

# The Glass Dragon

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It was the same dream that night as the night before. I awoke with a start, nearly knocking myself off the bed as I banged my head painfully against the night table.

“Jason,” my wife mumbled, her auburn hair shrouding her face, “are you alright?”

I stifled a curse as I rubbed my forehead, painfully tender and sure to bruise nicely. The alarm clock on the dresser read only 6:15, but there would be no use now in sleeping for another half-hour.

As if my aching head would permit it.

“Yes, honey,” I replied belatedly before Celia turned over to see my purplish forehead. “Go back to sleep.”

Celia mumbled something incoherent and proceeded to do just that. How the woman was able to pass out at will like some narcoleptic puppy was beyond me, but it was a trait I often admired.

I rose from the bed, my sore head spinning wildly, and stumbled to the bathroom where I found a medicine bottle in the cabinet. I took two of the yellow pills, not even really wondering what they were, and swallowed them with a glass of water from the faucet.

Once downstairs, my head began to clear and I was glad that I had a bit of extra time before work. I munched absently on a bagel, reading the papers and just as absently glossing over most of the stories, sensationalist nonsense that they were. As I flipped to the Government section, however, a headline caught my eye.

*Funding for Time Cop Project Approved.*

*It was about time*, I thought, shaking the last vestiges of grogginess from my mind and settling in to read the article. The TCP was an idea that was long overdue, and it appeared that its supporters in Congress had finally been able to make it a reality. The proliferation of personal time distortion devices had, over the past decade or so, become almost out of hand, and, for better or worse, we were now at the point where any sixteen year-old could download

instructions off the internet and create his own device with common household items like a paper clip, a rubber band, and a nine-volt battery. *You always needed a nine-volt battery*, I mused, and I was glad that it had not exactly progressed to that point. Yet.

In a way, I felt partly responsible. I was, after all, the one most directly responsible for inventing the damned things.

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I wended my way downtown, the morning gridlock on the San Francisco streets as sluggish as ever. The light before me changed from yellow to red, and I stopped and watched four more cars in the lane beside me run the signal. *There's no responsibility anymore*, I lamented, watching the display of honking and cursing through my windshield. I smiled at the irony as I looked up. Just above the street one of those ubiquitous billboards read: "Got a ticket today? Let us fix it for you... *yesterday*."

My cell phone rang and I looked back to the light, now green, and waited for the four or five morons in the other direction running the light in return. I picked up the phone as I inched out into the intersection.

"Hello?"

"Hey, dad," Robert's voice responded. "How you doing this morning?"

I slammed on the brakes as a dazed pedestrian walked into the road in front of me. "Alright," I sighed. "I gave myself one hell of a bruise this morning on the night table, though."

"I told you those glass night tables were trouble," Robert chided. "But you had to have them."

"They go with my glass dragon," I replied.

"I know, I know. Listen, dad," he said, "how about if I take you to lunch today?"

"Sure," I said, somewhat surprised. "Something bringing you to the city?"

"Well, I'm meeting a client in Oakland, and I figure I'll be able to give myself a long lunch and brave the traffic across the bridge. How's Cityscape sound?"

I smiled. "Cityscape, eh? If you're gonna hit me up for money, shelling out for an expensive lunch is a pretty good way to start."

I could hear him laughing on the other end. “When was the last time I asked you for money, dad?” he asked. “I just felt like taking you somewhere nice, that’s all.”

“Sure,” I replied. “Noon?”

“I’ll pick you up out front. But I gotta run. I have to actually do some work out here if I want to get away for lunch.”

“Try not to crash the supercomputer today,” I admonished. “Or did you already do that this week?”

“Very funny, dad,” he replied. “See you at noon.”

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The morning went pretty smoothly, all things considered, and except for an incident involving the live frog someone had decided to bring in for show and tell, the third graders behaved pretty well. Sometimes, I thought they even listened to me.

Around lunchtime, however, there was a bit of a stir.

“Mr. Abraham,” Billy Thomas asked, apprehensively raising his hand from his seat near the back of the room, “my big brother says school is a waste of time. He says we don’t need school any more, now that we have the hoppers.”

God, I hated the term “hoppers.”

A hush fell over the class. It was eerie, disconcerting, this level of silence in a third-grade class. They were all listening very attentively for my answer, as if each of them had been waiting for someone else to ask.

“Well, Billy,” I replied, suddenly realizing I was pitifully ill-prepared for such a pointed question from an eight year-old, “what do *you* think?”

Billy looked down at his desk. “I don’t know,” he said softly.

“Let’s think about it, then,” I offered, trying to sound diplomatic. “Do you go to school just so you can be rich later, or do you come here to learn and better your minds?”

Billy continued to stare at the desk as if it were about to bolt out of the room if left unsupervised. “I don’t know.”

“Well,” I continued, “if the only reason you’re in school is to get rich, then maybe you’re here for the wrong reasons.” I looked about the room, hoping my spontaneous strategy would

work. “But it’s easy to get rich nowadays, isn’t it? Anyone can do it. But learning, developing your mind, you can’t get that from... from hoppers, now can you?”

God, I hated the term “hoppers.”

Billy mumbled something that sounded vaguely like “I guess not.” The rest of the class simply stared at me, unreadable.

Just then, the lunch bell sounded.

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As promised, Robert arrived punctually at 11:59, pulling to a stop before the brick schoolhouse. I stepped into the car quickly, sighing as I leaned back against the leather seat.

“Tough day?” he asked.

“Yeah,” I replied. “Billy -- you remember Billy? -- he asked me today why he should bother going to school when everyone has a hopper.”

“You hate calling them hoppers, dad,” Robert reminded me helpfully. “They’re ‘time distortion devices.’”

I rolled my eyes. “Yes, I know. I gave him the ‘you can’t get an education from time travel’ speech, but I don’t know if any of them bought it.”

“Listen,” Robert began seriously, “everyone has to make their own choices in life. Some people will take the easy path, and others will do things the right way.” He turned down a side street. “You do the best you can to teach them. That’s all there is to it.”

“I know,” I sighed.

“Look, we’ve talked about this a hundred times before. Sure, it’s gotten out of hand, but think of all the good you’ve done. All the lives you’ve saved.”

“I know,” I sighed again, feeling a bit like Billy, staring at my son’s dashboard.

“I mean -- think about it,” he continued. “You did the Hitler Mission. That *has* to make you feel great.” He looked to me for confirmation. “Whatever else has happened since then, you made a lot of good things possible.”

He was right, I knew. I mean, it was, without question, the single greatest thing I had done in my life. As the chief designer of the time distortion unit, they let me be the one to go back for that historic first mission, the one we were afraid no one would remember anyway. But,

with the proper equipment, we were able to limit the effects and not change the consciousness of the world in the process. Back then, when there were only a few of the Units, when the effects were planned and controlled, we were able to do a lot of good. And so what if a few people took the easy way out, going back to win some lottery instead of earning their money? I had stopped the Holocaust, among other things, and that was a pretty awesome feeling.

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The view from the restaurant was incredible. The lobster bisque was even more so.

“You know,” Robert said abruptly, apparently just remembering. “I read in the paper today that Congress had passed funding for the TCP.”

“Yes, yes, I read that too,” I replied, tearing myself from the bisque. “It’s about damned time.”

“Once they get the program running,” Robert continued, “most of the negative effects of time travel will be eliminated.”

“Sure they will,” I said, stubbornly and cynically unconvinced. “That is, if someone doesn’t just go back and eliminate the funding later today.”

Robert snorted and flashed me a sardonic glance. But he knew damned well it was quite possible.

“Hey,” I said, changing the subject, “tomorrow’s Saturday. Why don’t you come over and have dinner with your mother and me? You can make the trip up from Cupertino to visit us old folks, can’t you?”

Robert looked at his watch. “Well, I have a lot to finish up at the office today. If I can’t get it done, I’ll have to go in tomorrow to work on the mainframe.”

I gave him a pained look.

“Okay,” he acquiesced. “I’ll find the time to be there tomorrow night.”

I smiled and went back to my bisque. Somehow, time was still the one thing always in short supply.

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It was about 7:45 by the time I got home, fairly late by my standards, not that it mattered. It wasn't like there would be anyone at the house waiting for me.

I opened the heavy wooden door, the frame squealing slightly in protest as I did so. Awaiting me on the foyer table was the glass dolphin, suspended above its wood base as if leaping out of some body of water.

For some reason that damned thing always depressed me. I don't know why I never moved it somewhere else. Maybe the attic.

I threw my coat on the couch and slumped down beside it, looking around at the mess that was my home. *You need a woman around here*, my mom used to say, before she died. Yeah, thanks for the hot tip.

For some reason I glanced to the answering machine, and saw to my surprise that a message actually awaited thereon. Probably a wrong number.

I hit the play button and a tinny voice came over the speakers. "Jason," my supervisor's voice began, "sorry to call you at home, but I just missed you at the office. It seems we're going to be short-staffed for the rest of the year, so your particle dynamics experiments will have to wait. Also, we're going to need everyone to pull together to handle the upcoming workload. But I know you're a team player, Jason. I'll see you tomorrow at six."

"Great," I muttered aloud into the empty house. "There goes my Saturday."

But it was a hollow protest, and I knew it. It's not like I had anything better to do.

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I just didn't feel like heating up another microwave dinner, so I trudged back to the car to grab some fast food. The line at the drive-through was, as always, slothful, but I dropped the car into park and waited without complaint.

The line began to inch along and I found myself staring in the large glass windows of the eatery. A man in a black leather jacket was standing at the counter, his arm snaking around the waist of a shapely woman. Inexplicably, my eyes seemed drawn to the couple, and when they turned around to find a table a sudden wave of recognition passed over me, as if the woman was an acquaintance of long ago that I just couldn't place. Her auburn hair cascaded down her back and her eyes, even through the grimy glass, shone like blue-green sapphires. I struggled to grasp

the nebulous memory that told me that I once knew this incredible woman. An abrupt blare of a horn behind me ended my little reverie, and I moved on to the window and ordered my food.

The woman plagued me for most of the drive home, but by the time I had parked in the driveway and walked to the front door, she was all but forgotten. Greeting me instead when I came home was a creaky door and a glass dolphin on the foyer table.

Why I ever bought that thing, I don't know. I guess I had thought it would impress a woman, someone, somewhere, if any had ever come to my house to see it. *That's it, Jason, I thought sarcastically, some strange woman is going to show up at your door, take one look at that damned dolphin and jump into your arms. Then you won't have to die alone in this old house.*

The sad thing is, that really must have been what I was thinking when I moved it by the door. I still don't know why I don't just throw the damned thing away.

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I awoke the next morning and slapped at the alarm clock, the wooden night table, like everything else in the house, noisily protesting the contact. A waking dream still lingered in my subconscious, something nice and warm and full of family and friends and an elementary school. And the woman from the fast food place. But it only lasted for a moment, and then the reality of my exhaustion battered into me like a cold train.

It was 4:15 AM on a Saturday and I was getting up to go to work. In a rare moment of early-morning clarity, I wondered what in the hell I ever did wrong in my life to end up here.

*And I had been close to greatness once,* I thought. Things could have turned out differently for me. I could have been a somebody, and not some miserable lab rat working 12-hour days in some miserable science factory. If I had finished my postulations just a few days earlier, it would have been me, me who introduced the world to the possibilities of time travel and me who got to go on The Mission. It would have been me who was the instant hero and not some schmuck no one had ever heard of from Trieste.

It would have been some schmuck no one had ever heard of from San Francisco.

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The car inched its way down Embarcadero, stopping as often as not in the early morning gridlock. I was late, I knew, but I didn't particularly care, and I had stopped getting agitated by the lethargic pace of the traffic. Maybe I would tell the director to kiss my team-player ass when I got to the lab today. *And maybe the sun will fall out of the sky.* I looked up into the morning fog, my eyes fixating on a spot in the windshield. I shook myself out of my momentary daze and my eyes refocused on the billboard above. *Got a ticket today? Let us fix it... yesterday.*

Yeah, well, time travel sure wasn't doing me a hell of a lot of good at the moment. I doubted it did anyone any good anymore. Sure, at first, it was great: Hitler, the fire at Alexandria, the Black Plague, all wiped out by "selective temporal engineering." All great improvements for mankind. *Well, maybe not the Plague,* I thought bitterly. *Maybe there wouldn't be all this damned gridlock now.*

I rubbed my temples as my mind suddenly clouded. I swerved just in time to avoid a car cutting into my lane on the freeway. *Why do all the madmen take I-80?* I wondered, and, missing my exit, I relegated myself to getting off at Mission Street and backtracking to the school. I was early anyway. Saturday classes didn't start until seven, and I still had a good half-hour.

The fifth-graders I had volunteered to teach on Saturdays had been worrying me of late. I even suspected a few of them had been using time distortion devices to tamper with their grades. *But what's the difference?* I wondered. *That's why no one cares about grades anymore anyway.*

Of course, that wasn't the point and I knew it. The Saturday kids had all been labeled "at risk," and, if I wasn't able to steer them on the right path, who knew what would become of them? Who knew how much damage they could do, playing with time like some omnipotent video game? I don't know why I did it -- why I volunteered for the Saturday sessions or why I began teaching in the first place. Maybe I felt that the world was in a lot of trouble. Maybe I felt it was my responsibility to help.

I pulled into the parking lot and checked the time. I still had about 15 minutes before class started, and I doubted any of the kids would be early. I grabbed the newspaper from the passenger seat and walked to my classroom.

As I suspected, I was greeted by rows of desks and chairs and an empty room. I sat behind my desk and unfolded the paper in front of me. *Time Cop Initiative Narrowly Defeated in Congress,* it read. *Ah well,* I thought. *Maybe next time.*



The doors flew open and a stream of kids sauntered in, pushing and tugging at each other roughly as they entered. Ignoring me, they milled about in the back of the class, one of them explaining to the others in a profanity-laden tirade the various negative views he held regarding Saturday school.

*Maybe this is why we never had kids*, I thought, glad that Celia would be waiting at home for me at the end of what was sure to be a long day. “Now settle down, kids,” I said feebly into the chaos, hoping to break up the little verbal protest before it developed into a full-fledged mutiny. “Let’s get to our seats and get started, okay?”

“Go to hell,” one of the students responded, not even bothering to glance up at me.

A long day, indeed.

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By the time I arrived home, the early afternoon sun had burned the fog from over the city, and it had developed into a typically beautiful California day. I parked the car in the driveway and walked to the front door, taking the scent of the gardenias lining the walk into my nostrils. The key turned in the lock and I opened the stained glass door, to be greeted, as always, by my loyal Labrador Retriever and my marvelous glass dragon.

“Hi, honey, I’m home,” I called, wrestling with the overjoyed dog and setting down my briefcase. “I had one hell of a day.”

Celia appeared around a corner, her luminous face and blue-green sapphire eyes lighting the room like a star. “Another rough day at the office, hon?” she asked, wrapping her soft arms around me and pecking me affectionately on the lips. “Why don’t you lie down and relax for a while?” she offered. “I’ll start dinner. I have something in mind that may cheer you up a bit.”

“Okay,” I agreed. “An early dinner sounds good. Are you making calimari, by any chance?” I asked, as though I didn’t know the answer.

She smiled that smile of hers, running her hand reassuringly down my cheek. “What do you think?”

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I awoke and checked the clock, finding to my surprise that I had slept until nearly six. I turned over to find Celia silently watching me from the foot of the bed. “Dinner’s ready,” she purred, and I could smell the calimari from the bedroom.

I rolled out of bed, a stray thought bubbling into my consciousness. “Celia, honey, are we having anyone for dinner tonight?”

She gave me a quizzical look. “No, dear,” she replied. “Just us. Why?”

“Oh... never mind,” I said, rubbing the sleep from my eyes. “Must have been a dream.”

“Hmm,” she agreed, leading me down to the dining room.

The TV was on in the living room, and, as I followed Celia downstairs, I could tell that something was going on, even though I could not yet make out the alarmed voices of the news commentators.

I went over to the television, turning up the volume to hear what crisis had spawned this special report. The man’s voice was grave.

“...at about 5:37 this afternoon. Guards are not sure how the escape was accomplished, but authorities strongly suspect that time distortion played a major role.”

“What’s going on?” Celia asked over my shoulder, holding my arm nervously. “What is it?”

“I don’t know yet,” I replied. “Someone escaped from jail, I think.”

I turned back to the television and my heart froze. A box in the corner of the display showed the escaped convict. Though I had not seen him in many years, I recognized his face instantly.

It was Lancome Terziat.

The Tyrant of Trieste.

“Again,” the voice continued, “if you are just joining us, channel four has just received word that Lancome Terziat has escaped from jail, where he was serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. Terziat, also known as the Tyrant of Trieste, was jailed just over twenty years ago after he was identified as the leader of the Fingers of Death Terrorist Camp. That group, of course, was the one responsible for the nuclear-”

I turned the television off. I knew very well what that madman had done. And I knew of what he was capable.

He had been my best friend.

“My God,” Celia whispered.

But it was much worse than she thought. I had gone for almost a year now without thinking of Terziat, and I had been able to sleep at night because I knew that he was safely locked behind a temporal grid, beyond the reach of his demented followers who had yearned to free him for so long. In an act unprecedented in U. S. history, in fact, Alcatraz federal prison had been reopened to house this one lone madman, where the country had thought he would be safely stored away until he died.

*If only they hadn't repealed capital punishment just before they nabbed him.*

*If only he hadn't gone completely insane.*

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Dinner was quiet. I could sense that Celia desperately wanted to distract me, but she could sadly think of nothing to say.

“He has to be stopped,” I said abruptly. “I have to stop him.”

Celia looked up from her plate. “Honey,” she said, reaching over to take my hand in hers, “maybe he'll just disappear. Maybe we'll never hear from him again.”

She knew it wasn't true as much as I did.

Terziat was a madman, plain and simple, a man whose greed and thirst for power were unparalleled. A brilliant researcher, he had worked with me at the academy, worked on the very time distortion experiments I had worked on myself. Just before the momentous discovery, we had fallen into an enormous argument over the way our research should continue. He would not listen to reason, and he had stormed out and left to work on his postulations alone.

My theories, of course, had been the correct ones. And all his work had gone for naught. In my foolish youth, still angry at his deserting me, I hadn't even given him the credit he deserved for his contributions. Once one of the brightest scholars in the world, he quickly disappeared from the scientific community. When I next heard of him, it was on CNN, and they were calling him the Tyrant of Trieste.

I buried my head in my hands, a thousand thoughts entering my mind. *If only things had gone differently*, I lamented. *If only we hadn't had that fight.*

*If only he hadn't escaped.*

But he had. And it wouldn't be long before he altered the timeline, brought about horrible events that had never happened. And no one would be the wiser, the alternate reality fusing with this one seamlessly. One day, soon, I would wake up or look up from the paper and everything would be different. I would find myself in some grotesque mutation of existence, some timeline that psychopath and his followers had made a reality. And my entire life, my accomplishments, my memories -- even Celia -- would be nothing but a figment of my imagination.

And there wasn't a damned thing I could do about it.

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Not surprisingly, I couldn't sleep that night. Celia -- God bless her -- had curled her head into the crook of my shoulder and fallen asleep in seconds. But I lay awake, and thoughts of horrible alternate timelines filled my head. *Would he make it so he developed time travel instead of me? Would he do something terrible to me? What if, I thought with a start, I wasn't even a part of his alternate reality? What if I had been killed years ago?*

Strangely, a sudden fit of exhaustion passed over me, and I was fast asleep.

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The lights came on and I awoke, the sirens blaring their acrid dirge into the cold morning air. I rolled over on the metal cot, pulling the thin sheet over my aching head. But the sirens did not go away, and I knew I could either get up or they would get me up.

I rose from the cot, every joint and muscle and bone in my tired body screaming in unison. I raised my feeble arm to shield my eyes, but the lights filtered through nonetheless. The camp was awakening around me, and it was time to start another of the agonizingly brutal days that were my life.

I shuffled to the showers, the cold water slamming into my rigid body like a million tiny needles. I worked the soap against my leathery skin, but the water had turned off before I was halfway through. I slogged out into the dressing room and wiped the water from my body with my ragged towel, quickly dressing and falling into line with the other workers. Today I would be sent to the electrical assembly line, piecing together positron cores or cathode-ray tubes or maybe

charge-coupled devices. My scientific aptitude had relegated me to such tasks, which, I suppose, were eminently better than the laborers’.

And it gave me the opportunity to effectuate my escape.

The breakfast line moved sluggishly, one scoop of some revolting gruel ladled onto each worker’s tray. There were no utensils -- too much of a security risk -- which was just as well, because the less of the stuff I actually got into my body, the better. I scooped at the gruel with my hands anyway, resigning myself to the fact that it was the only thing keeping me alive, if I could call it that. A fight broke out in the far corner of the cafeteria, which the guards watched laconically. The siren began to sound, and I found myself trudging amidst the human river flowing to the reconditioning chamber.

I collapsed onto a bench near the back of the room and tried to avoid watching the screens, placed as they were on all five walls of the room, including the ceiling. A red flag waved in the background and Terziat himself, as always, spouted his nonsense from omnipresent speakers. Most of the zombie workers stared into the screens, entranced, mouths agape. I wanted to vomit.

“And you should all be *proud*,” his voice boomed, “of the contribution you are making to the Empire. It is through your efforts that we are able to achieve the quality of life that we enjoy today.

“Remember, my comrades,” he continued, his voice bated, “life was not always as good as it is today. There was a time -- many of you thankfully do not remember -- but there *was* a time when the Empire was not around to serve us. There *was* a time when crime and poverty ran rampant in our country. There *was* a time before we had unlocked the secrets of time travel, a time before the beneficent Empire so assiduously provided for all her citizens.”

A cheer issued forth from the assembled laborers.

I could not listen to any more of the drivel. I found my hand unconsciously resting on the pouch I had sewn to the inside of my uniform. I found my hand resting on the device.

Today was the day.

Just as I had managed to get comfortable on the rigid bench, the presentation was over. Without any prodding from the guards, the laborers rose and shuffled out of the chamber, heading towards their assigned sections. I was one of the few heading towards the electronics wing, and, for the first time in many years, I felt hopeful. Hopeful that soon, all this might be behind me.

Hopeful that I had a real future.

But hope was a dangerous thing in a place like this. The labor camp, merely one of thousands throughout the Empire, was the way of life for most of the proletariat. All across the globe, the vast, efficient machine that was Terziate's Empire churned out weapons and armour and other instruments of war. Throughout the Empire, the oppressed masses slaved in the labor camps, providing the economic base which afforded Terziate his surely opulent lifestyle. Once he had invented the time distortion units, reshaping society to fit his whims was easy. Soon, his Empire would span the entire globe, and there would be no country left to rival his power, no one left to develop the technology themselves. His control over time, and, thus, the world, would be total.

Or so he thought.

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My heart leapt as I entered the electrical engineering chamber. We would indeed be working on positron cores today.

Which meant that the last piece of my device would soon be in my hands.

It had not been easy, assiduously collecting the pieces with which to construct my device. Though the theory had come to me in time – and what else did I have, in the camp, but time? – finding the materials with which to construct my invention had been significantly more difficult. Not only was I limited to whatever the electrical engineering factory happened to be producing at the time, but purloining the equipment proved to be a risky endeavor. Had I ever been caught with any of the parts I had collected -- well, a slow death would have been the best I could have hoped for.

But it had proven to be surprisingly easy to hide my plunder from the torpid guards, who had grown used to years of submissive compliance by the laborers. Over the years I had collected the parts when I could, and finally my project was nearing completion. I found that my hands were shaking uncontrollably as I sat down to work.

The day passed interminably, and once I had appropriated the positron isolator, time itself seemed to slow its pace solely to spite me. I did not remember much of the day, in fact, and when the 12-hour work shift had ended I hoped I had done nothing to divulge my plans.

In the cafeteria, I forced myself to eat, trying as best I could to follow my normal routine. Throughout the meal, I felt as if every guard in the complex was watching me, and I was sure that I would be pounced upon just as soon as I got back to the barracks. *Just a few more hours*, I thought. *Just give me a few more hours and all this will be gone.* All instantly obliterated once I had traveled back and de-invented the infernal time machine.

It was dark in the barracks, but thankfully I had taken the time – what else did I have in the camp, but time? – to learn how to assemble the device in the dark. I worked under the tattered sheet, taking care to properly align the components and secure them together. Though it took several hours, I was finished before morning, and, as I slid the nine-volt battery into its housing, I was thankful that I would never be awakened by the morning sirens again.

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The resounding peal of a car horn snapped me back to attention, and I realized that I had been staring at the green light for some time. With an apologetic wave to the driver behind me, I drove through the intersection and turned onto my street a few blocks ahead.

The sun was setting as I pulled into the driveway, affording me a picturesque view of the Golden Gate Bridge shrouded in a veil of purple clouds. I stepped out of the car and took a moment to inhale the sweet scent of the flowered walkway, an amalgamation of fragrant blooms Celia had carefully cultivated over the years. I took one last look at the purple sky and walked to the stained glass door, turning the key and casually stepping inside.

Awaiting me just inside the door, on the foyer table, was an exquisite glass sculpture, one which I had seen a thousand times but one which still served to draw a smile to my face.

*It is a very nice glass dragon*, I thought, contentedly. A very nice glass dragon indeed.

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