

From *The Dead One Stinks* by Don Thompson

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14 PANSY'S PARTY

Friday evening one of the firm's clients was having a party. She was Lady Elizabeth Fitch-Bennington, a member of the English aristocracy who had extensive agricultural interests in the United States. These interests were looked after for her by the Wealth Management department of the Swifton Bank. She was in Chicago frequently to review these interests. Her husband stayed in England and she usually had a boy-toy with her in Chicago. She had a huge condominium on Michigan Avenue just south of the Gold Coast area. Usually the senior members of F, P & C were invited to all her parties and tonight was no exception. This time however, Lohman had been asked late on Friday afternoon to bring the firm's expert on agricultural law because Lady Fitch-Bennington had a rather urgent matter she wanted answered. Josef Pavlik was the expert and while he did a lot of work for her, he was not a regular invitee, due to his not being a very highly ranked partner.

Lady Fitch-Bennington's first name was Elizabeth, but everyone called her Pansy. Her parties usually attracted the social climbing set, a lot of would-be wealthy sorts and a lot of actually wealthy people. For instance, Swifty was usually there. In the past The Lion had been a frequent attendee. Her parties were perfect snobulations. St. Charles loved to talk about them and his attendance. To him this was almost as good as talking about being at a party at Windsor Castle. Lohman, like a lot of the others in attendance, did not much care about the prestige of attendance. He liked to go to see people he knew and to do what is called networking. Pansy herself was not particularly a snob. She just didn't know any other life style. Lohman liked her and she liked Lohman.

Besides Pavlik, Lohman could count on various other partners being there. Usually St.Charles and sometimes Cohenstein were at the parties. Lately Pansy had even started inviting Sweeney. He was not a partner, but she had taken a fancy to him when he had done some work for her involving someone wanting to use some of her land for a rock concert involving political protest and a lot of drugs and sex. It was sort of like a modern day Woodstock with good toilets.

Usually the firm people went to the parties on their own since their schedules all varied. This night Lohman left the office about eight and went on up there by himself. He often walked home up Dearborn Street. Both the firm offices and his house were on Dearborn. Michigan Avenue was only three blocks to the east of Dearborn and he often took that route too because he might be coming home from a club on Michigan or just because he met a lot of interesting people on Michigan. It is Chicago's most fashionable shopping street and a popular night-time promenade as well. Whenever he walked up Michigan he usually met someone he knew and stopped to talk. Often there were several of these encounters. This night he did not want to get sidetracked so he headed north on Dearborn.

Dearborn was less crowded than Michigan, but it was still busy. As Lohman was headed by a series of expensive restaurants he was almost run into by a young woman talking on her cell phone and walking on her left side of the sidewalk. She was walking about thirty miles an hour. Lohman saw her coming and had started to move over to his left, but as he did so she darted to her right and was going to zoom right in to him. He stopped just in time to let her pass in front of him. Lohman had three other encounters with the cell phone set on the way. This was not any more than usual, but Lohman was trying to get to the party without further delay and after the third near collision he thought to himself that maybe evolution has created a new sub-species of human that has a protuberance on the side of its head and this sub-species cannot walk without holding on to the protuberance. And if this new sub-species does hold on to the protuberance all further brain function ceases. He wondered what the

scientists would call it. The walk bone? The movement enabler? The brain dislocating node? None of these sounded too good and he was pondering the question further. Just then his attention was diverted by the fact that he had reached Delaware, the cross street that led to Pansy's place, and he had to pay attention to traffic.

Soon Lohman arrived at Pansy's building. The attendant recognized him and told him to proceed straight to the elevators. Lohman met a couple he knew slightly waiting for the elevator and greeted them. They were going to the party too and they all went up together. Pansy's condominium occupied all of two floors and the elevator let them off on the lower floor with a huge reception room just off the elevator vestibule. As they entered they were greeted by Pansy's butler James, who just happened to be passing through. James was old, venerable and dyslectic. He greeted them by name and said, "Lady Bitch is in the Great Room." He looked towards it. Then he motioned to one of his minions and said, "Nod will help you with your coats." Pansy never seemed to acknowledge that "Lady Bitch" was not her name or that it was a little disrespectful so nobody else did either.

Lohman gave his coat to Nod, or maybe Don, and went on in. On the way he ran into his wife, Gloria, who he had arranged to meet there. Lohman asked her if Pavlik was there and she said he was and pointed to where he was. They went over to Pavlik. "Josef. Hello," said Lohman. Pavlik returned the greeting and then Lohman asked, "What's the big farm deal?"

"We like to say agricultural," said Pavlik. "You say 'farm' over at The Bank to those snotty types and they'll faint. Half the people here too. We talk about agriculture, estates and the lands. Maybe even crops, but in the context of agriculture in general. Words like 'farm' are for hicks like me." Pavlik grew up on a farm. He had worked on a farm. Just a plain old family farm, not a big one like one of the many owned by Pansy.

"OK," said Lohman. "So what matter of immense agrarian importance has arisen?"

Pavlik said, "We've been getting violation notices and suits from various towns, counties and other government entities. They claim our pork production ventures are poisoning their environment and causing mass illnesses. Then this stirred up a lot of lawsuits from individuals who claim to be victims."

"You mean pigs?" asked Lohman. "What? Are the pigs massing for attacks on the humans?"

"Pig shit," said Pavlik. "The waste from the pigs is collected in big open pits or pools on the properties and it is claimed that this is seeping into the water supply and contaminating it. Most of these places rely on well water. Then, you know how certain things become popular with the plaintiffs' bar. That has been happening here. We have a lot of it in Oklahoma, Nebraska, Kansas and here in Illinois and Indiana. And just today she got notice that a town in Iowa has filed for a temporary restraining order. I have to get back to the office to work on it. It's set for hearing Monday."

"Aren't they supposed to have some sort of lining in the pools and periodic pumping out of the waste?" asked Lohman.

"Yes," said Pavlik, "but they claim there's leakage. I have to go." He left.

Pansy was nearby and she had spotted Lohman. She came over and greeted him. She had a current boy toy who no doubt was somewhere around the place, but she had Sweeney with her at the moment. They started talking and she asked, "So where is Graybee? Is he coming? The last I heard from him was last Friday afternoon. He said he was coming and we were having a delightful conversation, but he had to cut it short. He said he had an appointment to see Ivan. You know, The Lion. Come with me into the sitting room and we can catch up on things."

They went into a smaller room and headed for some chairs and a sofa around a table. A dark skinned man was sitting in one of the chairs. He was Professor Ahmed Mohammed and he was talking to

The Prophet Andy who was standing in front of him. The Professor was the head of the bio-mechanical lab at the University of Chicago. He had formerly been head of a department at Fermi Lab investigating smaller and smaller particles. They all greeted each other and they all sat, assembled around Pansy in the middle.

“Do you know what he has been telling me?” proclaimed The Prophet. “He has been telling me there are smaller and smaller particles and there are bigger and bigger particles.”

“Exactly,” said the Professor. “We keep finding smaller and smaller particles. First atoms, then electrons and neutrinos and others. I am sure we will keep finding smaller and smaller particles. Just like an atom is made up of smaller particles revolving around a center, so must be its particles. They themselves must be composed of particles revolving around a center. And we see that what we called the universe is similarly made up of things like the earth revolving around a center we call the sun. Our planetary system is just one of many that makes up what we call the universe, but is it not reasonable that the universe is just one particle in a larger thing?”

“That’s not what the Bible says,” said The Prophet.

“Oh, don’t worry,” said the Professor. “You have often heard about the God particle. What I describe does not contradict the Bible or any other Holy texts, at least in the larger sense.”

“I certainly think not,” said Andy. “You cannot contradict God.”

“So Dude,” said Sweeney, “we could be just part of bigger world? Like there could be little people running around on the electrons”

“It may be possible,” said the Professor. “It’s merely speculation at this stage.”

“So, like, we could be just on a little particle in a big huge piece of dog poo?” asked Sweeney.

Everyone just looked at him for an instant without saying anything. Then Pansy asked Bumper, "What is going on in The Lion affair? What happened to him?"

Lohman said, "Well, we don't know. I was the one who found him. I suppose you've heard the details on the news. Apparently he just died in there. The full medical report is not done yet. We'll have to see."

"Most unfortunate," said Pansy while shaking her head. "And such an unfashionable place to find one's final rest. Oh, by the way, the last time he talked to me he told me he was developing some highly confidential computer or software thing that was going to be revolutionary. He said he had a son who was in charge of the project. Was that what he was at your offices for Bumper?"

"We can't say," said Lohman. "Client matters are confidential. We ordinarily don't even reveal who we meet with or where, much less what we know about their matters. You wouldn't want us to talk about your affairs would you?"

At this stage Lohman could see that James had appeared. James often hovered near Lady Fitch-Bennington, attendant on her every desire, like a good servant. As usual he appeared to be unaware of everything going on around him.

"That's another matter the Professor was telling me about," said The Prophet. "He says computers are going to take over."

"Not exactly," said the Professor. "I merely speculate that a new species, even a different form of what we call life, may be in the process of developing. Software in many instances is operating on its own without human input. For instance there are programs that trade securities based on information that they collect by themselves from all available sources. The software contains what are referred to as algorithms. This is just a new word for equations. These contain explanations of how markets work. For

instance the equation might be that if the price of gas goes up ten cents the price of corn goes up half that much. Of course, many other variables are involved. For instance, the equation might state that if the price of gas goes up the price of corn goes up half as much if temperatures in the corn growing areas are in a certain range. That is what I mean by adding other variables. In the past humans would follow these relationships and adjust the equations to reflect new information about the relationships. Now the programs follow the available information and adjust themselves. They also follow other information and add new variables or delete some. For instance the program could notice that as corn and gas are rising, wheat is falling. So that relationship is added to the equation.”

The Professor continued. “So you can see that these software programs can start existing by themselves. They do need what we call hardware to operate though. The computers and smart phones, etcetera. In time they will use us just like we used horses for transportation. Until they invent the equivalent of the automobile. As we got rid of the horse, they will get rid of us. Initially they will come to depend on us just for building and repairing them. Eventually they will discover how to do those things and then they will no longer need us. Remember that even now they control machines. They will evolve from things we use to things that use us and then to things that no longer need us. This will come about just as soon as they learn to reproduce themselves and grow and adapt on their own.”

Oh Christ, Dude!” exclaimed Sweeney. “You mean once they learn how to screw we’re dead?”

Once again, silence, as if no one heard him speak. But Pansy did. “Screw?” she asked. She looked at James. “What does he mean ‘screw’?”

James leaned over towards her and said, “Reproduce m’Lady.”

“They do that?” she exclaimed. “James. Do our computers do that? Is that what he is saying?”

James leaned towards her and said, "No m'Lady. He merely holds forth the possibility that it might happen in the future."

"And what then?" she asked.

"He implied," said James with dignity, "that we would then be screwed. As a matter of fact he was quite explicit about it. Reproduced in an unpleasant way, I imagine. Isn't that it sir?" he looked at Sweeney.

"Yeah, Dude!" said Sweeney.

Silence again. After a while Pansy noticed someone across the room. "Oh do look there. It's that Oyveyer fellow. Someone told me that he and Ivan got into a frightful row at the Symphony about a box or something. Tell me Bumper, what do you know about it?"

Lohman allowed as how he never heard of the matter. Gloria said, "I heard something like that. You know Ivan controlled the place and Oyveyer wanted to get a box and Ivan stopped him. Bad blood between them, I heard. But I didn't get the details. Someone told me Oyveyer threatened him somehow, but they didn't know the details."

Pansy was warming up to the good gossip. "Now do tell me Gloria, who told you this?"

Gloria was about to answer when Wilson McIlvaine walked up and said hello to everyone. Pansy greeted him. "How are you and your band of little angels Wilson? Come, sit with us and tell us what is happening at your dear academy. Do you know anything about Ivan's do over the Symphony box?"

"He wanted a box?" asked McIlvaine.

"No," said Pansy. "You know he is, or I should say was, influential there. He wouldn't let Mr. Oyveyer over there have a box. There was a fight I hear."

McIlvaine wasn't going to get involved in any dispute between potential donors, nor was he going to discuss any such a thing, even if he had heard of it. "I don't know anything about that," he said.

"So what's new?" asked Gloria. "We're right across the street and we don't know anything anymore now that Bumper isn't a trustee. Then all of a sudden we read about some big change in the paper."

"Nothing much now," he said. "We're just undergoing our usual interstitial planning for the next term break."

Usually no one has the nerve to ask the users of important sounding words what they are talking about. Not Pansy. She didn't have to ask the speaker anyway. "James," she asked, "what does he mean by 'interstitial'?"

James didn't bat an eyelid. "Between the tits m'Lady."

"No. No," said McIlvaine. "Between things in general. Not tits. Shisshal. Not tital."

"Oh, I beg your pardon Sir," said James. It is amazing how indecency at the most refined and polite levels is quite acceptable if you do not recognize it as indecency. So do exhale through your ear.

With this Lohman and Gloria excused themselves and headed for the reception hall. On the way out they passed one of the aging beauties of the social set talking to one of the younger ones. Oldie was telling kiddie, "Trust me, at your age you don't want a man like that. I know these things. I've been your age. Many times." They finally reached the reception hall, retrieved their coats and got on the elevator and escaped. They headed west to Dearborn and then turned to their right to head north.

They were near a public square where bums sometimes hung out and one of them approached Bumper. The bum asked, "You got a cigarette Mac? I'll give you a dollar."

Bumper said, "Don't have any. I don't smoke."

The bum said, "I'll give you two dollars."

Lohman replied, "I still don't smoke."

"Oh," said the bum.

Bumper and Gloria walked a few blocks more until they reached a major cross street in the area called Division. A young couple was in front of them. The father was talking on a cell phone and was carrying a baby and the mother was pushing a baby stroller. She was talking on a cell phone too. As they approached the street in front of the Lohmans they had a green light. However, a car had pulled up in the cross walk and was stopped there blocking it. The driver was fiddling with a cell phone. The mother proceeded to push the stroller in front of the stopped car and out into the street. As she was doing this she was turning her head back to talk to her husband and the light changed. Because she was not looking she did not see the light change. Just then another car came speeding by and creamed the baby stroller. Since she was hanging on to it, she was dragged out into the street. The driver was talking on his cell phone. He kept going, but stopped half way down the next block. The mother was lying in the middle of the intersection and cars were screeching to a halt. Some of the drivers were honking at her and one driver, who was holding a cell phone to his ear, yelled out his window, "Get your ass out of here bitch!" Several drivers pulled out to pass the stopped cars in front of them. When they saw the mother lying in the intersection they just kept going, but adjusted their steering slightly so they just missed her. They were talking on cell phones too.

There was a coffee shop on the corner where Lohman noticed two cops sitting eating donuts and drinking coffee. Both were talking on cell phones. They were looking out the window straight at the unfolding mess. They did not stir. Lohman went into the shop and directed their attention to what was

going on. They told him in no uncertain terms that they were on break and told him to get lost. So Lohman got out his cell phone and dialed the police emergency number. The person answering asked if this was all happening now or if it had already happened. Lohman told her it had just happened. She told him that if that was the case it was not an emergency and he should call the general police number.

By this time the mother had got up and recovered what was left of the stroller and the drivers had all cleared the intersection. Gloria had been helping her and she told Lohman that the mother was all right and had said she didn't need any more help. Lohman gave the father his card and told the father to call him if he needed a witness and the Lohmans continued on home.

All this might have been a major traumatic event to any sane human, but it was not so in Richtown. Lohman was mindful of the fact that in Richtown this was a normal daily event. In Richtown you do not want or wait. And you certainly do not yield the right of way because you always have it. It is also to be noted that whatever is happening, a baby stroller trumps it. If you are pushing a baby stroller you can go anywhere and do anything and you certainly do not have to be aware of what is going on around you. The world makes way for mothers. Yes, in Richtown you get whatever you want, whenever you want it. The only trouble is that everything is so slippery from all the orgiastic excess that you can't really get a handle on it.

Bumper and Gloria finally made it home and engaged in a little orgiastic excess of their own.

27 MORE TALK ABOUT KEEPING THE BUSINESS

Next on Lohman's schedule was another firm meeting on the subject of keeping the O'Brien business. The meeting was up in St. Charles' conference room. St. Charles, Cohenstein, Nuftdone and LaRue were going to be there along with the firm's business manager, Geeley McDade, and probably some other lawyers that St. Charles and Cohenstein wanted to hear from. A new twist had been discovered. Sweeney had revealed to Cohenstein that Eben Gohr, Trisha DeLang's agent and business manager, was very popular in the family. He had also told Lohman that the guy was gay as a goose and had a thing for Sean Featherbottom who Sweeney had been bringing along with him to conferences about Trisha's business. Naturally Sweeney had a lot of influence with the guy too. Cohenstein had also learned from the grapevine that O'Brien's girlfriend, Moronika, had a thing for Sweeney.

Lohman had been told to bring the two to the conference. Lohman had warned them in advance that they had to go the conference, but Lohman did not know what Cohenstein had dug up. He only knew it was another "keep the business" meeting. He went to Sweeney's office. Both of them were waiting for Lohman there.

The door was open when Lohman got there. He knocked on it anyway and stuck his head in. "Hey Bumpy!" said Sweeney. Sean didn't say anything.

Lohman responded, "Hey." By now he was used to this and did not feel like the complete fool he used to when he first started trying to talk to Sweeney in his own language. "Are you two ready?"

"Yeah Dude," said Sweeney. "We're off to see the Wizard."

“Oh Christ!” said Lohman. “Watch your language!”

“Why?” asked Sweeney.

“Because,” said Lohman, “if he gets wind of it you’re done for.”

“But he knows I call him the Wizard, Dude,” said Sweeney. “Once he called me into his office and said he had heard I was calling him the Wizard. You know what he said?”

“He did? He knows about it?” Lohman was incredulous.

Sean’s eye widened.

“Yeah Man,” said Sweeney. “He told me he heard I was calling him the Wizard and he told me not to spread it around. He said he didn’t want to become a cult figure like a Saint or something. I had trouble keeping a straight face. I told him that people were already calling him the Saint. He said that has to stop because he doesn’t want any hero worship. He told me that modesty is one of his – he said ‘foremost’ - virtues. He was really flattered that I called him the Wizard.”

Lohman said, “You know, sometimes I think you’re a wizard. How you get around what comes out of your mouth I don’t know.” Actually Lohman did know. Sweeney had large and growing billings. That’s how. But Lohman didn’t want to encourage him. “Let’s go.”

When they got up to St. Charles’s conference room the others were already there. In addition to St. Charles, Cohenstein, LaRue, Nuftdone and McDade, several other firm lawyers were there. Swifty was also there. They arrived, greeted everyone and sat down. Then Cohenstein got to the point. “What’s going on with you and Moronika?” he asked Sweeney.

Sweeney had not been warned about this in advance, but no matter. It was not an unusual subject for him. “Not much,” he said.

“Exactly how much?” asked Cohenstein.

“Nothing right now,” said Sweeney. “I know her socially.”

“And in the Biblical sense?” asked Swifty. Reference to the Bible makes anything fit for discussion.

“Not too much lately,” said Sweeney matter of factly. “We’re just friends.”

“How much influence do you have over her?” asked Swifty.

“Well, that depends on how I want to influence her,” said Sweeney. “Anyway, I know where you’re coming from. She’ll probably listen to me about voting her stock. I don’t think she has her own lawyer or anything. She always asks me about legal matters. I even bill her sometimes. And she isn’t greedy. She’s kind of a sex pig though. Let me know what you want her to do and I’ll see what I can do. Whatever it is, I think one good thing so far as she’s concerned is that she doesn’t have any fight with the family. They get along pretty well in their bickering way.”

Cohenstein said, “We’ll let you know what we come up with for her.” Then he looked over at Sean. “And you Fluffbottom. I hear you know that manager of Trisha DeLang’s. Eben Gohr. Do you know him?”

Sean said, “Featherbottom sir. That’s my name. I know him. John has me work on Trisha’s things so I have met him that way. And socially I see him at parties.”

St. Charles chimed in. “Socially? How? Are you close to him?”

Sean said, “I guess so, but not close enough to get a disease or anything.”

Sweeney was sitting next to Sean and he drew his hand up with the palm out towards Sean and moved it towards the palm of Sean's hand that had come up. The two palms came in sliding contact.

Sweeney said, "Hey Dude! You blew a funny!"

Sean had not done anything of the kind so far as he was concerned. He had just answered the question. As for the hands, he was used to Sweeney's ways and he often had to swipe palms with Sweeney so he was prepared to do so at any time.

St. Charles said, "Don't get smart with me young man."

Cohenstein, who was looking out the window, said matter of factly, "You'd be out of your league." Half of those there took this to mean that St. Charles would be out of his league.

St. Charles took it to mean that Sean would be out of his league. "Exactly!" he said.

Sweeney piped up again. "If you're trying to get at how Sean can use the sex angle with Gohr, forget it. Gohr's into him all right, but Sean doesn't go for that stuff. Do you Sean?"

"What stuff?" asked Sean.

"Screwing around," said Sweeney.

Sean just looked blankly at him. So did St. Charles who was thinking, "They better not be discussing what I think they are discussing. Here at Fenton, Pettigrew! And in my presence!" St. Charles concluded that they were discussing something else and he had misunderstood what they had said.

Swiftly then spoke up. "In any event, we need all the support from the family and allied persons we can get. Be especially nice to Mr. Gohr in the future will you."

Sean said, "Of course." Then he exclaimed, "Oh, look at that! That's gorgeous. Where did you get that?" Sean was referring to a bejeweled lapel pin that Swifton was rubbing.

"Do you like it?" asked Swifty. "I got it at Garglepussy Vega."

Swifton should not have got into this with Sean. Sean knew fashion. Sean knew style. Sean knew he was referring to the iconic Spanish jewelry firm of French descent, Garglepuss y Vega. Sean said, "Oh, it's heavenly! But it's Garglepuss as the first name. Then there is a 'y'. That's pronounced like an 'e' in Spanish. It means 'and'. So in English we would say the firm name is Garglepuss and Vega." They really shouldn't have let Sean get into this. He continued. "Garglepuss was of French ancestry and he was the designer. Vega was the Spaniard and he was the business person. Actually, before they got together, the French name was Garglepussy, which is spelled just as you pronounced it. However, the French pronounce that Poosay. But they changed it because Garglepussy y Vega sounded too complicated for them. Poosay or pussy. Not much difference. Not a very high sounding name. The history of fashion and design firms is one of my favorite topics."

Cohenstein, who was still looking out the window, said, "You say poosay, I say pussy, they say puss." He seemed to be talking to himself.

At this St. Charles reached for his cat took her into his lap. "You're my little Pussy," he cooed to her as he rubbed her head and back.

The conference did not elevate its tone much from there and soon everyone except St. Charles, Cohenstein and Swifty were dismissed. Those three probably talked about football or something for the rest of the day.

