

**an extra-pspatial pSecret pSociety tale**



**KRON BY NIGHT** a novelette by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | OCT 2015

[[ ]] Convention for the thoughts of the characters in this novelette:

*My [Tryke's] thoughts look like this. / Burke's thoughts look like this. / Mary's thoughts look like this. / Franks' thoughts look like this.*



In memory of Mr. Frank von Peck

It was back in mid-June of 1984 when Burke Braun (future Agent 2), his then-fiancée (and now wife) Mary (classified agent no.), Frank von Peck (future Agent 107) and yours sure-really (future Agent 33) decided to head up to Morrow Mountain State Park (near Albemarle, NC) for a mind-expanding camping trip. Burke had just procured some high-grade, water-soluble, psychoactive *beads* from a fellow employee (now deceased) at Grapevine Records (now defunct) on East Independence Boulevard (now Expressway).

Mary's still-quite-reliable, olive green, trunky, 1972 Plymouth Valiant 4-door sedan would be the mode of transit for the four of us twenty-something and nearly-twenty Caucasian cosmic cadets on a muggy, mid-morning Saturday. After Frank's courtesy oil dipstick check, we were off and rolling.

It quickly got smoky inside the cab. Mary, a winsome brunette, cracked her window to exhaust the herbal exhalations. *This car is a moving smokehouse.*

The ride was largely uneventful, except for the conversation regarding the not-yet-disclosed psychoactive.

"What exactly is it that we are going to take, Burke?" Frank asked from the backseat, next to me.

"Mark, the guy in the EP (Extended Play) section of the store told me that the active ingredient is a psilocybin spinoff," Burke replied from the shotgun seat. *A psilocybin spinoff? / What in this wacky world? / A toxic spinoff?*

“Is it safe?” I asked. “It’s not some strychnine amalgam, is it?” *Gosh, he is already paranoid.*

“Yeah, it’s safe; it’s not rat poison. Several of the Grapevine crew have already done it. All glowing, super-positive reviews.” *Nice to hear.*

“What’s the recommended dosage?” Mary asked as she briefly glanced over at Burke, while keeping two hands on the steering wheel. *Good question. A very good question.*

Burke turned his brown-haired head to the left. “Mark said that ‘one is fun’; ‘two will do’; ‘three will set you free’; but, ‘four will slam the door’.” *What door? / Wow, Mark managed to make a rhyme out of it.*

“In that case, I’ll be taking five,” Frank immediately blurted. *Good lord.*

“Are you crazy, Frank?” I asked rhetorically. “You don’t want to flip out and fall off the mountain.”

“I’ll be fine, dude,” Frank said assuredly. “That old mountain is just a tired, burnt-out, sloughing-away hill.”

Burke looked back at me. “Let me guess, Tryke, [my nickname, which became my nom de brosse] you’re only going to take half of one.”

“No, Burke, I was thinking of four and a quarter.” *He’s already gone. / Why so precise?*

“Four and a quarter!” Mary exclaimed. “I hope that someone has a razor blade and a magnifying glass.” *I don’t.*

“What’s with 4.25, Tryke?” Burke asked.

“I happened to notice that there were 17 of those orange micro-orbs in the Ziploc bag, Burke,” I replied. “Seventeen divided by four is ...” *I’m already too high for math.*

“My sweet Mary will be zonked out of her gourd if she takes that many,” Burke said. *Probably so.*

“Maybe we should divide them up proportionately by relative body weight,” Mary suggested. *Great idea.*

“If Frank wants to take five, he can go for it,” Burke said. “I’ll only be doing four. Four should be more than plenty.”

“Ok, if Frank is going ultra-cosmonaut and taking five, and Burke is taking four, then I’ll take four, too,” I said. “And, if my math is correct, this leaves four for Mary as well.” *Did he add that up right? Yeah, he did.*

“No way is little old me taking four,” Mary announced. “That would be like you and Burke taking seven.” *She’s right.*

“I’ve got it solved,” Frank said, projecting his voice mainly to Mary, who was directly in front of him. “Mary will take three. Burke and Tryke will take four each. And me, your fearless Frank, will take six.” *Famous last words. / What an epitaph that would be: ‘He took six’ ... a guaranteed graveyard head-turner, for sure.*

“I don’t think I even want to do three,” Mary divulged.

“Ok, how about 2.5 for Mary, four for Burke, five for me, and 5.5 for Frank?” I suggested. *What’s with Tryke saying point-five instead of half? / He’s stoned out of his mind.*

Burke smelled a rat. “No, you’ll get way to flaky on five, Tryke. I don’t want to have to babysit both you and Frank while I’m off the rails myself, treading water in that green pond. [This green pond is featured in the novella *To Morrow Tomorrow*.] No way, José.” *Wish I had a tape recorder for that one. / Burke is quite baked from my Frankenblend. [weed] / My guy is high.*

As side one of Burke’s custom-edited art-rock cassette tape came to a close with the fade-out of the Genesis *Los Endos* song, I spied the Albemarle City Limit sign on NC 24/27. *Wow, those 45 minutes sure flew by.*

Burke flipped the tape over and Pink Floyd’s *Summer ’68* song started. *‘How do you feel? How do you feel?’ Most excellent, thank you very much!*

Then we began to climb the Morrow Mountain entrance road. Soon, we passed the welcome sign. And then, the *Alcoholic Beverages Prohibited* sign appeared. *We won’t have to worry about violating that one this time. / Check. No beer in here.*

When we arrived at the triangle intersection, Mary slowed the car to a near-stop. “Which way, guys?” she asked.

“Uh, let’s score a decent campsite before we start roaming around,” Burke answered. *Good idea.*

Mary turned to the left and we made our way down to the campground area. The gray tree boughs and green leaves whizzed by. *Wonder where this day goes. / Wonder what adventures lie ahead. / I hope I have enough smoke. Yeah, I am sure I do. / I hope the boys don't get totally incoherent.*

A couple of minutes later, and we were in the campground area. It was only about 40% full. We claimed a distant site on the loop furthest from the main road. *Hope no one sets up shop right next to us.*

After some proper-assembly confusion, we got the tents up, and began to eat lunch on a wooden picnic table. It was a sunny, warm-bordering-on-hot, very high noon.

I then asked the question that I thought was on everyone's meandering mind: "When should we eat those little orange orbettes?" [sic]

"I think that now is a little too soon, Tryke," Burke said. "I want to be peaking when I see the sunset from the top of the mountain." *Me, too. / That sure would be nice. / I'm ready to drop them down the hatch right now and get show going.*

"What's the duration of the trip?" Mary asked. *A most excellent question.*

"Mark said that it lasts about six to seven hours," Burke said. *Good, it's not 14 hours like A. [A = acid, slang for LSD] / Perfect. / Nice.*

"How about a staggered start?" Frank proposed. "That way we can gauge the potency and not end up in the wrong

place at the wrong time.” *Interesting idea. / Yeah, that would certainly suck.*

“That’s a great idea, Frank,” Mary said.

“Sounds smart to me, too, Frank,” I added. “But, did you mean an incremental start? A staggered start would have each of us ingesting those little orange beads at different times, which would be a very interesting way to do them, no less.”

“Ok, Mister Technical, you got me. I meant an incremental start.” *Am I really sounding too technical? Maybe squelch it.*

“But, we may never get the full effect by taking it incrementally; we may never reach the apex,” Burke contested. *That could be true, too.*

“Sorry, my love; it’s three votes to one for a test run first,” Mary said as she gave Burke a funny grin.

“Ok, ok, I’ll do it your way,” Burke relented. “But, I better get some high voltage running through my bean, or you’ll be buying the next round of seventeen.” *Burke wants to go over the galactic cliff.*

Frank and I just smiled. Mary playfully stuck her tongue out at Burke. And Burke, well, he seemed suddenly lost in thought as a lone sparrow darted by. *Burke’s ozoned. [slang for stoned on marijuana] / Burke’s high as a kite. / What is my beau thinking of now?*



In surreptitious short order, we each dropped one orange micro-ball into our paper cups of pulpy orange juice. We looked at each other. *The moment of truth has arrived.*

Frank broke the anxious silence: “Here’s to an epik [sic] with a hard k voyage.” *Epik kaos. [sic]*

We raised our 7-ounce (207 mL) cups and tapped them together. Then we commenced the psychedelic-solution ingestion. With the last gulp, I looked down at my Casio digital wristwatch. It was 12:21 PM. *A curiously palindromic start time. I wonder when we leave the launch pad. / Tryke, already watching the clock.*

“Ok, group, where should we go first?” Frank asked.

“Do we already have to go somewhere?” Mary questioned. *Oh man, I don’t want to stay here all day.*

“Hey, if Frank feels the need for motion, why not just let him drive your car, Mary?” Burke suggested.

“Ok, that’s fine by me,” Mary said. “But, stay in the park, Frank.” *‘In the park.’ Yes, absolutely. / Please stay inbounds, Peck. / Do they really think that I would drive out of here? Is my reputation that outlandish?*

And with that tempered approval, Frank got the car keys from Mary and we re-occupied the venerable Valiant. I grabbed shotgun; Burke and Mary sat in the backseat.

“Did everyone bring their valuables?” I asked. “No one left anything important in the tents or on the picnic table, did they?”

“All good back here,” Mary and Burke said in unison.

“Got my stuff,” Frank said as he eased the steering-column shifter into D. *Gosh, I hope this goes off without a legal hitch.*

Frank slowly drove us out of the campground area, going extra-slow to keep the gravel dust down. A few campers waved to us and we waved back. *Maybe they appreciate Frank’s considerate, slow speed. / If they only knew ...*

He turned right onto the main, now-showing-some-age asphalt road and we began to descend towards Lake Tillery. We all rolled down our windows. The late spring air was infused with a multitude of fragrances. *Am I already having olfactory hallucinations? The scents in the air are divine.*

In no time we were down at the lakefront. Frank parked Mary’s sedan near the unoccupied boat ramp. We walked over to the wooden dock.

“Well, we’re about fifteen minutes out, team,” I stated. “How are we flinging, I mean feeling?” *Team? / Flinging? / Tryke’s already getting goony.*

“I’m flinging just fine,” Mary said. *Whoops! Misspoke there.*

“I think I’m getting an initial start-up charge,” Frank notified. *I’m sure he is. / I hope Frank doesn’t end up in a dangerous place again.*

“Nothing for me, yet,” Burke informed. “I hope this isn’t like the last *great* mushroom excursion. What a fizzle that was. I sure hope these little beads aren’t stale.” *Or oxidized?*

I looked down at my watch. “Folks, my mind’s elevation is twelve hundred thirty-seven feet [377 meters] above ennui level.” *Ennui level? / Gosh, what is he talking about now? / Tryke’s already wiggling out.*

Frank quickly picked up on my time-as-mental-elevation game. “Well, in twenty-three minutes, your lofty thoughts are going to crash down eleven hundred sixty feet. [353.6 meters] That’s one tall, steep-ass cliff, leading to complete despair, my friend. That will probably be all she wrote for you, Tryke.” *What a rosy prognosis. / 1260 – 1160 = 100.*

“That good, huh?” I retorted.

“Let’s not make this into a by-the-numbers trip,” Burke forewarned.

I then took my watch off and put it in my left-front pants pocket. *Burke’s right. I don’t want that damn watch to meter this trip. Let’s forget about the exact time ... for a long time.*

Then we all sat down on the dock and looked at the slightly undulating surface of the lake. We were quiet; the conversation ceased. *Getting lost.*

It appeared that the different shades of bluish green on the lake surface were being raised to different levels. The effect was like looking at a 3-D image without the special glasses. *Wonder if anyone else is seeing this. / I wonder if Burke is*

*feeling what I'm feeling. / Woah, I feel it now. Oh, boy. Here we go. / Whose keys are these? Oh yeah, they're Mary's. Must not lose them.*

After a speechless twelve minutes, Frank stood up. "Ready to go to the top?" *I hope that he can still drive satisfactorily. / Where? / Yes!*

"Sure!" Burke exclaimed with verve.

"Think you can still drive ok, Frank?" Mary asked.

"Better than ever," Frank said über-confidently. *Oh, no.*

We got back in the now-glowing green Valiant. Frank started the car up and began the climb out of the valley without a hint of trouble. He went straight at the triangle intersection and began to ascend Morrow Mountain proper, an ancient, now-rounded, heavily wooded, prominent Uwharrie peak.

Frank's driving skills were still excellent. He expertly navigated the stone-and-mortar-wall-lined hairpin turn. His window was rolled down with his left arm on the door. With his dark shades on, he looked like a younger Bryan Ferry. (Reference the *In Your Mind* album cover.)

A minute later, Frank was parking the car near the circle at the top. We all got out and walked towards the overlook.

"Man, it looks just like a book cover, [This scene is the cover of the *To Morrow Tomorrow* novella.] a most magical book cover," Frank declared.

We stopped for a moment to take in the splendid view of the green forest blanket with other well-worn Uwharrie peaks here and there, and Lake Tillery way down below. The air temperature was now 79° (Fahrenheit; 26° Celsius). The sun was bright. White cumulus clouds seemed to be puffing out and expanding every nanosecond. *This day sure feels incredibly alive.*

After a five-minute group silence, I spoke up. "It sure is something else." *He's ripped.*

"It certainly is," Mary added. *She's ripped, too.*

"Unless it's just something," Burke contended. *Burke's shredded.*

"Or else," Frank looped on. *Or else, what? / How is that?*

"Are we nowhere or elsewhere?" Mary asked. *Knowhere? [sic]*

"Maybe it's a meaningless distinction," I said. "You know, the treachery of words and all that jazz." *What did he just say? / Here comes the nonsense. / His cake is baked.*

Frank then began walking on the slabs-of-slate wall. We followed him. He stopped after about a hundred feet (30.5 meters), in the main parking lot area, and jumped down on the outside of the three-foot-high (one-meter-tall) stone barrier.

He seemed to be looking for something for a few seconds. (What he was looking for is mentioned in the *To Morrow*

*Tomorrow* novella.) Then he shot up on the wall again. Eventually, we all sat down on the masonry wall.

“Burke, where are those orange dots?” Frank asked. “I think I’m going to go for it and take four.” *Oh, dear. / Four more?! / So, Frank really wants to get some mileage. I’ll match him.*

“They’re right here in my pocket,” Burke said as he looked around to see if the coast was clear for extraction. “Four seems like a man overboard, Frank.” *He’ll be overboard alright, after creating a foundering of our ship. / Maybe I can talk him down. / Why does he want to do so much?*

I now felt that it was my time to claim a cut. “I guess I could go for just one more. I’m pretty high already. This stuff is clean. Elle Sioux Prima.” *El suprema? / I hope that we don’t encounter the park ranger. His mouth will get us all hung.*

“I could maybe do two more,” Burke said. *Two more?! What is my fiancé thinking? / Burke and Frank may end up over the dam at this rate.*

Mary then looked at the two psychic daredevils. “Guys, just do another one. I’m already soaring. Just a single one each. Then see where you are an hour from now. Doing two or more seems like an invitation to a grave mishap.” *Superb advice. / Yep, she’s right. / I will go all night, taking one every five hours.*

Burke got the plastic bag out and carefully unzipped it. He, Frank and I each swallowed one more orange orbette. *Buckle up, spaceman. It could get bumpy. / Booster rocket,*

*commence firing. / I'm ready to really zoom. Want to exit the stratosphere. / Hope the boys will be ok.*

“Hey, let’s check out the old picnic shelter up on the knob before we leave,” Frank suggested. *Up on the knob?*

I looked up towards the shelter. It looked vacant. “Sure, good idea, Frank. Let’s do it.”

“Yeah, let’s go check it out.” Mary also consented.

“But, let’s get some drinks out of the car before we go up there,” Burke advised.

With non-alcoholic drinks in hand, we marched up to the slate-and-mortar shelter. One hundred twenty yards (109.7 meters) later and we were there. It was still unoccupied. *Great. No one is here. / How long before a family of eight invade?*

There were four large picnic tables under the shake roof. Burke and Mary sat on one and I sat on an adjacent one near the shelter’s wide, rear, expansive-view opening.

Frank hoisted his left leg up on the stone wall. We were all looking out towards Lake Tillery and the other Uwharrie Mountain Range mounds to the northeast, two to five miles (3.2 to 8 km) away.

With the shade and the mountaintop breeze from an approaching cold front, the setting was not that uncomfortable. After a few slugs of our drinks, we all grew quiet. *What does it mean to have such abstract, seemingly*

*inconsequential, random thoughts? And, what does it mean to question them? / Sure is a wonderful day. / Patterns are everywhere, in everything. / Fifteen months ago ...*

Frank suddenly blurted out a shocking revelation (to him): “Damn, man, your hair has the weirdest shades of red in it, Tryke. It looks like it’s on fire. I see individual flames.” *Well, he sure doesn’t need anymore. / I see it, too. / Glad that I didn’t do another one.*

“I’ve heard that before,” I replied.

Then the silence spells started. Five – or more – minutes would go by without a spoken word. Yes, we were mega-mind-zapped. The orange dots were not placebo-ineffectivo. [sic]

Over the course of the next two-plus hours, someone would say something like ‘Hey, did you say something?’ Then someone would reply, typically about a minute later, with a line like ‘No, I don’t think so.’ And, sure enough, this would be followed after another significant delay with a line like ‘No shortage of thoughts today.’ And, yes, this in turn would be sent onto a Moebius strip with a line very similar to (if not exactly) ‘Now, what did you say?’ Moreover, our minds were flying way too fast for a real-time oral report.

There were a few visits from other park guests of various temperaments and ages. But, we just held our tables. (Frank had settled on the other side of my picnic table.) Perhaps we were being picnic shelter hogs, but at the time, we were honestly oblivious to it. We were tactically immobilized.



Then Mary noticed some large buzzing bees that appeared to be hornets. We all started to watch them, noticing that they would return to the fireplace and fly up the flue. They left a nice, easy to follow, trail in the air. *Man, I'm trailing bigtime. / They must have their nest in this fireplace's chimney. / I'd hate to get stung by a bee right now. That would truly suck. / Probably time to move elsewhere.*

Mary finally spoke up. "Guys, I think it's time to leave this place to the bees."

"Agreed," I said.

Burke and Frank just nodded. *They're chasing after their lost marbles, I can tell.*

We slowly walked back to Mary's car, which was now pulsating. *Man, I'm glad that I'm not driving. / Hope she's ok to drive. / Take it slow, Mary ... nice and slow.*

Mary got her keys back from Frank, opened the driver's door, got in, and acted like she was going to drive off without us. We all had a laugh, though I think we all fell for her joke for a few seconds. She then unlocked the other three doors. We all retook our Charlotte-takeoff seat assignments.

"Are you ok to drive, honey?" Burke asked Mary.

"Yeah, I feel ok. I'm high, but not nearly as high as you guys. The road still looks like the road." *Whew! It looks like a cooling black lava flow to me. / It has ripples and waves in it.*

“There’s something I must confess,” Burke confided. “Frank and I each took another orange orbette.” *Tiny orbettes and extra-large orbits. / Not really surprised. / Burke had to confess.*

“When?” Mary asked.

“In the walk up to the shelter,” Burke said.

“No wonder you two were essentially speechless back there,” Mary said.

We all buckled up (somehow still attuned to personal safety). Mary started the car, cautiously backed up, and then began to slowly descend Morrow Mountain.

Mary’s driving seemed to be pretty good. She never came close to crossing the center line or touching the right shoulder. Her speed was below the posted limit the whole way down.

As we cleared the hairpin turn, Burke pressed the cassette back into the tape deck. The song *Awaken* by Yes began playing. It was a magical descent, like we were in some fantastical movie. The road and trees seemed to be advancing towards the car: an onrush of hyper-pleasant sensory overload.

We breezed through the triangle intersection. There was a ravine to the right that seemed to be out of a fairy tale. I kept expecting a gnome to appear amongst the sylvan serenity. *Such a splendid scene. Such a splendid day.*

I even thought that I could hear the small creek babbling for a moment. However, I then realized that it was just those dissolved dots in my brain. *Man, my psyche-boosted mind is cruising at 606 MPH. [975 km/h] at 37,073 feet. [11,300 meters]*

Soon, we were pulling back into the campground. I noticed that it had filled up a bit since we had left. *When did we leave here? What time is it? Should I look at my watch? [I refrained.] Everything appears to be going quite well. I feel fine, at least physically. Blood circulation to my extremities seems ok.*

We disembarked from the most-valuable-at-the-time Valiant. A family of four with a dog had set up camp just one small spot over from us. *It never fails. I knew someone would pop a tent next to us. Why does this happen? Maybe do a study on this someday. / We now have neighbors. Wonderful. Freaking wonderful. / Damn. This could be a major buzzkill. / Hope the boys can keep it reeled in.*

Their tan-and-white dog came over and sniffed us. I petted the collie-mix on the back. He was friendly and just seemed curious. Or, maybe he was looking for an auxiliary food source for the evening. *Dogs and humans. Such a strong linkage between the species. Amazing how they can sense intentions, emotions ... and thoughts? Does the dog know that we're not in our usual frame of mind? / Maybe the dog smells the cat on me.*

The dog wandered back to his campsite. The owners apologized for any inconvenience. We just waved and

smiled (strangely?). “No problem,” Frank assured. *Well, no problem so far.*

We then all sat down in folding lawn chairs and tried to decide what was next on the neural agenda. Without thinking, I took a peek at my watch. It was 4:17 PM. *So, almost four hours since the initial dose. A nice high. Still coherent, I guess. Though, I wouldn't want to be quizzed.*

Frank gulped down some iced tea. He recapped the bottle and said, “Hey, let's check out the Kron House.”

“That could be very interesting,” Mary replied.

“Yeah, I'm up for that,” Burke said. “I feel like we're on display here at this campsite.” *Totally.*

“I agree,” I said. “This campground setting is inhibiting my whirling and a-twirling buzzeroni.” [sic] *A spinning slice of buzzeroni pizza, please. / We better get Tryke out of here before he starts talking to the campers. That would be bad. It wouldn't end well. / Time to vacate the premises.*

After about seven minutes (my best guess), we got back in the green, sponge-like-textured car with our drinks and some chocolate-covered protein bars. Mary navigated the forest-canopy-covered roads perfectly. And in just over five minutes, we were parked far away from the two vehicles in the Kron House parking lot. (The Kron House and environs were also visited and examined in the *To Morrow Tomorrow* novella.) *Wonder how this will go. / What awaits us? / Always a must-stop. / This just might be a whole lot of fun.*

We disembarked and began walking up the timber steps to the restored Kron House, a German doctor's family house from the 1800s, which sat atop a knoll clearing. A joyful, merrily skipping along, Hispanic family of three passed us without incident. *Ok, that accounts for one of the two cars in the parking lot.*

Once at the old house, we walked around it, occasionally peeking through the curtain-less windows. We were lost in our thoughts, everyone imagining living in such a house in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with no electricity or indoor plumbing. *No sensationalized TV news after dinner. Maybe not that bad. / No commercials chopping up the day. / A cold crap in January. / Hot as hell in those upper rooms in the summer.*

I finally spoke up as we made our way over to the doctor's small office building (also restored). "I wonder what went through their minds on hot summer nights." *Or, on long, cold winter nights.*

"Probably not what's going through your mind," Frank said. *A nice friendly zinger from Peck.*

"They probably weren't thinking about us being here today," Mary added. *Thinking about them, thinking about us ...*

"Certainly not in this state of mind," Burke concluded.

"Do you think that the good doctor ever got intoxicated on anything?" I asked.

"I think he was a teetotaler," Mary said.

“Not even a Monday morning moss smoker?” I asked, thinking it would elicit some laughter. However, it went over like a lead-cladded zeppelin. Crickets. *Moss smoker?*

After peering into the windows of Dr. Kron’s office and patient examination room, Frank had an idea for the next move. “Hey, let’s walk down to the little graveyard.”

“Sure, why not?” I replied.

“Yeah, I’m game for that,” Burke concurred.

“Ok, lead the way, Frank,” Mary said as she motioned towards the trail.

It was an easy four-minute stroll through the woods on a footpath to the Kron family gravesite. Once there, we studied the names and the dates on the headstones. *1798 ... born just 22 years after the start of this American nation. George Washington was still alive then. / Prussia ... that’s not even a country anymore. / Ah, he married a French lady in Paris in 1823, just a couple of years after Napoleon croaked on St. Helena. / Human lives just become names and years on a stone. And many times, not even that.*

Frank rested the palm of his right hand on Dr. Kron’s obelisk. “I can feel the stream of history,” he said.

“Is it hot or cold?” I asked. No one seemed to find it humorous. *Bombed again. Drop attempts at humor.*

“It’s electric, dude,” Frank replied. “Fifty milliamps. I’m feeling the electrons.” *He’s astro-croaked. [sic]*

I touched a cracked, white, marble headstone. “I wonder what the stone carver’s life was like.” *Life or wife? / Did anyone carve his or her headstone? Where was he or she buried? And, what were his/her wildest thoughts? Oh, what does it matter now? Why am I thinking such craziness? Those orange orbettes, of course.*

“It sure puts one’s life in perspective,” Mary said.

We then all sat down in various spots around the little graveyard and became enveloped (and developed) by our thoughts. No one said anything for at least fifteen minutes, maybe more. *I really have no idea what anyone is thinking, including myself. And, that’s funny just to think. Just these incessant meandering fragments. / I bet it was a hard life out here. No interest in going back in time. / Wow, I just know that we are all thinking the exact same thoughts. / I could live out here in that little house after a few minor additions, like an A/C unit.*

Time had become hard to estimate. Relational temporal measurements seemed uncertain. I then glanced at my wristwatch again. It was now 5:25 PM. *Five hours out. So far, so grand. No asteroid collisions.*

Finally, Mary recommenced the conversation. “Are you guys ready to go now?” *Good call. Enough channeling of the Krons. / Did Mary just ask a question? To whom?*

“Sure, dear,” Burke replied.

“Yeah, I guess so,” I said. “I was getting quite confused by the backwards clocks in that rabbit hole.” *What rabbit hole? / Backwards clocks? / Tryke is toast.*

Burke was then staring at the ground. “It really sucks that some worthless vandals have broken these gravestones and left trash here,” he said. *It certainly does. / Would love to dump this trash on their living room floor or in their car. So tired of being human sometimes. / Walking trash.*

We all then became painfully aware of the sad condition of the gravesite. We began to pick up the beer cans, soda bottles, plastic wrappers, partially decomposed napkins and paper plates, and place them in a discarded plastic grocery bag. *A picnic at this gravesite? Weird focks. [sic] / I bet whoever smashed up these graves is a certified mega-loser. / Pigs that walk on two legs. Wait, that thought is insulting to swine everywhere. ~~Strikethrough.~~ / A world losing respect.*

Frank held the bag open as we quickly filled it. He began looking around for a trashcan.

“Looks like you got left holding the bag, Frank.” No laughter. *Remember, no attempts at humor. Everyone is way too zonked to get any jokes.*

Burke knew what Frank was looking for. “Frank, I remember passing a trashcan at the doctor’s office building.”

“Ok, I’ll take care of the trash,” Frank said as he began to march back up the trail.



We followed behind him in silence. I wonder how many people have walked on this little trail. *435,534 unique visits? Why am I thinking such trivial nonsense? Because it's what I seem to always do.*

Once clear of the last piece of understory, Frank saw the trashcan and promptly deposited the gravesite trash. *Score. Two points for the unassisted dunk.*

“You get the good-deed-of-the-day gold medal, Frank,” Mary said as we all gathered near the grape arbor.

The now-quite-hot sun was Arizona bright. However, a dry line had just recently passed through and the relative humidity had dropped to 28%, which made it fairly tolerable in the shade. Also, there was now a slight breeze out of the northwest, which was very much appreciated by all.

“Hey, there are a pair of extra-large, army-green, outdoor-type blankets in the car’s trunk, and even some small throw pillows,” Mary said. “How would you guys like to lie down and relax under one of those tall oak trees over there?” *Oh, yeah. That’s the ticket. / Perfect. / Just hope that no one bothers us. They seem to be growing more sedentary.*

“Sounds like a grand idea, Mary,” I said, already glancing over and sizing up a nice spot.

“I will second that,” Burke added.

“Ok, give me the keys and I’ll run down and get everything,” Frank enthusiastically offered.

“Are you sure you don’t need any help?” Burke asked.

“No, Frank is the man who can get it all.” *Ah, he’s cementing his claim on the third person singular.*

Mary gave Frank her car keys and he disappeared down the steps to the parking lot. *Hope he doesn’t lock the keys in the trunk. That would suck moose eggs. Mousse eggs? / Hope he does ok down there.*

In just three minutes he was running back up the hill with the blankets and some assorted toss pillows under his arms.

“How was my time?” Frank asked, almost out of breath.

“Most peculiar,” Burke said.

I laughed as I pulled out my watch and spied its face. It read 5:45 PM. *Ah, a quarter to six and all is well.*

“Well, how fast was I, Mr. van Tryke, the man with the stopwatch?” Frank implored. *Stopwatch?*

“Five forty-five,” I dryly announced. “You’re going to have to work on your trunk-searching strategy and step-scaling technique if you want to make the team this year.” *What did Tryke just say? / What team is he talking about? / That time is bullshit!*

“No way!” Frank exclaimed. “I know that I was quicker than five minutes and forty-five seconds.” *Oh, I get it: That’s the time of day. / It’s already 5:45? Wow!*

We all had a big guffaw. Five and a half hours out and we were feeling great. *I want to do another one. / Glad there are no health issues with anyone. / No bad people or animal interactions so far. / I want to do two more, maybe three. Make this a landmark psychedelic experience.*

We set up the king-size blankets next to each other under a giant, century-old oak tree. It provided total shade. And, the ground wasn't too hard or damp. We soon found comfortable spots and fell back into our thought parades. *This is it – right here. / The boys seem to be doing ok. The colors are amazing. Ultra-iridescent. / A perfect rest stop, this certainly is. / This sure beats the campground.*

We were all lying down, heads resting on toss pillows, faces up; all just staring at the boughs, branches, twigs and leaves of the massive old tree, when Frank made his demand for refueling: "Is there any way that I could do two more, Burke? Just two more."

Burke extracted the clear plastic bag from his front jeans pocket and counted the remaining orange micro-orbs. "Ok, there are exactly eight left," he broadcasted. "We can do two each to finish it off."

"I'm game," I said. "Pass the bag." *This will be a nocturnal grand finale. I won't do anything psychoactive for at least a year after this. Well, maybe.*

Burke extracted two of the orange orbettes and threw them down his throat. Then he passed the bag to me, and I promptly did likewise. Frank got the bag next and tilted it,

watching the four remaining, not-quite-perfectly-round, cantaloupe-colored orbules [*sic*] wobble down the seam.

“Mary, how many do you want to do?” Frank asked.

“One is plenty for me,” she replied. *That crafty fox is going to get to consume a total of six. / Frank sure pulled a smooth one there. / Does that mean that he will do a half-dozen? Wow! I hope he can keep it together.*

And with that, Frank ingested three more apricot orbettes, chasing them down with a couple of slugs of his bottled iced tea. He then handed the Ziploc bag back to me and smiled. We both had similar thoughts. *Why, you sly dog. / Tryke knows that I pulled a keen move there.*

Then I handed the plastic bag back to Burke, and he handed it to Mary on the far end. She then extricated the last peach-hued pinhead from the corner of the clear bag and popped it in her mouth. *All gone. / All gone. / All gone.*

“All gone,” she then calmly stated. *She read my mind. / She read my mind. / She read my mind.*

“Just for reference, what time is it, Tryke?” Frank asked.

I checked my watch. “It’s an uncanny 6:06,” I proclaimed.

“We’ll be flying high to at least midnight,” Burke said. “Maybe touch back down at two in the morning.”

“Is that when you plan on returning to the campsite?” a shocked Mary asked.

“What campsite?” I asked, momentarily forgetting about our tents. *Well, he won't be making any sense tonight. / Has he really forgot about the campground? / Looks to be a long night with/for Tryke.*

“Have you really forgotten about our tents?” Mary asked out of complete disbelief.

“No-no-no,” I sputtered. “I was just testing you guys.” *Wonder if they believe me. Probably not. / Whatever, Tryke. / Nice try. / Oh, boy! Tryke is burnt toast.*

The conversation ground to a halt as we began to study the intricacies of the amazing oak tree. It looked like a matrix of mosaic leaf-tiles that tilted ever so when the wind blew. The unearthly textures seemed to permeate the air between my eyes and the upper branches of this most awesome tree.

After about twenty-five minutes of under-tree silence, I felt the urge to speak up, as cued by the passing of a raven. *Poe's bird ate the manuscript. What a silly thought.*

“You know, this massive oak tree probably existed back when Dr. and Mrs. Kron were still alive. It was most likely just a seedling in 1876 on the nation's centennial.” *He might be correct. / What is he saying now? / That's just a wild guess. Who knows what the exact age of this tree really is?*

“I sure would like to climb that tree,” Frank disclosed. *Oh, no. Did he really say that?*

“Well, don't attempt it now,” I warned.

“Why not? I feel so spry.” *Spry my ass. / Is he really going to climb it? / Surely, Frank is just kidding.*

Frank then stood up and shared his climbing plan. “See that magnolia tree next to it? I’ll use it to get perched in the oak tree. Magnolia trees are like ladders: They are very easy to climb.” *What?! / He’s zapped more than I thought. / I can already see him tumbling out of that tree and breaking a leg. This is where it all goes south.*

“Are you sure, Frank?” Mary asked in a dissuading tone.

“Medic may not get here for an hour,” I added, backing up Mary. “We’ll have to drive to the park office and explain your accident while tripping our heads off. Or, you could immediately die from the fall and save us the trouble.” *Tryke has no faith in my climbing abilities. / Gosh, what a horrible scenario. / Oh, please no. Dear God, no.*

“Very funny, Tryke,” Frank said. “I’ll be just fine. Thank you very much.”

“Be careful, man,” Burke cautioned. “Check for dead limbs and don’t go up too high.”

“Oh, I’m already up so very, very high,” Frank replied. *Oh, dear. / Just what we all feared. / Lovely.*

We watched Frank dash over to the magnolia tree that was about ten feet (three meters) from the base of the big oak tree. He very adroitly scaled the magnolia tree to a height of 25 feet (7.6 meters). Then he grabbed hold of a crossing ten-inch-diameter (25.4 cm) bough of the oak tree and

climbed up on it like a gymnast. *He really does seem pretty deft. / Wow! / I couldn't imagine doing that right now.*

He then shimmied his way to the limb's crotch and rested his back against the huge trunk. Once securely ensconced, he smiled down at us, just like the Cheshire cat in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. He was in no pain or distress. *Well, look at that. He did it. Just hope that he can get back down safely. / He sure accomplished that in short order. / Only Frank, only Frank.*

"How do you feel?" I shouted up to our agile arborealist. [sic]

"Higher than you," Frank replied, followed by an owl sound that seemed to warble as it came down to my ears. *Was that reverb or preverb? [sic] / I sure hope he doesn't fall. That would suck unimaginably. / I would freak out if I were sitting up there right now.*

"How's the view?" Burke asked.

"Great. Looks like there's a raccoon in the top of the Kron House chimney." *Can he really see that from there? / Frank's hallucination station. / He better get down before he leaps for an imaginary nymph.*

"How long do you plan to stay up there?" Mary asked Frank.

"I'll be down before it gets dark," Frank said. "I'll descend with the setting sun." *That should get a rise out of them. / How poetic. / That long? / That's nuts.*

“Sunset is probably two hours from now,” Mary yelled. “Is your perch really that comfortable?”

“It’s an impekkable [sic] with a double-k perch,” Frank replied.

Suddenly, we heard a vehicle door shut in the parking lot. *Damn! I sure hope that’s not the park ranger or a park employee. / Oh, crap! The park ranger is here to bust us. We should have never parked in that lot. / Well, it was all going too good. Reality has now arrived, unannounced and most unwelcome. / Things may get very interesting now. I hope they don’t see me in this tree. Maybe I should tell them not to look up at me.*

We all remained silent. Then, after a hyper-extended minute, we heard an engine start, followed by the sound of wheels backing over the pebbly asphalt. Next, the sound of said vehicle driving away. *That must have been the other car that was parked in the lot when we arrived. / That must have been the other car that was parked in the lot when we arrived. / That must have been the other car that was parked in the lot when we arrived. / That must have been the other car that was parked in the lot when we arrived.*

“That must have been the other car that was parked in the lot when we arrived,” Frank said from on high.

“That’s exactly what I was thinking,” Mary said.

“Me, too,” Burke said.

“Me, three – I mean four,” I tacked on.



Then we all got quiet again and began wondering about the car's occupant or occupants. *But, where did they come from? / Where were they the past two hours? / Was he/she/they at the green pond, flipping their wig all day? / Was some psychopath spying on us?*

Frank still looked very relaxed in the oak tree. As for me, the pillow and blanket felt more than adequate. I was quite comfortable right where we were, and Burke and Mary seemed content, too. *Equilibrium re-established. Though, I can't totally relax until he gets down out of that monstrous tree.*

A tranquil 27 minutes passed with each of us lost in the morass of our deepening thoughts and surreal visions once again. *The Kron children probably played right where we are lying, maybe 140 or so years ago. / I hope no one else comes up here. I like having this to ourselves. / I sure hope no bear wanders up here. / The three of them look dead down there.*

At a near-dusky 7:27, (Yes, I checked my watch again, and was once again surprised by the palindromic time.) Frank carefully descended from the oak tree to the magnolia tree to terra firma (solid earth). *Thank God he's safely back on the ground. / Yey, he's out of that tree. / Glad that he made it down ok. / Why are they so immobilized?*

Frank walked over and sat down on the far end of the blanket that I was lying on. He didn't seem to be overexerted by the tree climbing adventure. He actually seemed to be thinking of his next forest foray.

“How was it up there?” I asked Frank. “Did you feel any vertigo?”

“Not at all,” he replied. “Usually I am somewhat uneasy with heights. But today, a piece of cake. I felt very fluid in my hand and foot movements and body positioning. It was like I was in some automatic climbing mode.” *Automatic climbing mode? / Automatically zapped. / Automatically adept.*

Frank then laid his slender torso down. He stared up at the tree with the rest of us. “That sure is one mighty-ass tree,” he said.

“It really is,” Mary replied.

“I’m sure that it has seen a lot of human foolishness over the decades,” I added. *And now, some more.*

“The tree has *seen*?” Burke questioned. “And, where exactly would the tree’s eyes be, Tryke?”

“Everywhere, Burke,” I replied. “On each barkette [*sic*] on every limb.” *Barkette? / What did he just say? / I had to ask.*

Some light laughter then we grew quiet once more. Sunset silently arrived, followed by a glowing gloaming. The first stars appeared. Then a crescent moon came into view. And then a dozen more stars. And then a bright planet Venus. *Wow! All of these celestial bodies seem to have stringy linkages with each other. / What a universe it is! / What will this night matter thirty years from now? Will I still even be alive? / Wonder how many times Dr. Kron stared up at the night sky from this knoll? What were his thoughts?*

The psychoactive ingredient from all of the day's dosings seemed to hit a crescendo as darkness settled to grass level. We were essentially speechless for about two hours. Our thoughts twisted through the trees. *What a magical night in North America. Yeah, just somewhere in North America with thoughts ripped asunder. / I wonder who or what is lurking. / I'd like to put this day in a jar for future reference. Maybe write a song based on it. / I wish I had my motorcycle up here. The ride would be freaking awesome.*

Then, at maybe ten o'clock (my best guess; no, I didn't look at my watch), Frank got up and walked over to the Kron House. He peered in the now-almost-black windows.

"Hey guys, I think I just saw the ghost of Dr. Kron," Frank shouted back at the supine three of us.

"Oh, really," I said as I rose to my feet, feeling a head rush. "Let me see if I can verify that for you." *Tryke, the apparition verifier? Please. / Too funny.*

Burke and Mary followed suit, and we all walked over to the Kron House and peered in the windows. Not sure what they saw paranormal-wise (if anything), but when I pulled my face back I saw my eerie dark reflection with the electric sky behind my head. *Wow! I look like one hopelessly lost soul in the cosmic sea.*

Frank then grabbed the back doorknob and gave it a turn. It was locked. *Why does he want to go in there? / No, let's not go in there. / This is where we get busted.*

“We don’t really want to sleep in there, do we, Frank?” Mary asked. *Hell no. / I’ll pass on that. / They really thought that I wanted to sleep in there?*

“Just checking to make sure it’s locked,” Frank said. “Don’t want a black bear to get in there and eat Little Red Riding Hood.” *What? / Huh?*

“I think that you’ve got your fairy tales mixed up, Frank,” I said. “It was a big, bad wolf – not a bear.” *Please, no bears.*

“Just checking, just checking,” Frank slyly said.

Suddenly, we heard a very strange sound, just like a baking pin rolling down the hood of a car. *What in this increasingly bizarre world was that?! / What a weird sound! That didn’t sound like an acorn. / What an odd noise that was. Almost sounded like my metal flashlight rolling on the roof of Mary’s car. Where is my flashlight? Did I leave it on the Valiant? No, it’s in my backpack. / Was something just on my car’s roof, hood or trunk? Gosh, I hope there is no damage.*

We froze behind the Kron House. We remained silent for ten seconds. Then Burke offered up the \$64K question: “What should we do now?” *Yes, what?*

“Let’s just stay right here for a few minutes, remaining silent,” Mary said. *Sounds good to me.*

“But, if someone is coming up right now, they’ll see our blankets on the lawn and know we’re nearby,” Frank smartly remarked. “I am going to run over there and gather up everything and put it in the woods, way out of view. I will hide

behind the big oak tree until the coast is clear. I suggest that you guys go hide in the woods. Whoever it is will look back here. Go down the cemetery trail seventy-five feet [22.9 meters] and observe the situation through the trees.” *That’s actually a better plan. / Seems like the best thing to do, I guess. / His thinking sure is much sharper than mine. / Hope they don’t get lost in the woods.*

Frank then scurried off towards our blanketed encampment as the rest of us made our way to the Kron gravesite footpath. *Hope this plan works. / Damn, I hope we don’t get detected. / Must try to stay smart, even though I’m seeing distractions everywhere. / Hope Tryke can stay quiet.*

Frank hid the blankets and drinks in the woods and settled behind the massive trunk of the mighty oak tree, occasionally peeking out at the top of the steps. *No one yet. Maybe we get lucky.*

Burke, Mary and I quietly walked down the graveyard path about 20 yards (18.3 meters), which was as far as we could go and still have a view of the back of the Kron House. We were silent. It was so quiet outside. *So far, so good. / No one yet. / Crossing my mental fingers.*

Then, after maybe three or four minutes, we heard a crackling sound at ground level. To our relief, it was just a marmot wandering about and grousing (it seemed to me). *Whew! / Thank God. / What a scare that rodent gave.*

At the nine-minute mark, I whispered to Burke and Mary: “I think that the coast is now clear. Want to slowly start walking back?”

“Ok,” Mary said. “But, let’s all be extra-quiet. No heavy feet on the twigs.” *Sage advice. / I see twigs everywhere. This will be hard. / I sure hope that they can keep their shoe noise to a minimum.*

Thirteen minutes after the mysterious rolling-object sound, we were all back behind the Kron House. We all felt quite relieved, but were still unsure if we were totally in the clear.

“Did you see anyone, Frank?” Mary asked.

“No, no one,” Frank replied. “How about you guys?”

“Nothing but a crawling critter,” Burke replied. *A crawling critter? Or, a carpet crawler?*

“Well, what do you think we should do now?” I asked everyone.

“Maybe we should spy the parking lot,” Mary suggested.

“I will stealthily survey it,” Frank said. “You guys just wait back here. I’ll be back in three minutes, tops.”

Frank then departed, heading for the steps that lead down to the parking lot. He remained quiet; we never heard his footsteps, or anything.

He came sprinting back just four minutes later with a big shark grin on his face. He alighted five feet (1.5 meters) from us, huffing and puffing.

“Dudes, we dodged a big bullet,” he said. “There’s no person, animal, or extraterrestrial alien down there. Your car

looks fine, Mary. All of the doors are still shut and locked. And, the parking lot gate is still wide open." *Good, we didn't get locked in. / Excellent report. / Ah, most-favorable news.*

"What a relief!" I exclaimed.

"Let's take that as an omen to leave and return to the campground," Mary said. *Yeah, maybe a harbinger of something untoward in the offing. / Yes, let's go. That was our important portent. / So, this is it for here. What a night. Goodbye Kron clan.*

"Yeah, that sounds like a good idea," Burke said. "I'm starting to come down, anyway."

"I think that drama brought me down a few astral planes," I added. *Astral planes? / He's still flying.*

We then got the blankets and drinks from behind the humongous oak tree and headed back for the veritable Valiant. I looked up at the tree for one last time. *Another strange tale for the wise old oak tree to reminisce about some evening.*

We reloaded the car. Mary drove us back to the hushed campground without a discernible incident, except for passing an entering car halfway down the Kron House road. *If they only knew ... / Whew! That was a close call. / Perfect exit timing. / So sad: They'll never know of our astounding ad hoc adventure.*

I saw a plethora of otherworldly images passing by in the dark woods. However, I just remained silent. I'm sure that the other three were seeing some bizarre things, too.

When we reached our campsite it was – could you believe? – 11:11. And as soon as we disembarked from the car, a thin, middle-age, white-haired, 50-something, Caucasian man emerged from a pup tent in the campsite right next to ours. *Not a nut-job. Not now. / I hope he's not a psycho. / This guy looks like a wig. / Is this where we end up being a news story?*

He looked excited, and yet a little perturbed. He tilted up his Montréal Expos baseball cap, shined a flashlight on his face, (upward from below his chin) and queried us: “Kron by night?”