

The Pet Shop

For the first time in his life, Charles Dory was confused. It confused him to be confused. He was confused because he was experiencing conflicting emotions simultaneously. He could not understand how he could feel exhilarated, depressed and distressed at the same time. Charles Dory, a bachelor in his early thirties, had always lived his life on an even keel - no ups or downs. He had approached his successes and failures with equanimity. His involvement with the opposite sex had always been infrequent, perfunctory, and invariably to satisfy his biological needs. He intended to remain a confirmed bachelor and never to get entangled with anyone, enabling him to retain a sense of independence and freedom for the rest of his days. It is not known why he shied away from a marital commitment. Perhaps his parents' marriage had served as an unhappy example.

Charles was a historian of the future, a profession he had chosen rather carefully. He was a product of the late twenty-first century. Many vocations trendy in earlier times had all but disappeared. Most issues related to political science, economics, social psychology, sociology, etc. had been studied to death and for the most part were thought resolved. The professions had become computerized: lawyers, doctors, dentists, accountants, and others had all but vanished. The so-called hard sciences were open only to the very few with a special and unique talent for them. Luckily for Charles, he had a singular and unique aptitude for history and in particular for the interpretive aspects of that area of study. There seemed to be an infinite number of ways in which history could be understood. Thus anyone providing a new and intriguing slant on historical events, especially those of a scandalous character, often enjoyed moments in the academic limelight. All that seemed to be required was a good imagination and a colourful approach that did not challenge established historical facts. The future was even better, because there was no verifiable data to refute any view of it.

Despite strong competition, Charles managed to hold his own. However, he was always seeking something to launch him to fame and forever make his fortune. A number of years before time travel became possible, he had become interested in futurology, a field pioneered by some intellectual dilettantes of the late twentieth century. These effete thinkers had never successfully foretold anything. The standing joke about them was a quote from a leading politician of earlier times, Winston Churchill, who asserted, "A successful politician (futurolgist) is one who can satisfactorily explain why all his predictions were wrong." While Charles maintained his work on the past to feed himself, he felt that should he make a breakthrough in futurology, he would go down in history as the first to triumph in this area.

Slowly and incrementally, he obtained a reputation as an innovative thinker about time-related events. He theorized about a continuum between the past, present and future, with a balanced equilibrium between the three. He postulated that compartmentalizing them inevitably led to misunderstanding their intrinsic nature. Thus he became a trend-setter of sorts, with a small but rabid band of disciples. The academic establishment sneered at his ideas, particularly historians, a group not known for acceptance of anything new.

The first notable examples of time travel were into the past and seemed to support the claims of Charles' detractors. They argued that time was essentially discontinuous because there was no way to travel into the future. (Early time travel devices were not

finely tuned. Initial leaps into either the past or the future were of five hundred years and each subsequent leap of one hundred years. This created some hardship for students of the past. However, it prevented those traveling into the future from taking advantage of the results of the following day's horse races, stock market numbers or winning lottery numbers.)

Historians competed fiercely for travel into history. Fortunately, the technology involved allowed the time travelers only to be invisible spectators and not participants in the events of the time they were studying. Otherwise, the well-known time paradox could have produced serious consequences. (It turned out to be equally true that travelers into the future were also invisible spectators.) In any case, Charles never got an opportunity to time-travel into the past because of his unorthodox reputation. However, when travel into the future became possible, thus proving his detractors wrong, Charles became the pioneer of travel into that dimension and subsequently the Guru of futurology as the first historian of the future. Using insights he did not know he had, he managed on several occasions to extrapolate backwards in time and to successfully predict certain socio/political/economic trends and occurrences.

Thus, Charles' reputation and fortune had become secure. Seemingly, he had it made from both professional and personal points of view. Yet he was in a turmoil that prevented his usual sang-froid to bring him back to a state of equilibrium. How did this disturbing mental state come about?

Unexpectedly, it all began with what turned out to be Charles' last voyage into the future. Charles had anticipated this undertaking eagerly for reasons he could not identify. A week before, he had been approached by two total strangers, one male and the other an extraordinarily attractive female, in a well frequented cafeteria near his office. In the ensuing conversation, the woman did not utter one word. In Charles' time period, clothes were no longer needed as a means of protection from a hostile natural environment. As a result, their sole function was as costumes, with each citizen trying to outdo all others by the bizarre nature of their garb. Yet, the strangers were dressed in a fashion that Charles had never seen before and each had a look that was eerily strange. The woman was attired in an outfit that, while modest by many standards, was sexually the most provocative Charles had ever seen. He failed miserably in his attempt to ignore her or her attire, so that it took a little time for the other to get his attention. The man spoke in a low voice, as if he did not want anyone to overhear, and his words appeared to be carefully chosen as if English were not his native language.

"Are you Charles Dory? he asked. Charles answered in the affirmative and politely added "What can I do for you?" Without being invited, the strangers sat down.

"Are you the Charles Dory, the well known historian of the future, who is planning another excursion into the future soon?" he inquired. "I am he." Charles replied.

"I am Dr. Vi Abel and this is my assistant Ms. Ruby Red. We are from Australia. I am a clinical psychologist who is researching, what mental, and related physical problems if any, time travel poses for those who take advantage of this amazing new technology. We have been able to acquire a comprehensive medical and psychological profile of all who have time-traveled, but we felt that a brief interview with each subject would be of additional value. We of course will want to re-evaluate all your clinical parameters once you have returned from your next trip into the future. Have you any questions or reservations about our work or its value?"

Charles hesitated for a few moments. He could not keep his eyes off the beautiful Ms. Ruby Red. Discreetly, Dr. Abel coughed a number of times to bring Charles back from his sexual reverie. Without giving it any real thought he replied. "No! Actually, I think it is high time someone did it. I am personally grateful to you and am willing to cooperate in any manner you see fit. How can I help you?"

Of course, Charles was desperately hoping that a positive response would allow him to become far better acquainted with Ms. Red. She had become the focus for a type sexual fantasy that Charles had never experienced before.

When Dr. Abel was reasonably sure that he had recaptured at least some of Charles' attention, he continued. "You can answer two questions. First, during your past travels into the future, did you ever perceive anything that you deemed needed to be changed and would you have if you could? Second, are you affected by the apparent paradox of your travels into the future that are now a thing of the past? After all, in a bizarre sense, the future which has not yet occurred is something you have already experienced in your past."

Charles shifted uncomfortably in his seat and thought about the questions for about a minute. Then he replied. "I don't think I viewed anything that, in my opinion, needed to be altered and if I had, I wouldn't have known how to go about it. It is true that much of what I beheld I did not understand, therefore there was no way I could ascertain if it was good or bad. In any case, what I experienced is now a matter of public record and you can make those types of determinations for yourself. As for your second question, I must confess that the paradox you referred to never occurred to me, so that I could not have been affected by it, at least that is what I think."

Much to Charles's dismay, Dr. Abel and Ms. Red stood up to leave. "Thank you for allowing us this moment of your time. We are very grateful and we will be seeing you upon your return."

"I certainly hope so," Charles muttered under his breath as he watched them quickly walk out of the cafeteria and disappear.

The week went by rapidly. Charles was much too busy to wonder or think about the strange twosome he had encountered. However, he did dream about Ms. Red each night of that week, awaking with moist, indeed downright soaked pajamas. Charles had obviously never heard about the biblical directive about not spilling one's seed.

The day scheduled for time travel finally arrived. This was to be Charles' most adventurous foray into the future: he planned to stay about a week, which was twice as long as usual; also, he was going five hundred years further into the future than ever before.

Charles arrived at the Time Travel Institute; entered the special chamber that contained the time travel device; sat down before a console consisting of an array of pre-set dials and instruments; strapped himself into his seat; checked the time and nodded to his assistant, who then pulled the switch that started the journey into the future. Charles immediately disappeared from view.

Much to his amazement, he next found himself totally naked, lying on a bed that had an extraordinarily comfortable mattress, under a mirror that covered the whole ceiling, and in a room that smelled like nothing he had ever experienced before and yet had a powerful aphrodisiac effect. The walls of the room shimmered with changing colors. The most sensuous music he had ever heard engulfed him. On either side of him on the bed, and equally unclad, lay two fabulously beautiful and voluptuous young women, who immediately wrapped themselves around Charles and began an orgy of love making. "I must be dreaming," thought Charles. "This must be every man's ultimate sexual fantasy." He immediately gave himself up to his libidinous desires and proceeded to participate wholeheartedly in this pleasurable activity. Much to his surprise both he and the young women seemed to have insatiable appetites, as the lovemaking continued on for hours. Finally they stopped after countless orgasms, for nourishment, ablutions and rest.

When Charles awoke from his nap, he found himself in the same bedroom but the music, aroma and colors had subtly changed. His new companions, two different but equally beautiful women wasted no time. The lovemaking recommenced with the same ardor as before and yet it was somehow different. When nature made its inevitable demands, the lovemaking ceased and Charles fell asleep immediately.

Once again, Charles awoke to the presence of two new and gorgeous women. Again conditions in the room altered slightly. The cycle of lovemaking, food, ablutions and rest occurred and recurred. By this time every inch of body had become an erogenous zone. It seemed as if the succession of amorous activities with different women and differing conditions would never stop. Each seemed to fulfill another of Charles' sexual fantasies. As pleasurable as they were, in reality they were nothing more than variations on a constant theme. Inevitably, Charles began to get bored and started to wonder when and if he could escape from this endless carnal activity. Charles had just learnt that having too much of a good thing can become disagreeable.

After what appeared to be an indefinite number of cycles, Charles awoke to find himself alone, in the same chamber as before but with none of the embellishing adornments. He breathed a sigh of relief as he sat up on the bed. The door opened and a familiar person walked in. Charles gaped at him. It was none other than Dr. Vi Abel.

"What are you doing here? How did you get here?" Charles blustered.

"All in good time" Dr. Abel replied. "Your clothes are in the closet over yonder. I suggest you get dressed. I am sure that you are rather tired of this room and perhaps would like to take a walk. While I am sure that you have many questions, you also have much to learn. All will be explained."

Charles dressed quickly and without a moment's hesitation they departed. Charles was still in quite a daze. He hardly noticed his surroundings, which by late twenty-first century standards were quite strange. They walked for about an hour. Slowly Charles regained his composure. Dr. Abel steered him to a rest area for food and refreshments. Not a word had been spoken so far. Then Dr. Abel commenced talking. He gave the following accounting, after reassuring Charles that he would answer any questions at any time.

"I am from this time period which is one thousand years ahead of yours. Yet, I was in your time period, when we met. If you are wondering, you are in the time period you

were aiming for. I have always found it surprising that in the early years of time travel, no one seemed to appreciate that we of your future would have the same capability as you and that our devices would be far more advanced than yours. For example, your devices do not allow you to be anything more than passive observers. As you can see, we have overcome that impediment and we, who are responsible for bringing you here, hope to use that parameter to save ourselves."

"What do you mean, you brought me here?" Charles arrogantly asked. "I remember quite clearly getting into our device with settings preset, and in total control."

"Actually, you had no control at all. While it is true that it was in your epoch that time travel was invented, your trip here was our idea. You were brought here with the use of our technology. We planted the idea for this trip in your mind without your knowledge. Moreover, your own settings would have ended in disaster, since you would have materialized inside a solid mountain of granite. You were like the foolhardy individual who dives into water without checking its depth.

If you are wondering why we came to your time, it was to check you out and to make sure that you would arrive here in one piece."

"Why did you need to check me out?" Charles queried.

Dr. Abel responded. "We had to make sure that you were in excellent physical and mental health, to enable you to withstand the rigors that you were to experience. Most importantly we had to be assured that you had a strong libido. That was why Ms. Ruby Red was present at our first encounter. She is an intensively sexual woman and transmits a strong aura of sensuality to any receptive male. You certainly responded to her, so much so, that I had to dampen her desire for you with a drug I put in her drink. Then and only then was I able to capture your attention and engage you in the brief conversation we shared. You turned out to be the ideal person for our needs."

At this point Charles could not refrain from asking, "Why did you go to all this trouble? What was so important that I, or someone like me, was needed to resolve your problem, whatever it is?"

"Look around you," Dr. Abel replied. For the first time Charles took note of his surroundings. They were seated at a table in the middle of a beautifully appointed park. The day was sunny and there were many people enjoying the park and the weather. Then Charles noticed two odd things. First was the absence of children and playgrounds. Second, nearly all the persons in the park were alone. Yet they were accompanied by the most exotic pets Charles had ever seen. The pets were of feline or canine origin, but of breeds totally unknown to him.

"Can you explain the dearth of children and the plethora of pets?" Charles asked.

"You have put your finger on the nub of our predicament" replied Dr. Abel. He went on.

"About five hundred years ago, the human race found itself on the horns of a dilemma. The planet had become overpopulated, not only with humans but with all sorts of other animals of the domestic variety, namely dogs and cats. Attempts to control both

populations had failed miserably. People did not want to give up their right to bear children and to own pets.

At the same time, the science of genetic engineering had reached such a successful stage that we were able to produce living organisms by design. We had banks of canine, feline and human DNA, that we could alter by splicing. Desired living animals were produced in vitro. First, we offered all pet owners the opportunity to design pets of their choice, if they got rid of their own. Each family was allowed one sterile pet of their composition. Much to our surprise, most people seized the opportunity. The bond between pet owners and their new pets now seemed stronger than it had ever been before. Perhaps this was because they could own only one pet at a time, and maybe because, to some extent, they had created the animal, having chosen its every trait. A brand new and very successful Pet Design and Pet Shop industry sprang into existence. In any case, that seemed to solve the urban domestic animal problem.

However, the human population problem remained. I guess it was predictable that what happened with cats and dogs would happen with humans. We found that we could design and produce children in much the same manner. Now there was no need to reproduce sexually. We embarked on a successful campaign to sterilize all females, and allotted babies on a first come and one-to-a-customer basis. This permitted us to control the size of the population and keep it at a constant level."

"Wasn't there some resistance to this arbitrary and heavy-handed way of dealing with the problem?" interjected Charles.

"Yes! replied Dr. Abel. "At the onset of our campaign, there was much opposition. Soon however, women were savoring the time and the freedom to engage in sexual activity without fear of becoming pregnant or ill and they valued the ability to have a child with chosen characteristics. Defiance quickly disappeared. Indeed, within a short period of time, pregnancy was perceived to be an illness. Soon after, sterilizing female infants at birth became mandatory. Of course, children, now a scarce commodity, assumed a fashionable and huge economic value that no one had anticipated. That is why they are seldom seen."

"Well!" Charles interjected. "This seems to me to be the best of all possible worlds. So, what went wrong and what does all this have to do with me?"

"Patience" Dr. Abel sighed. "All will be revealed. For the first couple of hundred years, we lived in paradise. Our population had become stable and our technology had become fabulously efficient by the standards of your time. Thus, all could have anything they desired without having to labor for it.

Our world became slowly transformed by a creeping form of hedonism. Further, because we had successfully combated all known disease, we lived to a very old age. Since children were being produced only to replace those who had died, inadequate and insufficient amounts of new blood was being introduced into our world. We became a stagnant society, with very little new or exciting. Here, everyone is someone else's pet. That is what humans have become. This has led to the common impression that in our world time stands still. Essentially, that is death. How did you feel during your sexual sessions? Didn't it all start to pall? Didn't time stand still at some point and didn't you sense that you were the sexual plaything of these women, in other words, their pet? That

is exactly what you were! Is this inclination not heightened by the fact that, despite the pleasure, there is no biological purpose to it all, since any possibility of procreation has been eradicated?

Our reason for bringing you to our time period is to have you return to yours and attempt to change the future of your time. We are not allowed to tamper with anything of significance in our past. However, there is nothing that prevents us from inducing someone from your period to act. If nothing is done, the inevitable will occur and we will disappear, if for no other reason than death by boredom. We put you through this ordeal to impress you with the urgency of the situation. We are in desperate need of your assistance. We will now return you to your time period. Do you have any questions?"

These revelations had plunged Charles into a deep state of depression. After a couple of moments he asked, timidly, "Where do you go to get a child?"

Dr. Abel hesitated and then gently replied, "I thought you would have guessed. To the Pet Shops, of course."

POSTSCRIPT

Charles Dory never took another time trip. For about a year, he remained in a state of despondency. Then he managed to shake himself out of his lethargy and wrote a monumental treatise about the future. He spent the rest of his life proclaiming the virtues of motherhood. In a sense, he also practiced what he preached: he fathered as many children as he could, with as many women as possible. On his deathbed many years later, he was asked why he had sired so many offsprings. His answer was simply, "That's Life!" Whereupon he died.

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