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A STATUE FOR FATHER

First time? Really? But of course you have heard of it. Yes, I was sure you had.

If you're really interested in the discovery, believe me, I'll be delighted-to tell you. It's a story I've always liked to tell, but not many people give me the chance. I've even been advised to keep the story under wraps. It interferes with the legends growing up about my father.

Still, I think the truth is valuable. There's a moral to it. A man can spend his life devoting his energies solely to the satisfaction of his own curiosity and then, quite accidentally, without ever intending anything of the sort, find himself a benefactor of humanity.

Dad was just a theoretical physicist, devoted to the investigation of time travel. I don't think he ever gave a thought to what time travel might mean to Homo sapiens. He was just curious about the mathematical relationships that governed the universe, you see.

Hungry? All the better. I imagine it will take nearly half an hour. They will do it properly for an official such as yourself. It ’ s a matter of pride.

To begin with, Dad was poor as only a university professor can be poor. Eventually, though, he became wealthy. In the last years before his death he was fabulously rich, and as for myself and my children and grandchildren-well, you can see for yourself.

They've put up statues to him, too. The oldest is on the hillside right here where the discovery was made. You can just see it out the window. Yes. Can you make out the inscription? Well, we're standing at a bad angle. No matter.

By the time Dad got into time-travel research the whole problem had been given up by most physicists as a bad job. It had begun with a splash when the Chrono-funnels were first set up.

Actually, they're not much to see. They're completely irrational and uncontrollable. What you see is distortedand wavery, two feet across at the most, and it vanishes quickly. Trying to focus on the past is like trying to focus on a feather caught in a hurricane that has gone mad.

They tried poking grapples into the past but that was just as unpredictable. Sometimes it was carried off successfully for a few seconds with one man leaning hard against the

grapple. But more often a pile driver couldn't push it through. Nothing was ever obtained out of the past until-Well, I'll get to that.

After fifty years of no progress, physicists just lost interest. The operational technique seemed a complete blind alley; a dead end. I can't honestly say I blame them as I look back on it. Some of them even tried to show that the funnels didn't actually expose the past, but there had been too many sightings of living animals through the funnels-animals now extinct.

Anyway, when time travel was almost forgotten, Dad stepped in. He talked the government into giving him a grant to set up a Chrono-funnel of his own, and tackled the matter all over again.

I helped him in those days. I was fresh out of college, with my own doctorate in physics.

However, our combined efforts ran into bad trouble after a year or so. Dad had difficulty in getting his grant renewed. Industry wasn't interested and the university decided he was besmirching their reputation by being so single-minded in investigating a dead field. The dean of the graduate school, who understood only the financial end of scholarship, began by hinting that he switch to more lucrative fields and ended by forcing him out.

Of course, the dean-still alive and still counting grant-dollars when Dad died-probably felt quite foolish, I imagine, when Dad left the school a million dollars free and clear in his will, with a codicil canceling the bequest on the ground that the dean lacked vision. But that was merely posthumous revenge. For years before that

1 don't wish to dictate, but please don't have any more of the breadsticks. The clear soup, eaten slowly to prevent a too-sharp appetite, will do.

Anyway, we managed somehow. Dad kept the equipment we had bought with the grant money, moved it out of the university and set it up here.

Those first years on our own were brutal, and I kept urging him to give up. He never would. He was indomitable, always managing to find a thousand dollars somewhere when we needed it.

Life went on, but he allowed nothing to interfere with his research. Mother died; Dad mourned and returned to his task. I married, had a son, then a daughter, couldn't always be at his side. He carried on without me. He broke his leg and worked with the cast impeding him for months.

So I give him an the credit. I helped, of course. I did consulting work on the side and

carried on negotiation with Washington. But he was the life and soul of the project.

Despite an that, we weren't getting anywhere. An the money we managed to scrounge might just as well have been poured into one of the Chrono-funnels-not that it would have passed through.

After an, we never once managed to get a grapple through a funnel. We came near on only one occasion. We had the grapple about two inches out the other end when focus changed. It snapped off clean and somewhere in the Mesozoic there is a man-made piece of steel rod rusting on a riverbank.

Then one day, the crucial day, the focus held for ten long minutes-something for which the odds were less than one in a trillion. Lord, the frenzies of excitement we experienced as we set up the cameras. We could see living creatures just the other side of the funnel, moving energetically.

Then, to top it off, the Chrono-funnel grew permeable, until you might have sworn there was nothing but air between the past and ourselves. The low permeability must have been connected with the long holding of focus, but we've never been able to prove that it did.

Of course, we had no grapple handy, wouldn't you know. But the low permeability was clear enough because something just fen through, moving from the Then into the Now. Thunderstruck, acting simply on blind instinct, I reached forward and caught it.

At that moment we lost focus, but it no longer left us embittered and despairing. We were both staring in wild surmise at what I held. It was a mass of caked and dried mud, shaved off clean where it had struck the borders of the Chrono-funnel, and on the mud cake were fourteen eggs about the size of duck eggs.

I said, “Dinosaur eggs? Do you suppose they really are?”

Dad said, “Maybe. We can't tell for sure.”

“Unless we hatch them,” I said in sudden, almost uncontrollable excitement. I put them down as though they were platinum. They felt warm with the heat of the primeval sun. I said, “Dad, if we hatch them, we'll have creatures that have been extinct for over a hundred million years. It will be the first case of something actually brought out of the past. If we announce this-”

I was thinking of the grants we could get, of the publicity, of all that it would mean to Dad. I was seeing the look of consternation on the dean's face.

But Dad took a different view of the matter. He said firmly. “Not a word, son. If this

gets out, we'll have twenty research teams on the trail of the Chrono-funnels, cutting off my advance. No, once I've solved the riddle of the funnels, you can make all the announcements you want. Until then-we keep silent. Son, don't look like that. I'll have the answer in a year. I'm sure of it.

I was a little less confident, but those eggs, I felt convinced, would arm us with all the proof we'd need. I set up a large oven at bloodheat; I circulated air and moisture. I rigged up an alarm that would sound at the first signs of motion within the eggs.

They hatched at 3 A.M. nineteen days later, and there they were-fourteen wee kangaroos with greenish scales, clawed hindlegs, plump little thighs, and thin, whiplash tails.

I thought at first they were tyrannosauri, but they were too small for that species of dinosaur. Months passed, and I could see they weren't going to grow any larger than moderate-sized dogs.

Dad seemed disappointed, but I held on, hoping he would let me use them for publicity.One died before maturity and one was killed in a scuffle. But the other twelve survived-five males and seven females. I fed them on chopped carrots, boiled eggs, and milk, and grew quite fond of them. They were fearfully stupid and yet gentle. And they were truly beautiful. Their scales

Oh, well, it's silly to describe them. Those original publicity pictures have made their rounds. Though, come to think of it, I don't know about Mars-Oh, there, too. Well, good.

But it took a long time for the pictures to make an impression on the public, let alone a sight of the creatures in the flesh. Dad remained intransigent. A year passed, two, and finally three. We had no luck whatsoever with the Chrono-funnels. The one break was not repeated, and still Dad would not give in.

Five of our females laid eggs and soon I had over fifty of the creatures on my hands.

“What shall we do with them?” I demanded. “Kill them off,” he said.

Well, I couldn't do that, of course. Henri, is it almost ready? Good.

We had reached the end of our resources when it happened. No more money was available. I had tried everywhere, and met with consistent rebuffs. I was even glad because it seemed to me that Dad would have to give in now. But with a chin that was firm and indomitably set, he coolly set up another experiment.

I swear to you that if the accident had not happened the truth would have eluded us

forever. Humanity would have been deprived of one of its greatest boons.

It happens that way sometimes. Perkin spots a purple tinge in his gunk and comes up with aniline dyes. Remsen puts a contaminated finger to his lips and discovers saccharin. Goodyear drops a mixture on the stove and finds the secret of vulcanization.

With us, it was a half-grown dinosaur wandering into the main research lab. They had become so numerous I hadn't been able to keep track of them.

The dinosaur stepped right across two contact points which happened to be open-just at the point where the plaque immortalizing the event is now located. I'm convinced that such a happenstance couldn't occur again in a thousand years. There was a blinding flash, a blistering short circuit, and the Chrono-funnel which had just been set up vanished in a rainbow of sparks.

Even at the moment, really, we didn't know exactly what we had. All we knew was that the creature had short-circuited and perhaps destroyed two hundred thousand dollars worth of equipment and that we were completely ruined financially. All we had to show for it was one thoroughly roasted dinosaur. We were slightly scorched ourselves, but the dinosaur got the full concentration of field energies. We could smell it. The air was saturated with its aroma. Dad and I looked at each other in amazement. I picked it up gingerly in a pair of tongs. It was black and charred on the outside, but the burnt scales crumbled away at a touch, carrying the skin with it. Under the char was white, firm flesh that resembled chicken.

I couldn't resist tasting it, and it resembled chicken about the way Jupiter resembles an asteroid.

Believe me or not, with our scientific work reduced to rubble about us, we sat there in seventh heaven and devoured dinosaur. Parts were burnt, parts were nearly raw. It hadn't been dressed. But we didn't stop until we had picked the bones clean.

Finally I said, “Dad, we've got to raise them gloriously and systematically for food purposes.”

Dad had to agree. We were completely broke.

I got a loan from the bank by inviting the president to dinner and feeding him dinosaur.

It has never failed to work. No one who has once tasted what we now call “dinachicken” can rest content with ordinary fare. A meal without dinachicken is a meal we choke down to keep body and soul together. Only dinachicken is food.

Our family still owns the only herd of dinachickens in existence and we are the only suppliers for the worldwide chain of restaurants-this is the first and oldest-which has grown up about it.

Poor Dad! He was never happy, except for those unique moments when he was actually eating dinachicken. He continued working on the Chrono-funnels and so did twenty other research teams which, as he had predicted would happen, jumped in. Nothing ever came of any of it, though, to this day. Nothing except dinachicken.

Ah, Pierre, thank you. A superlative job/ Now, sir, if you will allow me to carve. No salt, now, and just a trace of the sauce. That ’ s right…Ah, that is precisely the expression I always see on the face of a man who experiences his first taste of the delight.

A grateful humanity contributed fifty thousand dollars to have the statue on the hillside put up, but even that tribute failed to make Dad happy.

All he could see was the inscription: The Man Who Gave Dinachicken to the World.

You see, to his dying day, he wanted only one thing, to find the secret of time travel. For all that he was a benefactor of humanity, he died with his curiosity unsatisfied.