaged in a heated discussion about God and science. Aaron had just parroted conventional undergraduate dogma, asserting that, “God might exist, but the Bible and science are incompatible.” Ken happened to trundle by. Assessing the topic, he stepped up to the group. Tall and gangly, he towered over the other students. With a shock of black hair, a prematurely craggy face, and a prominent, bobbing Adam’s apple, his stern features brought to mind a young Ichabod Crane. His hawk-like nose and thin lips augmented the effect. Without hesitation he interrupted the discussion and asked, “Why are you wasting time debating about a god whose existence I refuse to acknowledge?” And then he spun about and walked away.

At the moment, Etienne looked flustered. He probably thought that, as a senior graduate student, he shouldn’t have to deal with such nonsense from a first year peon like Ken, someone who hadn’t yet passed the qualifier.

“Will you Americans ever get over your World War Two Messiah complex? *Merci, merci, merci*, Okay? How often do we have to say it? Shit. You guys can be so stupid.”

“Stupid? How come we win most of the Nobel prizes?” Another first year student, Maya Dupree, had joined in. Aaron didn’t

know where she had come from. Just like the day before, at the reception in the lab, she had snuck up with the skill of a cat burglar.

He saw again that Maya Dupree was a severe, unattractive, and bookish woman with huge, thick glasses, a bad complexion, and a curveless figure. She had long, stringy hair of an indescribable hue, like gasoline, and it looked at least a week overdue for a shampooing. She had tiny eyes, almost black. A long aquiline nose dominated her chalky face. She wouldn't exactly turn heads in the department.

She had made a foolish remark about Americans dominating the Nobel Prizes, and Etienne knew how to respond.

"I guess you mean like T.D. Lee, C. N. Yang, and Hans Bethe?" He then continued, rattling off ten or twelve more physics Nobel laureates. "Yeah, okay, America gets credit for winning all those prizes, but none of those guys were *born* in the U.S. They all immigrated here, like most of the American Nobel Prize winners."

Etienne looked pretty smug. For good reason, Aaron thought, because he made a fair point. And neither Ken nor Maya had a comeback. Game over, man.

But not quite. Professor Mike Jacob had a follow-up question.

"And tell me, what does that say about this country, that all these geniuses, these Nobel laureates from all over the world, they all come here to live?"

Etienne looked shocked; no doubt he had not expected a professor to join in such a juvenile debate. And in truth, Jacob hadn't. Aaron knew him well, and he could see that Jacob just enjoyed toying with Etienne. He was certain that Jacob had no intention of aligning himself with Ken and Maya.

Jacob chuckled a bit, relieving some of the tension. "Don't look so pissed," he said to Etienne. "I'm just busting your balls."

A brilliant high energy theorist, Professor Mike Jacob held a Ph.D. from Cal Tech. But he talked like a longshoreman. He used the same irreverent manner of speaking to both colleagues and students. Aaron loved the guy. Almost everyone did, unless his gruff mannerisms or his unkempt mane of wild chestnut hair just didn't fit your image of what a professor should be.

The conversation paused for a moment, waiting for a new topic. If Jacob's blue-collar style offended any of the new students, they didn't show it.

Bernie Roche put the finishing touches on turning a styrofoam cup inside out. Aaron had watched him during the conversation, gently massaging and pressing the cup inward starting at the base, and skillfully working over the lip that protruded at the top. Whenever Aaron tried that little exercise, the cup would split at that point.

Roche set the cup down and took a deep breath.

"What kind of name is O'Neill for a Jew?" he asked.

Patrick O'Neill carried over 300 pounds, fat not muscle. He was already balding but with a full black beard, with a little gray starting to creep in. Aaron saw that he had the unconscious habit of pulling on his facial hair. He wore gold, horn-rimmed glasses, cheap frames, though more stylish than Maya's binoculars. The tufts of hair that remained on his head were black and curly with the same feint hints of premature gray.

He did look like a rabbi. He would make the perfect *Tevye* in the unlikely event that the physics department put on a production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. As his name suggested, however, he was Roman Catholic through-and-through. His easy going and pleasant persona made Aaron suspect that he'd be a friend, although he remembered that O'Neill's undergrad degree came from Penn, which meant that he could cause serious trouble, competition wise.

"I'm not Jewish, I'm Catholic. We've already been through this. Just because I have dark, curly hair and a beard, you assume I'm Jewish?"

"Sorry dude, no offense."

"Well just because your name is Patrick O'Neill, it doesn't mean you're a Catholic. The heretics and schismatics, you know, the Protestants, they might have gotten to you."

That observation came from the most unlikely of sources, Grace Chen. Aaron could not tell whether Grace meant her comment as humor. Regardless of her intent, she set everyone laughing, none more so than Professor Mike Jacob, who leaned so far back while convulsing in his amusement that he almost tipped over his chair.

CHAPTER THREE

After almost everyone at the picnic had finished eating, Mike Jacob coaxed his wife Vivian into giving an impromptu recital.

Last year, at age fifty, Jacob, a lifelong bachelor, had married Vivian Stein, a woman of twenty-five. Vivian, an accomplished musician, held the second chair in the cello section of the prestigious Pittsburgh Symphony. Several times, at various department functions, Aaron had delighted in the pleasure of her company, enraptured, no doubt, like anyone else with a Y chromosome. She was a classic beauty, elegant, poised and dignified, tall and lithe, long lines, deep blue eyes that sometimes looked violet, alabaster skin, and straight and shiny auburn hair almost down to her waist. She always looked as though she had just bathed.

On this day, she wore a light and flowing emerald green summer dress, no makeup, and a simple gold herring bone necklace that disappeared enticingly in her décolletage.

A chair appeared from somewhere, and she set up to play on the sidewalk that bordered the lawn, on the side closer to Baker. Vivian secured a rock stop with one chair leg. Just watching her warm-up and tune her instrument satisfied Aaron.

Mike Jacob introduced her to the assembly.

“Most of you know my wife Vivian. She’s agreed to play for us. Darling, what’s it going to be?”

“A short Rimsky-Korsakov opus,” she said, while completing her tuning. “Very short, I promise.”

“That’s his wife?” Roche asked, of no one in particular. And no one sitting at the table bothered to answer, because Jacob had just introduced her as such. Aaron did turn to meet Roche’s eyes. He nodded, to which Roche responded with a simple, “Damn.”

Vivian started playing, but Aaron hardly noticed; the loveliness of the music overshadowed by the loveliness of the musician. Aaron had decided long ago that cello playing was one of the more pleasurable things to watch an attractive woman do. *I’ll bet there’s not a man here paying more attention to what he hears than what he sees.*

When she finished, and the applause subsided, most of the students got up and headed off to their offices or apartments. At their table, only Bernie Roche and Aaron stayed seated. Still mesmerized by Vivian’s beauty, they exchanged appreciative glances.

“You know what she reminds me of?” Roche asked. And then he answered his own question. “The National Gallery in D.C., the East Wing. You ever see it?”

Aaron thought for a few seconds before answering. “Yeah, but I don’t see the connection. Are you telling me that she’s fine art?”

“No. Well, yes, she is, but that’s not what I meant. I’m talking about the building itself. Have you ever heard the complaint about it?”

Aaron shook his head. “Nope.”

“The problem is that the building is too flawless. Instead of directing attention to the art, it ends up being a diversion.”

A few minutes later, after she packed away her cello, Vivian Jacob, along with her husband Mike, strolled over to their table.

“Vivian, you remember Aaron. This other scraggly looking dude is a new grad student, Bernie Roche,” Mike said, as the two sat down across from the young men.

“Hi Aaron, nice to see you again. And nice to meet you Bernie, welcome to CMU.” She held out her hand for Roche to shake. The contact between the two bothered Aaron.

“Nice to meet you, um,…”

“Vivian. Nobody over twelve is allowed to call me Mrs. Jacob.”

“Vivian,” Roche said, finishing his greeting. “Thank you for playing, that was beautiful.”

“Yes, thank you,” Aaron added.

Vivian smiled at their politeness.

“Now,” she said, while adjusting her long hair, using her hands to pull it behind her ears, keeping it out of her eyes. “There are three of you and only one of me. You’re not going to talk physics are you?”

Professor Jacob held his hands out in front. “She’s under the impression that that’s all we talk about. And that we’re social misfits.”

Roche chuckled a bit. “I wonder how she got that idea?”

The social-misfits comment reminded Aaron of something.

“You know, I never knew how bad we really are until last April. I went to the APS meeting in D.C. Did I ever tell you this story?” He directed the question at Mike Jacob.

Jacob shook his head. “I don’t think so. Tell us.”

Last spring, Aaron attended a meeting of *The American Physical Society* in Washington D.C.’s Willard Hotel. The east coast chapter of the APS holds an annual week-long convention every spring. For the previous four or five years the location of the meeting had alternated between Baltimore and Washington.

“Okay. So we’re at the Willard on Pennsylvania, a few blocks from the White House. I didn’t know anyone so I was just hanging alone. One day, after the last afternoon session, I went into the bar and ordered a beer.” He didn’t mention that he had to show two forms of ID before the bartender would serve him. At this point, Aaron still considered looking young as more of a curse than a blessing.

“There were physics-types at the tables, but I’m the only person at the bar. So I start talking to the bartender. He’s standing right by me, taking his time, filling up a bunch of those wooden bar-food bowls.

“I said something like ‘I guess you guys kinda lucked out this year.’ As soon as I said it, he stopped what he was doing and says, ‘What are you talking about?’ ‘The convention,’ I said, ‘the convention’s here instead of Baltimore. It’s been bouncing back and forth. I guess this year you guys won.’ He didn’t say anything for a second. He just got this expression like I’m an idiot. I can still see him.

His face is sort of scrunched, and he's tugging on this pony tail thing he has going. Finally he said, 'Are you like, nuts?'

Roche interrupted the story.

"That's sounds like your average D.C. bartender. You know what they say about D.C. It's the city that combines northern hospitality with southern efficiency."

The Jacobs chuckled, but in way that made Aaron believe that they both had heard that one before. Was Roche trying to show off?

"Right. Anyway, now it's my turn to be clueless. 'Why do you say that?' I asked. So now he leans in close and says, 'Well, the truth is, Baltimore and Washington agreed to alternate so that neither of us would have to host you guys every year, kind of like spreading around the pain. I mean, come on man, just take a good look.'

"So I look around the bar. Right away I see the problem. There were the usual rumpled physicists scattered throughout the lounge, arguing physics, eating free bar munchies, and scribbling on napkins. But as far as I could tell, I was the only one who had actually purchased a drink of any kind. 'You don't make much money off us, do you?' I asked. 'We lose money, loads of it,' he tells me. Then he leaned in even closer, just about whispering in my ear, and says, 'You guys are so pathetic, that even the hookers take off the week you come to town.'"

Mike, Vivian, and Roche all laughed at the story. Genuine laughs.

"Vivian, how'd you ever get mixed up with this loser crowd?" Roche asked.

"I don't know," she said. "I think God has a sense of humor."

CHAPTER FOUR

“*W*hat’s up with this Ken Dolittle guy?” Roche asked. “I heard he went here undergrad too.”

After the barbeque, Aaron and Bernie Roche had strolled across campus. They grabbed some cokes from the Tartan Grill, then perched themselves on the wall that ran along the sidewalk outside Skibo, the student center, watching the coeds and a game of Ultimate Frisbee unfolding on the cut.

“He’s an idiot. Kind of a smart idiot, but still an idiot. You know what I mean?”

Roche nodded. “Yeah sure, I know the type.”

“Everyone thinks he has a photographic memory. It does seem like he can regurgitate every proof in every textbook he’s ever read.”

“So do you know why he stayed at CMU?”

“Yeah, I do. It’s a great story. Like everyone else, he wanted to get into MIT. And in his application, he wrote a brown-nosing cover letter explaining that in his view MIT was the only physics grad school worth a damn, and the MIT faculty was leaps and bounds above the faculty of all other physics departments, and how he was a perfect fit.”

“How do you know all this? He showed you the letter?”

“No, no way. But I’ll get to that.”

Roche nodded for him to continue.

“So, too bad for Ken, his letter neither moved nor impressed MIT. And that was the least of his problems.

“One day, must have been last February, I was heading to class, walking down the seventh floor hallway in Wean, right by the office. Have you seen the fishbowl yet?”

The entrance from the hallway to the physics office led into an anteroom with two huge floor-to-ceiling windows, exposing the area where Maria, the departmental secretary, sat. A door in the back corner of the anteroom led to the chair’s office.

“Yeah, I’ve poked around a bit in Wean.”

“Okay, cool. So I’m just about at the fishbowl, when the door flew open and Ken stormed out, swearing at the top of his voice, his face beet red. He slammed the door so hard, that I thought for sure the glass would shatter. Then he just walked by me, like he didn’t even see me, still swearing loud enough that all down the hallway heads began popping out of offices to see what’s happening.

“Then the fishbowl opens again, and Becky Lindstrom, her face as red as Ken’s, stepped into the hallway and starts yelling, ‘Don’t you EVER slam my door again, mister, and you keep your profanities to yourself.’

“Ken did stop swearing, but he never slowed down or turned around. He just held his right hand up to the side of his head and shook it in an *I don’t want to hear it* gesture. I heard Lindstrom say ‘moron’ under her breath, and then she turned and went back into the fishbowl.”

“So what the hell happened?” Roche asked.

“It took me a while to find out. But about a week later I ran into Maria drinking coffee at the grill. Maria is Lindstrom’s secretary, have you met her?”

“Oh yeah, the one with the impressive Higgs Mechanism.”

Aaron chuckled at the joke that only a physicist would understand. He hadn’t heard that one before. Theorists had postulated something called the Higgs Mechanism to explain how elementary particles acquired their large masses. Roche used it as a metaphor for Maria’s Hooter’s-girl figure. She was in her mid-twenties and a perpetual part-time psychology major at Pitt. Her youth and friendliness meant that she related to the students as peers; her position as Lindstrom’s secretary made her privy to most of the department’s secrets and gossip.

“That’s the one. She told me what happened. So Ken wanted to go to MIT, but had already been rejected. Now he was counting on the other places he applied, Chicago and Princeton. Maria knows where we all applied, because she sends out the profs’ recommendation letters. Ken applied to CMU too, probably just for backup. Anyway, Lindstrom called him in because when she opened his CMU application, she found the love letter to MIT inside. When Ken heard this he must have realized that he included his MIT cover letter in *all* his applications. Maria said he just went postal, started swearing and pulling his own hair. Then he stormed out.”

“So Maria told you what the letter said?”

“More or less. But don’t tell anyone, she could get into trouble.”

“I won’t. So he got rejected all around?”

“Must be. I’m guessing that only CMU forgave him that mistake, and they had to. He had good grades as an undergrad. To reject him, you’d sort of have to deny the viability of your own program.”

“That’s hilarious.” Roche paused a moment. Aaron knew what question he’d ask next.

“So why did you stay here?”

Aaron sighed. “Elaine Issek.”

“Is she still here?”

“Yeah, a Chemical Engineer. She’s only a sophomore.” That reminded Aaron to look around and make sure she wasn’t nearby.

“So you stayed here for grad school because of this girl, and then what? She broke up with you?”

“That’s about right.”

“She was your first girlfriend?”

“Yep, my very first.”

He surprised himself by blurting out that truth. After all, he had known Roche for all of two days. Damn his insight. Okay, then, he asked for it. He’d give him the unabridged version.

Aaron told Roche how he had worked during his junior and senior years as a tutor in the self-paced math program. Most students

took math in the traditional lecture format: the professor lectured, the class took notes. A smaller group of students, some by choice and some due to scheduling conflicts, took a self-paced alternative. They would study units of calculus, differential equations, linear algebra or one of a few other specialty courses. If they needed help, they went to the math center to ask questions of the tutors. After they studied and worked some examples, they took a small exam, more like a quiz, which a tutor graded. If they passed, they moved on to the next unit.

A week into the fall semester, just about a year earlier, Elaine Issek walked into the grading room. The two tutors on duty that day had busied themselves with unrelated activities. A Stephen King novel engrossed Aaron, while Frumpy Angie worked on some homework. Aaron sensed that a student had come into the room, but he didn't look up. He was determined to avoid that fatal eye contact which the newcomer would accept as an invitation. Let Angie grade this one. He wanted to finish this chapter without interruption.

Frumpy Angie worked the same shifts as Aaron. She never shaved her armpits and wore sleeveless, loose fitting, large-print flowery dresses that reminded Aaron of muumuus. She must have had the same plan as Aaron; she didn't look up either.

After standing just inside the doorway for a moment without receiving any acknowledgement, Elaine must have made a choice, because she walked straight to Aaron's desk. He continued reading, a grizzly disemboweling scene was about to begin. Can't this dude take a hint?

"Excuse me, I hate to bother you, but are you a grader?"

Feminine. And the words 'bother' and 'grader' came out sounding like *bawth-ah* and *gwade-ah*. Massachusetts. Boston Massachusetts.

Defeated, Aaron looked up.

He saw an attractive young woman with medium length, straight blonde hair, and limpid, hazel eyes set in an angular New England face. She was slim with a waif-like air. Did he, just a moment before, find her accent, like he had always found a Boston accent, annoying? At least on this beauty it now sounded exquisite and seductive.

“Yeah, I am, sorry. Here, I’ll take it.”

“Are you sure? I don’t want to bug you. I mean, I can see you’re doing your English Lit.”

That stung a little, but Aaron ignored it. He closed the Stephen King novel and placed it in the bin under his desk.

Elaine handed him her exam and sat down at the student desk next to Aaron. She wore black shorts and white deck shoes. Her long, tan legs, which she crossed, put up a good fight with the exam for the attention of his eyes.

At that moment, he realized he would pass her even if she handed him a blank sheet. Fortunately she hadn’t. Her test was from the fourth unit of calc-one, and a quick glance told Aaron that she knew her stuff. She wouldn’t need any favors from him. For just a moment her competence disappointed him.

After a few beats of feigned contemplation, he passed her. Then he handed back her exam.

“Thanks,” she said.

“Welcome. See ya.”

“Bye.”

He did see her a few more times, as she breezed through the course, finishing all the units by mid-semester. Every time she came in the grading room, it made his knees weak, his heart ache, and his stomach tighten with longing.

Later in the semester, after Elaine had finished the course, Aaron played in an intra-mural football game against one of the fraternities, Sigma Nu. All the frats had distinct personalities. Sigma Nu, at least on CMU’s campus, had a happy-go-lucky party-frat reputation.

Whenever Sigma Nu played, they had their “little sisters” cheering for them, co-eds who aligned themselves with the frat, attending their parties and other functions. It turned out that Elaine was a Sigma Nu little sister. Aaron spied her standing on the sideline in the Sigma Nu cheering section.

It was a mild and sunny mid November day, with just a crisp hint of winter in the air. Most of the trees had shed their leaves, but the ground had not seen its first snowfall. Elaine wore faded jeans, and did

them justice, along with low-top red sneakers, and an oversized Sigma Nu sweat shirt. The light wind mussed her hair in a desirable way. At first, Aaron felt the inevitable disappointment of a dashed fantasy, certain that she must already be involved with one of the carefree Sigma Nu brothers. But then, a miracle occurred. While Aaron trotted toward the sideline, Elaine spotted him, smiled and waved.

Okay. He was going to have to do something about this.

Aaron's team walloped Sigma Nu, as they always did. Having fun interested Sigma Nu more than winning, bless their fraternal hearts. After the game ended, Aaron worked up the courage to seek Elaine out and strike up a conversation. Rejection worried him some, but his bigger fear lay in not knowing what to say.

"Hey," he said, finding her on the Sigma Nu sideline, as the players and fans gathered up clothes, folded lawn chairs, and stowed coolers. If Aaron approached a little sister right in the midst of the members of any other frat, strong testosterone-laden territorial invasion signals would fill the air. But not Sigma Nu. The brothers who bothered to notice him just smiled and nodded.

"Hey yourself. Nice game."

"Thanks. I didn't know you were a Sigma Nu sister." He reminded himself to make eye contact and to avoid looking at his own feet.

"There's a whole lot about me you don't know, except that I took self-paced calc," she said, smiling. She was teasing him just a bit, he thought. She pushed her hair back over her left ear. Aaron wondered if it was a sign of maturity that, for the first time in his life, he found a woman's cheekbones to be her most attractive feature.

"So what's up?" Elaine asked.

"Not much," he answered. Now what should he say? "Oh, by the way, I was wondering, are you taking self-paced calc-two next semester?" Please let it be so.

"Don't think so. I don't feel like I learned much in calc-one. I'd just cram and cram, and then forget it all after I passed the unit. I'm gonna try the lecture route." Her smile faded some.

Then she surprised him.

"I'm not dating anyone from Sigma Nu," she said.

Aaron couldn't think of anything to say in response. His heart seemed to skip a beat.

"It's just that everyone assumes we are, I mean the little sisters, but I'm not. I just like having a place to party on the weekends and, you know, people to hang out with."

"Would you like to see the movie in Doherty tomorrow night?" Did he just say that? It came out without thinking. Her twist of the conversation was just the kick he needed.

"Yeah, I'd like that," she said.

Such a simple reply, but it made Aaron feel like he just broke the surface after a long underwater swim, and now he could breathe.

With the real business behind them, they stood there talking about classes, fraternities, families, and hometowns. Then they parted, after agreeing that Aaron would pick her up the next night at seven.

The movie, presented by the Student Council and shown in a huge lecture hall in Doherty, was the classic *Casablanca*. If a higher power intended the consummate tale of unrequited love as a harbinger, Aaron missed the message, too intoxicated by the sweet apricot scent of Elaine's shampoo to wax metaphysical. Afterwards they enjoyed a slice of pizza and a Coke at the Tartan Grill.

Before walking together to her dorm, Elaine excused herself to use a Skibo restroom. Aaron took advantage of the temporary separation by speed sucking a couple of tic-tacs. On the walk back they fell silent. Just before crossing Forbes Avenue, Elaine stopped, turned to Aaron, put her hands on his shoulders and kissed him. Gently, and not too long.

"When we get to Morewood Gardens, there'll be tons of people around. I just wanted to let you know what a nice time I had," she said.

Aaron started dating Elaine just about the time that he should have worked on his grad school applications. He never bothered, except to apply to CMU. To leave the following year, when he could just as easily stay here for his Ph.D. work, was unthinkable.

Then it came, the inevitable crash and burn. Elaine was his first girlfriend. She had had many boyfriends. Aaron could see now that he had smothered her with relentless devotion and frustrated and annoyed

her with his insecurities. She dumped him halfway through the spring semester.

“So what are you going to do?” his roommate Paul asked him one night in their dorm, not long after the breakup. They had already downed a couple beers and had started working on another. They each sat on their bed, shooting the breeze as they had done countless times before.

“Beats the crap out of me.”

“You’re okay?”

“I’ll get over it. I’m getting over it.”

Paul took a sip. He seemed to study Aaron for a moment.

“You’re taking this pretty well. I thought I’d be scraping you off the sidewalk.”

“Me too. But what’s the point?”

“Stupid bitch.”

Aaron paused to take a few gulps of Iron City. “Nah, don’t say that, she’s all right. It just didn’t work out.” He almost believed it was that simple.

“Tough guy. So what about grad school?”

He had applied to just one place. Most people would have felt like killing themselves, but he kind of liked the idea that he would still be on familiar ground the following year. He looked over at his desk. A pair of sunglasses sat within reach. He grabbed them, put them on, gave a big-toothed smile, tilted back his head, and said:

“Looks like Carnegie Mellon University.”

Paul laughed. “You don’t look anything like Tom Cruise. By the way, did you guys ever...?”

“Nope.”

“Ouch.”

Aaron, coming out of the zone, paused to stretch. He wasn’t sure Roche was interested in this much information. But in an instant he saw that he had gotten his full attention.

“So that’s about it. Pretty pathetic.”

“No man, I understand,” Roche said. “After all, you’re never as much in love as you are with that first girlfriend.”

Aaron hoped that Roche was wrong about that. He decided to change the subject.

“By the way, where are you living?” he asked.

“Over in Mudge,” Roche said. Mudge Hall was the grad student dorm, across Forbes Avenue and down a block on Morewood. “How ‘bout you?”

Aaron smiled. He knew his living arrangement would impress Roche.

“Down in Oakland, on Dawson Street.”

Oakland was a dangerous neighborhood just on the southern outskirts of Pitt’s campus. A lot of CMU grad students found cheap housing there and then looked over their shoulders when they had to walk home at night.

“I got a room in a house. There’re eight of us. Three Pitt med students on the second floor and three more in the basement. Then me and another CMU grad student on the first floor.”

“Cool. But won’t it be a pain to walk back and forth from Oakland every day?”

“I don’t think so. Besides, I haven’t told you the best part. All six of the Pitt med students are women. And, I kid you not, five of them are knockouts.”

“Damn, how’d you manage that?”

“I know the girl that owns the house, Kathy Jensen. She graduated from CMU last year. She lived in Donner, the same dorm I lived in. I guess her parents helped her buy it. She’s one of the six med students. After she rented all the second floor and basement rooms to other women, she wanted guys on the ground floor. I was in the right place at the right time.”

“So have you made a move on any of them?”

“Nope, just kind of getting the lay of the land. The other guy, Ron Kamp, he’s a Civil Engineering grad student, he’s already snagged one. But there’s another one, her name is Lynn. She looks interesting.”

Roche nodded his approval.

“So you’re a sentinel in the house-of-the-female-med-students. Not bad.”

Aaron was right; Roche was impressed. But as it turned out, Aaron never pursued Lynn or any of the Pitt ladies. Any motivation to do so would soon be overcome by other events.

They decided to head back to Wean, to see if anyone else was still around. On the way back, they passed two students painting the Fence, finishing up the lettering to the tune of Jethro Tull's *Thick as a Brick* blasting from a nearby radio.

"Hey, I noticed them painting this fence before, what's it all about?"

"It's not just a fence, it's *the* Fence," Aaron said, as if that explained everything. "Mostly frats and sororities paint it, announcing their mixers. Or sometimes, like now, the Student Council uses it to advertise movies."

The Fence, about fifty yards in front of Doherty Hall, was without a doubt the most important CMU campus icon. It started out life, maybe fifty years earlier, as a simple ornamental wooden fence in the middle of campus. Built from six vertical support posts, each about twelve feet apart, and traversed by two horizontal beams, it had a total length of about sixty feet. Somewhere in antiquity an enterprising student got the grand idea to paint the fence to advertise some long forgotten campus function and ended up launching an enduring tradition. These days, the Fence got painted two or three times a week, sometimes more. It sat in a bed of pea gravel, the small stones splattered with swatches of every imaginable color. The posts and beams had swelled to twice their original thickness, all the extra bulk coming from layer after layer of paint.

The message, taking the form of green letters on a white background, announced a Clint Eastwood spaghetti-western double feature, Tuesday night at seven, in Doherty 2210.

"So people take turns painting it?"

"Not exactly. If you don't want someone to paint over your message, you have to guard it."

"Guard it?"

"Not in the normal sense. There's no force involved. You just have to sit by it. As long as someone from your organization is sitting there, nobody else can paint it. But leave the scene for a second, just to

take a leak in Doherty, and it's fair game. So in the dead of winter there'll be pledges spending the night out here, trying to do their homework by flashlight and freezing to death."

"Reminds me why I never joined a frat," Roche said.

"Me too. But the Fence is cool. I'm sure everyone on campus, faculty, staff, students, police, administrators; they all check it at least once a day. Sometimes it's clever. And sometimes, like today, it's just a simple announcement. You never know what you might find on the Fence."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Heddle was born in Pittsburgh. A physicist, he has a Ph.D. from Carnegie Mellon University. He has conducted postdoctoral research at the University of Maryland and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He was an Associate Professor of Physics at Christopher Newport University, an Adjunct Professor at Daniel Webster College, and a staff member at The Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility in Newport News, Virginia. He lives in New Hampshire with his wife, two sons, and Labrador Retriever.