

Swan Song

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ACT ONE -- Interior W. Estate, evening.

The hibachi cools, the coals turn powder, and a tuxedo clad John W. paces nervously in the kitchen. He steals a quick glance at the Westclock wall clock.

"Its time for `your friends' to go home," intones John to Linda as she scrapes remains of her ill-received "Ninja Pudding on a Stick" into the trashmaster.TM

"MY friends? What do you mean *my friends*? I don't think they liked my new dish, and it was *your pal* Prof. `We don't need no Review' Juan who insisted that I not let anyone taste it before I served it! He said it would be a culinary protest against pre-palate censorship. Some pal! This tastes like it was cooked by Mirza Awful Alpo, inveterate enemy of the cookout faithful -- besides, these guests are not *my* friends -- you're the one who invited them over to plot the overthrow of the universe, and look what happened!"

"We were not plotting the overthrow of the universe," explains John phlegmatically while hydraulically adjusting his bow-tie, "we were simply conducting a sociological experiment: "Contemporary Inflammatory Discourse: Professors who take themselves seriously, and Others who are Easily Impressed"..... and well, our agenda became overturned..."

"Yeah, well speaking of the hidden becoming revealed, try to ignore what's going on in the den: Steve is busy convincing Melissa that David's picture should be on every milk carton in America. Someone mentioned that David is not missing, but Steve countered, "but his rights are", and that portraying him as a missing kid probably kidnapped by cultists will get a lot of publicity. David wants nothing to do with the plan, but they say he has been drafted for the role -- they took a vote. Ya know, sort of like making him caliph in absentia -- since he started it all he has to go through with it. Steve already has K. Paul committed to writing a feature story for "The New York Review of Marginal Religious Groups In-Fighting" -- quite an influential divisionary publication highly valued for its duplicitous ability to distort both sides of the story while pursuing etheric objective reporting."

John moaned and reclined on the kitchen table next to the condiments.

"That's the last thing we need!" W. begins weeping in the Miracle Whip.

"Yeah, I know honey," commiserates Linda, "investigative reporting has been the undoing of some of our best unbalanced minds."

John daubs his wet eyes with a moist towelette purloined from KFC and asks a question of his mulla-hugging wife.

"Who put those giant flapping things on our front yard -- ya know, the ugly-ugly-ugly flags with the lime green and puce happy faces with the nine pointed stars on their foreheads and the logo: "Bahá'í: Neoplatonism Rules!"

Linda adroitly knocks John off the table with a swift kick to the cummerbund.

"Those were a gift from Sen and Sonja -- I promised them that I would not even look at them before I put them in my front yard! How dare you suggest censoring someone's artistic vision!"

John leaps precariously to his feet, his patent leather shoes sliding across the freshly greased linoleum. He careens headfirst into the vestibule, trips over Sherman the Bosch Bahá'í Cat, spills a bowl of clam dip on Sheila and Amin, and knocks over a candelabra in the foyer, accidentally setting fire to Richard's beard. Nima and Tony, who had been lurking in the umbrella canister, jump out and douse Richard with Canada Dry Ginger Ale.

While Richard says thoughtful prayers of praise and gratitude for Nima and Tony's fortuitous delurking, Sherman scrambles up the drapes, and the B's go in search of potato chips, John begins wailing and flailing.

"That does it! Everyone out! Everyone out! I'm pulling the plug on this party! Its over over over!!!"

SWAN SONG - Act TWO

Music: "The Party's Over" played by Zamphir X, master of the Pan-African Flute.

ACT TWO: Front porch, W Estate, later same evening.

John, head in hands, sits on the steps while his Ninja suited spouse comforts him.

"I don't know what was the worst part of the evening," sighs John, "it started out so well: a small circle of friends telling each other how right we were. and then, bit by bit, things got weird, and by the time we tossed 'em out there was a cow wearing a bra in the vestibuleis Juan still locked in the bathroom?" Linda nods sadly. "Yes, 'fraid so. He thought the cow was an Aux. Bovine spy with a secret transmitter fitted in her brassier. He says he's not coming out, ever. He just slides notes under the door. In the latest missive he called the Pope an `old Pole wearing a Queen's hat who's not the same Pontiff who wrote Pacim en Terris, and then he offered to re-spackle the shower stall."

John's eyes roll in their sockets like greased ball bearings. "What if we move away?" "Then he'll buy our house so he can stay in there, I guess. I knew things were getting strange when he tried to pull the beard off the UPS delivery man -- he insisted it was Robert in one of his clever disguises. Rick walked in, said `what's the furor' and Juan insisted he said "where's the Fuhrer." A tussle ensued, my mother's crystal candy dish fell

on the floor, and Juan cried "Crystal Night! Crystal Night!" and then raced out the front door, ran around back, and crawled in the bathroom window. Just another normal Talisman night at the W Estate." "Well, its the *last* party at our house," insists John, "I am never inviting those nuts over again -- least of all Derek, the British Economist and his vicious feline accomplice. One or both of them crawled up the drapes! The B's ate all the chips and wore all the dip -- my fault on that -- and then Steve and Allison played badminton with the Kiwi fruit -- food was flying everywhere [and I left without my hat]. I tried to be a good host, honest. Besides, I actually believed we could have some useful consultation. I even made up an agenda, but somebody hid it!" Linda laughs. "Oh no, honey. Nobody did that, I simply placed it on your desk under the bill for your tux." "You mean...." "Yes, the formal charges cover your hidden agenda."

MUSIC: Ominous Theme

SWANG SONG - ACT THREE

ACT THREE: Bus Stop outside entrance to Abha Kingdom, distant future. Linda paces nervously. John is trying to reason with her.

"I'm *not* going in there," insists Linda, " I just know what its going to be like and I don't like it! I have never fit in with the acceptable, and half the time I don't even accept myself!" "Honey, please be sensible..." pleads John. "Sensible!? How can you talk about sensible when nothing that's happened in the last several decades has made any sense -- nothing turned out the way we imagined!"

"True," Prof. admits, " I mean Indiana being vaporized by Radical Quakers took me completely by surprise, as did the Armed Amish Electric Resistance Movement, and the...."

"NO NO NO!!" interrupts Linda, "I mean the important stuff -- K. Paul becoming a Black Separatist after his Melanin Reassignment Surgery, Juan throwing away his brilliant career as an underpaid history prof. to write fantasy fiction comic books, then going berserk and leaping around on top of the World Trade Center screaming "I'm the Paraclete of Caborca!" and finally, after they adjusted his Lithium, Thorazene, Buspar, Ascendin, Haldol, and Novane he re-enrolled in the Faith, taught like gangbusters, and was invited by the Frankfurt LSA to be resident Bahá'í scholar at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Germany!"

"Yep, that was a strange one, but Juan always did dream of the Germans coming for him" concurred John, remembering that night long ago when a pre-Lithium Juan locked himself in the W's bathroom. John glanced at the light from El Abha, "now let's walk through the door together, Honey, c'mon..."

"And what about Quanta winning the Pulitzer Prize? Did you expect that, huh? Didja? Or David serving at the World Centre all those years? Or Derek becoming the richest Bahá'í in the world and then getting so senile that he

left his fortune to establish an Adam Smith Memorial Trust and have it administered by Sherman the Cat!! Good thing his wife had all her marbles!"

John finally grabs Linda, holding her close to keep her from relentless pacing.

"Easy, my little Ninja...tell the good Prof. what you're *really* upset about"

She kicks his shin horribly hard.

"OUCH! Now, that's more like my lovely Linda! What *is* bugging you for real?"

Linda sags to the equivalent of pavement and the tears flow like real tears. Her sobs sound like someone stomping on a rubber duck.

"I peeked around the corner..." weeps Linda, "and I saw Abdul Baha. That's why I can't go in there..."

John's drop jawed.

"Honey, darling, snookums.....is it a sense of guilt or shame for those stupid things we said back in the 1990's that's keeping you from entering Paradise?"

Linda stops sobbing and gives John a look that could freeze concrete.

"Shame?! Guilt?! Are you nuts? No! But when I peeked around the corner I heard Abdul-Baha asking everyone "Are you happy?", "Are you happy?" and you know me, John, I *just can't stand to be interrogated like that*!"

Linda is now up and pacing, steam rising from her peter-pan collar.

"What right does he have to ask me if I'm happy? That is a private matter between God and Linda, and ..."

Suddenly, a searing shaft of illumination captures her as if she were a rabbit trapped in headlights...a form stands at the gate, long jet black hair flowing luxuriously to his waist, a full dark beard reaching mid-chest. A mild, dignified voice intones: "Oh you who are waiting, tarry no longer..."

Linda, overwhelmed at the prospect of facing the Blessed Beauty, swoons. John catches her in his arms and hoists her over his shoulder as if she were a sack of onions and heads for the light, stopping to thank the bearded apparition.

"No problem, John, my pleasure."

"Well, listen," advised Prof. W, " you better ditch before she comes to, if she finds out it was Richard who got her into Paradise, she'll never get over it!"

Linda, woozy and limp, entered the Celestial Pavillians slung over the sturdy mid-western shoulder of John -- a comedic scene bringing much laughter to Abdul-Baha who indeed did ask "Are you happy?"

Linda, seized with transports of enraptured joy, lifted her blushing pink

cheeks and smiled soundless at the Master. Before John swung her down to stand on her own, Linda wiggled her fingers at Abdul Baha in a friendly wave as would any child delighted with a glorious, loving, reunion.

"I always did love you, Abdul Baha"

The Master smiles.

Linda, holding on to John, steadies her stance.

"I am a Bahá'í, really. I have forever loved Baha'u'....." the Greatest Name catches in her throat, and even before the first tears stream down, Abdul Baha has enfolded her in a hug of warmth, acceptance, and love beyond measure.

Narrator: And they all lived happily ever after, forever. Really.

— Swan Song (Used by permission of the curator)