

their state-of-the-art space capsule, its bulkheads lined with shelves holding the brass urns. They would revolve endlessly around the planet, presumably dodging incoming meteors and the relatively stationary T.V. satellites.

Clete and Juanita hopped a flight to Florida, Mom's brass urn tucked down in the bottom of her daughter's handbag. As the plane lifted off, Clete leaned back in his seat and said, "I don't believe this." Juanita dabbed her eyes with a napkin and said, "It's what Mom wanted."

The relatives huddled on the edge of the swamp, waiting for Eternal Orbits' first launch. The departed rested comfortably inside the capsule in seven large green trash bags, waiting for blastoff. The brass urns rested comfortably in the warehouse, waiting for meltdown.

The official from Eternal Orbits called the countdown through a bullhorn. The rocket smoked and rumbled in its scrap lumber scaffold, then shot into the sky. It did a big half-mile arc and crashed down into the swamp.

While the crowd stood frozen in the morning chill, stunned, the official from Eternal Orbits made a dash for his company car. The sound of his engine firing woke the crowd. They swarmed the car, cursing and screaming, hanging on as he crept across the parking lot. By the time he'd hit the highway, he'd lost them all, or so he thought. He grinned as he saw them fading in his rear-view mirror, still chasing him in their futile pursuit. He turned up the radio and settled into the plush upholstery, feeling good, until the woman's face appeared in his windshield from the roof, upside down, screaming and grimacing horribly.

LOTTO

It was lottery night. Ellis drove down to the Seven-Eleven to buy two tickets, one for Ruth and one for himself. He couldn't park in the lot, it looked like a damned party was going on: a suitcase-sized cassette player blared on top of the newspaper machines, shirtless boys in low slung jeans and baseball hats danced with short-skirted, bikini-topped girls, stag groups stood around the fringes, smoking cigarettes and drinking beer from quart bottles.

Ellis parked in the street and waded through the crowd, catching a dancer's elbow in the kidney. He pushed through the glass door. "What the hell is going on out there?" he asked the gum-chewing cashier. She'd been leaning on the counter, looking out the window at the festivities. She

pushed up to a standing position and reached into her blouse to straighten an errant bra strap. She said, "I dunno. Party, I guess."

He bought the tickets and walked back outside. The music hit him like a slap on the head. A pretty black girl grabbed his hand, smiling, pulling him out to the middle of the parking lot, enticing him to dance. He heard their laughter. They were making fun of him. She shook her breasts and started moving, making cat eyes at him, her white teeth flashing in the middle of her coal-black face. Ellis broke into a fast-paced, modified carioca, catching them all off guard. He heard a gasp from the crowd. He heard somebody say, "Look at that old guy move." Yes sir, look at him move indeed.

The black girl's eyes widened, followed by a smile. She tried to fall in step with him, almost matching him step for step. Almost. But Ellis had been taking lessons and he was hot. The crowd moved back to give them room.

Ruth was at home looking at the bottom of a test tube that was filled with her urine. The bottom of the test tube was reflected in a small mirror, set at a forty-five degree angle in a small stand underneath the vial of prophetic fluid. There was a distinct lavender ring forming in the bottom of the tube. She swept the stand and the test tube and the golden liquid off the marble counter top. She sat down heavily on the closed toilet seat. She put her face in her hands and groaned. She was forty-seven years old and she was pregnant.

The cops came and broke the party up. The young sergeant leaned on the hood of his car with his arms crossed, watching the crowd disperse. He stopped Ellis as he was trying to slink away and told him that he ought to be ashamed of himself, the girl was young enough to be his daughter. Called him an old goat. Ellis told the young cop that he'd be doin' the same thing himself, under the circumstances. The cop told him, "Yeah, but I wouldn't have let her get away." Ellis turned to see her climbing into a high-riding purple pick-up truck with three boys, showing a lot of dark leg. Ellis shrugged his shoulders and blushed. The young cop laughed.

Ellis banged in the front door, looking for Ruth. He called through the closed bathroom door that he'd gotten her lottery ticket. "And you know something?" he said, "I got a feeling this is our lucky night. I played your age, you know, forty-eight, on your ticket and mine. I just got a feeling it's gonna be our lucky night."

The door opened so hard and fast that Ellis was sucked into the room with his wife. She grabbed his collar and pushed him up against the wall, dislodging the towel rack, knocking it to the floor. She hissed through her teeth, "I am not forty-eight, Ellis dear, I am forty-seven."

TIME TO TANGO

Clete was dancing to the rock-and-roll show on the T.V., shuffling his feet, sucking up static electricity off the shag rug like a vacuum cleaner sucks up loose sand off a linoleum floor.

Juanita was in the kitchen doing dishes, shaking her huge hips to the beat as she scoured the three-quart pot, her thighs clapping together under her muu muu as she shimmied, registering 4.2 on the Richter scale, rattling the tea cups in the china cabinet.

Clete moon-walked across the floor, the hair on his cat's back standing up straight as he passed.

Juanita could stand it no longer. She had to dance. She rumbled out of the kitchen, jiggling like a barrelful of cranberry sauce.

Clete saw her coming and moved toward her, pushing his glasses back up on his nose, spearing a flower out of the vase and putting it in his mouth. It was time to tango.

They touched; there was an explosion.

Clete woke up on the patio surrounded by bits of broken glass, the curtains billowing out of the smashed window.

Juanita came to in the dining room on top of the splintered, shattered remains of the china cabinet. She called out to Clete, "Damn it, Honey, you've got to remember to ground yourself occasionally, you crazy-legged fool."

Clete knew she was right.

Ginger, Juanita's Chihuahua, aroused from her nap by the blast, picked her way through the wreckage and wondered, what the hell happened here?