

Breakfast of Champions

Background

Literary terms

- Alter ego
- Dystopia = symbolic hell
- Unreliable narrator

Alter ego

- Katabatic hero – Dead Dude
- Gilgamesh - Enkidu
- Major Kovalyov – Ivan Yakovlevich the barber
- Cornelius – Tyler Durden
- Dwayne Hoover – Kilgore Trout

Where it all began

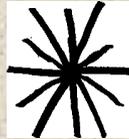
Chapter 8



Trout wandered out onto the sidewalk of Forty-second Street. It was a dangerous place to be. The whole city was dangerous—because of chemicals and the uneven distribution of wealth and so on. A lot of people were like Dwayne: they created chemicals in their own bodies which were bad for their heads. But there were thousands upon thousands of other people in the city who bought bad chemicals and ate them or sniffed them—or injected them into their veins with devices which looked like this:



Sometimes they even stuffed bad chemicals up their assholes. Their assholes looked like this:



◆ People took such awful chances with chemicals and their bodies because they wanted the quality of their lives to improve. They lived in ugly places where there were only ugly things to do. They didn't own doodley-squat, so they couldn't improve their surroundings. So they did their best to make their insides beautiful instead.

The results had been catastrophic so far—suicide, theft, murder, and insanity and so

Prologue

Chapter 1



This is a tale of a meeting of two lonesome, skinny, fairly old white men on a planet which was dying fast.

One of them was a science-fiction writer named Kilgore Trout. He was a nobody at the time, and he supposed his life was over. He was mistaken. As a consequence of the meeting, he became one of the most beloved and respected human beings in history.

The man he met was an automobile dealer, a *Pontiac* dealer named Dwayne Hoover. Dwayne Hoover was on the brink of going insane.

→ Listen:

Trout and Hoover were citizens of the United States of America, a country which was called America for short.

This was their national anthem, which was pure balderdash, like so much they were expected to take seriously:

*O, say can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's
last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars,
thru the perilous fight
O'er the ramparts we watched were so
gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs
bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our
flag was still there.*

Prologue

And Kilgore Trout and Dwayne Hoover met in Midland City, which was Dwayne's home town, during an Arts Festival there in autumn of 1972.

As has already been said: Dwayne was a Pontiac dealer who was going insane.

Dwayne's incipient insanity was mainly a matter of chemicals, of course. Dwayne Hoover's body was manufacturing certain chemicals which unbalanced his mind. But Dwayne, like all novice lunatics, needed some bad ideas, too, so that his craziness could have shape and direction.

Bad chemicals and bad ideas were the Yin and Yang of madness. Yin and Yang were Chinese symbols of harmony. They looked like this:



The bad ideas were delivered to Dwayne by Kilgore Trout. Trout considered himself not only harmless but invisible. The world had paid so little attention to him that he supposed he was dead.

He *hoped* he was dead.

But he learned from his encounter with Dwayne that he was alive enough to give a fellow human being ideas which would turn him into a monster.

Here was the core of the bad ideas which Trout gave to Dwayne: Everybody on Earth was a robot, with one exception—Dwayne Hoover.

Of all the creatures in the Universe, only Dwayne was thinking and feeling and worrying and planning and so on. Nobody else knew what pain was. Nobody else had any choices to make. Everybody else was a fully automatic machine, whose purpose was to stimulate Dwayne. Dwayne was a new type of creature being tested by the

Only Dwayne Hoover had free will.

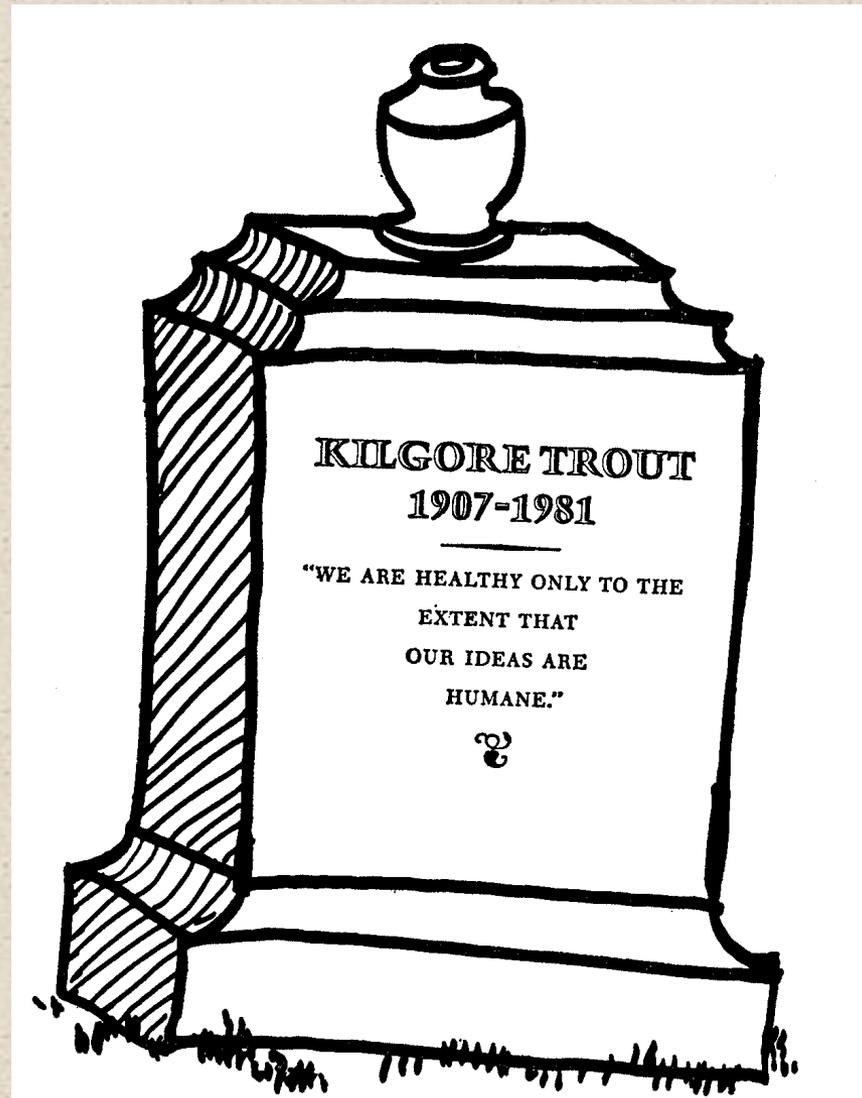
→ Trout did not expect to be believed. He put the bad ideas into a science-fiction novel, and that was where Dwayne found them. The book wasn't addressed to Dwayne alone. Trout had never heard of Dwayne when he wrote it. It was addressed to anybody who happened to open it up. It said to simply anybody, in effect, "Hey— guess what: You're the only creature with free will. How does that make you feel?" And so on.

It was a *tour de force*. It was a *jeu d'esprit*.

But it was mind poison to Dwayne.

→ It shook up Trout to realize that even he could bring evil into the world—in the form of bad ideas. And, after Dwayne was carted off to a lunatic asylum in a canvas camisole, Trout became a fanatic on the importance of ideas as causes and cures for diseases. But nobody would listen to him. He was a dirty old man in the wilderness, crying out

Dramatic Foreshadowing



Meet The Protagonists

Chapter 2



Dwayne was a widower. He lived alone at night in a dream house in Fairchild Heights, which was the most desirable residential area in the city. Every house there cost at least one hundred thousand dollars to build. Every house was on at least four acres of land.

Dwayne's only companion at night was a Labrador retriever named *Sparky*. Sparky could not wag his tail— because of an automobile accident many years ago, so he had no way of telling other dogs how friendly he was. He had to fight all the time. His ears were in tatters. He was lumpy with scars.

➡ Dwayne had a black servant named Lottie Davis. She cleaned his house every day. Then she cooked his supper for him and served it. Then she went home. She was descended from slaves.

Lottie Davis and Dwayne didn't talk much, even though they liked each other a lot. Dwayne reserved most of his conversation for the dog. He would get down on the floor and roll around with Sparky, and he would say things like, "You and me, Spark," and "How's my old buddy?" and so on.

And that routine went on unrevised, even after Dwayne started to go crazy, so Lottie had nothing unusual to notice.

➡ Kilgore Trout owned a parakeet named Bill. Like Dwayne Hoover, Trout was all alone at night, except for his pet. Trout, too, talked to his pet.

But while Dwayne babbled to his Labrador retriever about love, Trout sneered and muttered to his parakeet about the end of the world.

"Any time now," he would say. "And high time, too."

Kilgore Trout's Publishing Career

- A lot of people have oodles of charm.
- Trout's employer and co-workers had no idea that he was a writer. No reputable publisher had ever heard of him, for that matter, even though he had written one hundred and seventeen novels and two thousand short stories by the time he met Dwayne.

He made carbon copies of nothing he wrote. He mailed off manuscripts without enclosing stamped, self-addressed envelopes for their safe return. Sometimes he didn't even include a return address. He got names and addresses of publishers from magazines devoted to the writing business, which he read avidly in the periodical rooms of public libraries. He thus got in touch with a firm called World Classics Library, which published hard-core pornography in Los Angeles, California. They used his stories, which usually didn't even have women in them, to give bulk to books and magazines of salacious pictures.

They never told him where or when he might expect to find himself in print. Here is what they paid him: doodley-squat.

- They didn't even send him complimentary copies of the books and magazines in which he appeared, so he had to search them out in pornography stores. And the titles he gave to his stories were often changed. "Pan Galactic Straw-boss," for instance, became "Mouth Crazy."

Most distracting to Trout, however, were the illustrations his publishers selected, which had nothing to do with his tales. He wrote a novel, for instance, about an Earthling named Delmore Skag, a bachelor in a neighborhood where everybody else had enormous families. And Skag was a scientist, and he found a way to reproduce himself in chicken soup. He would shave living cells from the palm of his right hand, mix them with the soup, and expose the soup to cosmic rays. The cells turned into babies which looked exactly like Delmore Skag.

Pretty soon, Delmore was having several babies a day, and inviting his neighbors to share his pride and happiness. He had mass baptisms of as many as a hundred babies at a time. He became famous as a family man.

And so on.

- Skag hoped to force his country into making laws against excessively large families, but the legislatures and the courts declined to meet the problem head-on. They passed stern laws instead against the possession by unmarried persons of chicken soup.

And so on.

The illustrations for this book were murky photographs of several white women giving blow jobs to the same black man, who, for some reason, wore a Mexican sombrero.

At the time he met Dwayne Hoover, Trout's most widely-distributed book was *Plague on Wheels*. The publisher didn't change the title, but he obliterated most of it and all of Trout's name with a lurid banner which made this promise:

How Trout Came to Midland City

father was a pitiful old man. They were pale white broomsticks. They were hairless. They were embossed fantastically with varicose veins.

And, two months after Trout received his first fan letter, I had him find in his mailbox an invitation to be a speaker at an arts festival in the American Middle West.

◆ The letter was from the Festival's chairman, Fred T. Barry. He was respectful, almost reverent about Kilgore Trout. He beseeched him to be one of several distinguished out-of-town participants in the Festival, which would last for five days. It would celebrate the opening of the Mildred Barry Memorial Center for the Arts in Midland City.

The letter did not say so, but Mildred Barry was the late mother of the Chairman, the wealthiest man in Midland City. Fred T. Barry had paid for the new Center of the Arts, which was a translucent sphere on stilts. It had no windows. When illuminated inside at night, it resembled a rising harvest moon.

Fred T. Barry, incidentally, was exactly the same age as Trout. They had the same birthday. But they certainly didn't look anything alike. Fred T. Barry didn't even look like a white man anymore, even though he was of pure English stock. As he grew older and older and happier and happier, and all his hair fell out everywhere, he came to look like an ecstatic old Chinaman.

He looked so much like a Chinaman that he had taken to dressing like a Chinaman. Real Chinamen often mistook him for a real Chinaman.

◆ Fred T. Barry confessed in his letter that he had not read the works of Kilgore Trout, but that he would joyfully do so before the Festival began. "You come highly recommended by Eliot Rosewater," he said, "who assures me that you are perhaps the greatest living American novelist. There can be no higher praise than that."

Clipped to the letter was a check for one thousand dollars. Fred T. Barry explained that this was for travel expenses and an honorarium.

It was a lot of money. Trout was suddenly fabulously well-to-do.

◆ Here is how Trout happened to be invited: Fred T. Barry wanted to have a fabulously valuable oil painting as a focal point for the Midland City Festival of the Arts. As rich as he was, he couldn't afford to buy one, so he looked for one to borrow.

The first person he went to was Eliot Rosewater, who owned an El Greco worth three million dollars or more. Rosewater said the Festival could have the picture on one condition: that it hire as a speaker the greatest living writer in the English language, who was Kilgore Trout.

Trout laughed at the flattering invitation, but he felt fear after that. Once again, a stranger was tampering with the privacy of his body bag. He put this question to his parakeet haggardly, and he rolled his eyes: "Why all this sudden interest in Kilgore Trout?"

He read the letter again. "They not only want Kilgore Trout," he said, "they want him in a tuxedo, Bill. Some mistake has been made."

He shrugged. "Maybe they invited me because they know I have a tuxedo," he said.

Pre-Epiphany

an idea which he found very tangy: "But maybe an unhappy failure is exactly what they *need* to see."

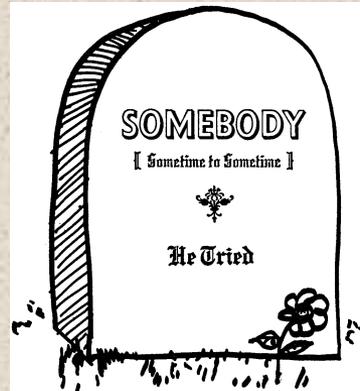
He became energetic after that. "Bill, Bill—" he said, "listen, I'm leaving the cage, but I'm coming back. I'm going out there to show them what nobody has ever seen at an arts festival before: a representative of all the thousands of artists who devoted their entire lives to a search for truth and beauty—and didn't find doodley-squat!"

► Trout accepted the invitation after all. Two days before the Festival was to begin, he delivered Bill into the care of his landlady upstairs, and he hitchhiked to New York City—with five hundred dollars pinned to the inside of his underpants. The rest of the money he had put in a bank.

He went to New York first—because he hoped to find some of his books in pornography stores there. He had no copies at home. He despised them, but now he wanted to read out loud from them in Midland City—as a demonstration of a tragedy which was ludicrous as well.

He planned to tell the people out there what he hoped to have in the way of a tombstone.

This was it:



Dwayne's Dystopia

Chapter 4



Dwayne was meanwhile getting crazier all the time. He saw eleven moons in the sky over the new Mildred Barry Memorial Center for the Arts one night. The next morning, he saw a huge duck directing traffic at the intersection of Arsenal Avenue and Old County Road. He didn't tell anybody what he saw. He maintained secrecy.

And the bad chemicals in his head were fed up with secrecy. They were no longer content with making him feel and see queer things. They wanted him to do queer things, also, and make a lot of noise.

They wanted Dwayne Hoover to be *proud* of his disease.

◆ People said later that they were furious with themselves for not noticing the danger signals in Dwayne's behavior, for ignoring his obvious cries for help. After Dwayne ran amok, the local paper ran a deeply sympathetic editorial about it, begging people to watch each other for danger signals. Here was its title:

A CRY FOR HELP

But Dwayne wasn't all that weird before he met Kilgore Trout. His behavior in public kept him well within the limits of acceptable acts and beliefs and conversations in Midland City. The person closest to him, Francine Pefko, his white secretary and mistress, said that Dwayne seemed to be getting happier and happier all the time during the month before Dwayne went public as a maniac.

"I kept thinking," she told a newspaper reporter from her hospital bed, "'He is finally getting over his wife's suicide.'"

◆ Francine worked at Dwayne's principal place of business, which was *Dwayne Hoover's Exit Eleven Pontiac Village*, just off the Interstate, next door to the new Holiday Inn.

The Pontiac is a glamorous youthful adventure

Harry was startled, and then pain set in. Dwayne had never said anything about his clothes in all the years he'd known him. The clothes were conservative and neat, in Harry's opinion. His shirts were white. His ties were black or navy blue. His suits were gray or dark blue. His shoes and socks were black.

"Listen, Harry," said Dwayne, and his expression was mean, "Hawaiian Week is coming up, and I'm absolutely serious: burn your clothes and get new ones, or apply for work at Watson Brothers. Have yourself embalmed while you're at it."

◆ Harry couldn't do anything but let his mouth hang open. The Hawaiian Week Dwayne had mentioned was a sales promotion scheme which involved making the agency look as much like the Hawaiian Islands as possible. People who bought new or used cars, or had repairs done in excess of five hundred dollars during the week would be entered automatically in a lottery. Three lucky people would each win a free, all-expenses-paid trip to Las Vegas and San Francisco and then Hawaii for a party of two. 1

"I don't mind that you have the name of a Buick, Harry, when you're supposed to be selling Pontiacs—" Dwayne went on. He was referring to the fact that the Buick division of General Motors put out a model called the *Le Sabre*. "You can't help that." Dwayne now patted the top of his desk softly. This was somehow more menacing than if he had pounded the desk with his fist. "But there *are* a hell of a lot of things you *can* change, Harry. There's a long weekend coming up. I expect to see some big changes in you when I come to work on Tuesday morning."

The weekend was extra-long because the coming Monday was a national holiday, *Veterans' Day*. It was in honor of people who had served their country in uniform.

◆ "When we started selling Pontiacs, Harry," said Dwayne, "the car was sensible transportation for school teachers and grandmothers and maiden aunts." This was true. "Perhaps you haven't noticed, Harry, but the Pontiac has now become a glamorous, youthful adventure for people who want a *kick* out of life! And you dress and act like this was a mortuary! Look at yourself in a mirror, Harry, and ask yourself, Who could ever associate a man like this with a Pontiac?"

Harry LeSabre was too choked up to point out to Dwayne that, no matter what he looked like, he was generally acknowledged to be one of the most effective sales managers for Pontiac not only in the State, but in the entire Middle West. Pontiac was the best-selling automobile in the Midland City area, despite the fact that it was not a low-price car. It was a medium-price car.

◆ Dwayne Hoover told poor Harry LeSabre that the Hawaiian Festival, only a long weekend away, was Harry's golden opportunity to loosen up, to have some fun, to encourage other people to have some fun, too.

"Harry," said Dwayne. "I have some news for you: modern science has given us a whole lot of wonderful new colors, with strange, exciting names like *red!*, *orange!*, *green!*, and *pink!*, Harry. We're not stuck any more with just black, gray and white! Isn't that good news, Harry? And the State Legislature has just announced that it is no longer

Now It Can Be Told

Chapter 5



While Dwayne Hoover listened to West Virginia, Kilgore Trout tried to fall asleep in a movie theater in New York City. It was much cheaper than a night in a hotel. Trout had never done it before, but he knew sleeping in movie houses was the sort of thing really dirty old men did. He wished to arrive in Midland City as the dirtiest of all old men. He was supposed to take part in a symposium out there entitled "The Future of the American Novel in the Age of McLuhan." He wished to say at that symposium, "I don't know who McLuhan is, but I know what it's like to spend the night with a lot of other dirty old men in a movie theater in New York City. Could we talk about that?"

He wished to say, too, "Does this McLuhan, whoever he is, have anything to say about the relationship between wide-open beavers and the sales of books?"

➡ Trout had come down from Cohoes late that afternoon. He had since visited many pornography shops and a shirt store. He had bought two of his own books, *Plague on Wheels* and *Now It Can Be Told*, a magazine containing a short story of his, and a tuxedo shirt. The name of the magazine was *Black Garterbelt*. The tuxedo shirt had a cascade of ruffles down its bosom. On the shirt salesman's advice, Trout had also bought a packaged ensemble consisting of a cummerbund, a boutonniere, and a bow tie. They were all the color of tangerines.

These goodies were all in his lap, along with a crackling brown paper parcel containing his tuxedo, six new pairs of jockey shorts, six new pairs of socks, his razor and a new toothbrush. Trout hadn't owned a toothbrush for years.

➡ The jackets of *Plague on Wheels* and *Now It Can Be Told* both promised plenty of wide-open beavers inside. The picture on the cover of *Now It Can Be Told*, which was the book which would turn Dwayne Hoover into a homicidal maniac, showed a college

What is the purpose of life?

Chapter 7



Kilgore Trout took a leak in the men's room of the New York City movie house. There was a sign on the wall next to the roller towel. It advertised a massage parlor called *The Sultans Harem*. Massage parlors were something new and exciting in New York. Men could go in there and photograph naked women, or they could paint the women's naked bodies with water-soluble paints. Men could be rubbed all over by a woman until their penises squirted jism into Turkish towels.

"It's a full life and a merry one," said Kilgore Trout.

There was a message written in pencil on the tiles by the roller towel. This was it:

A white rectangular box containing the handwritten text "What is the purpose of life?" in black ink. The handwriting is cursive and somewhat messy, with a question mark at the end.

Trout plundered his pockets for a pen or pencil. He had an answer to the question. But he had nothing to write with, not even a burnt match. So he left the question unanswered, but here is what he would have written, if he had found anything to write with:

The Purpose of Life (I)

*To be
the eyes
and ears
and conscience
of the Creator of the Universe,
you fool.*

➔ When Trout headed back for his seat in the theater, he played at being the eyes and ears and conscience of the Creator of the Universe. He sent messages by telepathy to the Creator, wherever He was. He reported that the men's room had been clean as a whistle. "The carpeting under my feet," he signaled from the lobby, "is springy and new. I think it must be some miracle fiber. It's blue. You know what I mean by *blue*?" And so on.

When he got to the auditorium itself, the house lights were on. Nobody was there but the manager, who was also the ticket-taker and the bouncer and the janitor. He was sweeping filth from between the seats. He was a middle-aged white man. "No more fun tonight, grandfather," he said to Trout. "Time to go home."

Trout didn't protest. Neither did he leave immediately. He examined a green enameled steel box in the back of the auditorium. It contained the projector and the sound system and the films. There was a wire that led from the box to a plug in the wall. There was a hole in the front of the box. That was how the pictures got out. On the side of the box was a simple switch. It looked like this:



➔ It intrigued Trout to know that he had only to flick the switch, and the people would start fucking and sucking again.

"Good night, Grandfather," said the manager pointedly.

Trout took his leave of the machine reluctantly. He said this about it to the manager: "It fills such a *need*, this machine, and it's so easy to operate."

➔ As Trout departed, he sent this telepathic message to the Creator of the Universe,

Typical mini-katabasis

Chapter 12



Kilgore Trout was far away, but he was steadily closing the distance between himself and Dwayne. He was still in the truck named *Pyramid*. It was crossing a bridge named in honor of the poet Walt Whitman. The bridge was veiled in smoke. The truck was about to become a part of Philadelphia now. A sign at the foot of the bridge said this:



➡ As a younger man, Trout would have sneered at the sign about brotherhood—posted on the rim of a bomb crater, as anyone could see. But his head no longer sheltered ideas of how things could be and should be on the planet, as opposed to how they really were. There was only one way for the Earth to be, he thought: the way it was.

Everything was necessary. He saw an old white woman fishing through a garbage can. That was necessary. He saw a bathtub toy, a little rubber duck, lying on its side on the grating over a storm sewer. It *had* to be there.

And so on.

➡ The driver mentioned that the day before had been Veterans' Day.
"Urn," said Trout.

Fabulously well to do

► Dwayne's waitress at the Burger Chef was a seventeen-year-old white girl named Patty Keene. Her hair was yellow. Her eyes were blue. She was very old for a mammal. Most mammals were senile or dead by the time they were seventeen. But Patty was a sort of mammal which developed very slowly, so the body she rode around in was only now mature.

She was a brand-new adult, who was working in order to pay off the tremendous doctors' and hospital bills her father had run up in the process of dying of cancer of the colon and then cancer of the everything.

This was in a country where everybody was expected to pay his own bills for everything, and one of the most expensive things a person could do was get sick. Patty Keene's father's sickness cost ten times as much as all the trips to Hawaii which Dwayne was going to give away at the end of Hawaiian Week.

► Dwayne appreciated Patty Keene's brand-newness, even though he was not sexually attracted to women that young. She was like a new automobile, which hadn't even had its radio turned on yet, and Dwayne was reminded of a ditty his father would sing sometimes when his father was drunk. It went like this:

*Roses are red,
And ready for plucking.
You're sixteen,
And ready for high school.*

► Patty Keene was stupid on purpose, which was the case with most women in Midland City. The women all had big minds because they were big animals, but they did not use them much for this reason: unusual ideas could make enemies, and the women, if they were going to achieve any sort of comfort and safety, needed all the friends they could get.

So, in the interests of survival, they trained themselves to be agreeing machines instead of thinking machines. All their minds had to do was to discover what other people were thinking, and then they thought that, too.

► Patty knew who Dwayne was. Dwayne didn't know who Patty was. Patty's heart beat faster when she waited on him—because Dwayne could solve so many of her problems with the money and power he had. He could give her a fine house and new automobiles and nice clothes and a Me of leisure, and he could pay all the medical bills—as easily as she had given him his hamburger and his French fries and his Coke.

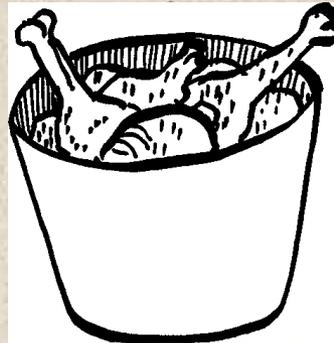
Dwayne could do for her what the Fairy Godmother did for Cinderella, if he wanted to, and Patty had never been so close to such a magical person before. She was in the presence of the supernatural. And she knew enough about Midland City and herself to understand that she might never be this close to the supernatural ever again.

Patty Keene actually imagined Dwayne's waving a magic wand at her troubles and dreams. It looked like this:

Kentucky Fried Chicken, explained

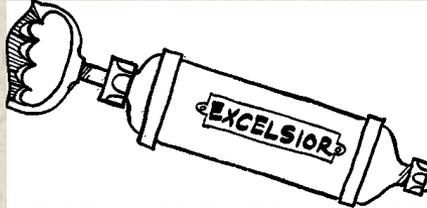


The idea was to kill it and pull out all its feathers, and cut off its head and feet and scoop out its internal organs —and then chop it into pieces and fry the pieces, and put the pieces in a waxed paper bucket with a lid on it, so it looked like this:



→ Francine, who had been so proud of her capacity to make Dwayne relax, was now

Now It Can Be Told



As far as Trout knew, this word meant *higher* in a dead language. It was also a thing a fictitious mountain climber in a famous poem kept yelling as he disappeared into a blizzard up above. And it was also the trade name for wood shavings which were used to protect fragile objects inside packages.

"Why would anybody name a fire extinguisher *Excelsior*?" Trout asked the driver. The driver shrugged. "Somebody must have liked the *sound* of it," he said.

➔ Trout looked out at the countryside, which was smeared by high velocity. He saw this sign:



So he was getting really close to Dwayne Hoover. And, as though the Creator of the Universe or some other supernatural power were preparing him for the meeting, Trout felt the urge to thumb through his own book, *Now It Can Be Told*. This was the book which would soon turn Dwayne into a homicidal maniac.

The premise of the book was this: Life was an experiment by the Creator of the Universe, Who wanted to test a new sort of creature He was thinking of introducing into the Universe. It was a creature with the ability to make up its own mind. All the other creatures were fully-programmed robots.

The book was in the form of a long letter from The Creator of the Universe to the experimental creature. The Creator congratulated the creature and apologized for all the

Now It Can Be Told

discomfort he had endured. The Creator invited him to a banquet in his honor in the Empire Room of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City, where a black robot named Sammy Davis, Jr., would sing and dance.

◆ And the experimental creature wasn't killed after the banquet. He was transferred to a virgin planet instead. Living cells were sliced from the palms of his hands, while he was unconscious. The operation didn't hurt at all.

And then the cells were stirred into a soupy sea on the virgin planet. They would evolve into ever more complicated life forms as the eons went by. Whatever shapes they assumed, they would have free will.

Trout didn't give the experimental creature a proper name. He simply called him *The Man*.

On the virgin planet, The Man was Adam and the sea was Eve.

◆ The Man often sauntered by the sea. Sometimes he waded in his Eve. Sometimes he swam in her, but she was too soupy for an invigorating swim. She made her Adam feel sleepy and sticky afterwards, so he would dive into an icy stream that had just jumped off a mountain.

He screamed when he dived into the icy water, screamed again when he came up for air. He bloodied his shins and laughed about it when he scrambled up rocks to get out of the water.

He panted and laughed some more, and he thought of something amazing to yell. The Creator never knew what he was going to yell, since The Creator had no control over him. The Man himself got to decide what he was going to do next—and why. After a dip one day, for instance, The Man yelled this: "Cheese!"

Another time he yelled, "Wouldn't you really rather drive a Buick?"

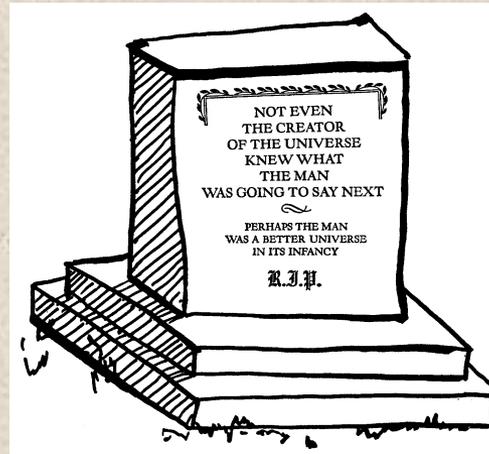
◆ The only other big animal on the virgin planet was an angel who visited The Man occasionally. He was a messenger and an investigator for the Creator of the Universe. He took the form of an eight hundred pound male cinnamon bear. He was a robot, too, and so was The Creator, according to Kilgore Trout.

The bear was attempting to get a line on why The Man did what he did. He would ask, for instance, "Why did you yell, 'Cheese'?"

And The Man would tell him mockingly, "Because I *felt* like it, you stupid machine."

◆ Here is what The Man's tombstone on the virgin planet looked like at the end of the book by Kilgore Trout:

The Purpose of Life (II)



Enter Vonnegut

◆ Wayne couldn't read very well. The words *Hawaii* and *Hawaiian*, for instance, appeared in combination with more familiar words and symbols in signs painted on the windows of the showroom and on the windshields of some used cars. Wayne tried to decode the mysterious words phonetically, without any satisfaction. "Wahee-io," he would say, and "Hoo-he-woo-hi," and so on.

◆ Wayne Hoobler smiled now, not because he was happy but because, with so little to do, he thought he might as well show off his teeth. They were excellent teeth. The Adult Correctional Institution at Shepherdstown was proud of its dentistry program.

It was such a famous dental program, in fact, that it had been written up in medical journals and in the *Reader's Digest*, which was the dying planet's most popular magazine. The theory behind the program was that many ex-convicts could not or would not get jobs because of their appearances, and good looks began with good teeth.

The program was so famous, in fact, that police even in neighboring states, when they picked up a poor man with expensively maintained teeth, fillings and bridgework and all that, were likely to ask him, "All right, boy—how many years you spend in Shepherdstown?"

◆ Wayne Hoobler heard some of the orders which a waitress called to the bartender in the cocktail lounge. Wayne heard her call, "Gilbey's and quinine, with a twist." He had no idea what that was—or a Manhattan or a brandy Alexander or a sloe gin fizz. "Give me a Johnny Walker Rob Roy," she called, "and a Southern Comfort on the rocks, and a Bloody Mary with Wolfschmidt's."

Wayne's only experiences with alcohol had had to do with drinking cleaning fluids and eating shoe polish and so on. He had no fondness for alcohol.

◆ "Give me a Black and White and water," he heard the waitress say, and Wayne should have pricked up his ears at that. That particular drink wasn't for any ordinary person. That drink was for the person who had created all Wayne's misery to date, who could kill him or make him a millionaire or send him back to prison or do whatever he damn pleased with Wayne. That drink was for me.

◆ I had come to the Arts Festival incognito. I was there to watch a confrontation between two human beings I had created: Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout. I was not eager to be recognized. The waitress lit the hurricane lamp on my table. I pinched out the flame with my fingers. I had bought a pair of sunglasses at a Holiday Inn outside of Ashtabula, Ohio, where I spent the night before. I wore them in the darkness now. They looked like this:

Vonnegut's soliloquy



The lenses were silvered, were mirrors to anyone looking my way. Anyone wanting to know what my eyes were like was confronted with his or her own twin reflections. Where other people in the cocktail lounge had eyes, I had two holes into another universe. I had *leaks*.

- ➔ There was a book of matches on my table, next to my Pall Mall cigarettes. Here is the message on the book of matches, which I read an hour and a half later, while Dwayne was beating the daylights out of Francine Pefko:
"It's easy to make \$100 a week in your spare time by showing comfortable, latest style Mason shoes to your friends. EVERYBODY goes for Mason shoes with their many special comfort features 1 We'll send FREE money-making kit so you can run your business from home. Well even tell you how you can earn shoes FREE OF COST as a bonus for taking profitable orders!"
And so on.
- ➔ This is a very bad book you're writing," I said to myself behind my *leaks*.
"I know," I said.
"You're afraid you'll kill yourself the way your mother did," I said.
"I know," I said.
- ➔ There in the cocktail lounge, peering out through my leaks at a world of my own invention, I mouthed this word: *schizophrenia*.
The sound and appearance of the word had fascinated me for many years. It sounded and looked to me like a human being sneezing in a blizzard of soap flakes.
I did not and do not know for certain that I have that disease. This much I knew and know: I was making myself hideously uncomfortable by not narrowing my attention to details of life which were immediately important, and by refusing to believe what my neighbors believed.
- ➔ I am better now.
Word of honor: I am better now.
- ➔ I was really sick for a while, though. I sat there in a cocktail lounge of my own invention, and I stared through my *leaks* at a white cocktail waitress of my own

Vonnegut's personal epiphany

Mary Alice was also the Queen of the Festival of the Arts. The cover of the program showed her in a white bathing suit, with her Olympic Gold Medal hanging around her neck. The medal looked like this:



Mary Alice was smiling at a picture of Saint Sebastian, by the Spanish painter El Greco. It had been loaned to the Festival by Eliot Rosewater, the patron of Kilgore Trout. Saint Sebastian was a Roman soldier who had lived seventeen hundred years before me and Mary Alice Miller and Wayne and Dwayne and all the rest of us. He had secretly become a Christian when Christianity was against the law.

And somebody squealed on him. The Emperor Diocletian had him shot by archers. The picture Mary Alice smiled at with such uncritical bliss showed a human being who was so full of arrows that he looked like a porcupine.

Something almost nobody knew about Saint Sebastian, incidentally, since painters liked to put so many arrows into him, was that he survived the incident. He actually got well.

He walked around Rome praising Christianity and bad-mouthing the Emperor, so he was sentenced to death a second time. He was beaten to death by rods.

And so on.

And Bonnie MacMahon told Beatrice and Karabekian that Mary Alice's father, who was a member of the Parole Board out at Shepherdstown, had taught Mary Alice to swim when she was eight months old, and that he had made her swim at least four hours a day, every day, since she was three.

Rabo Karabekian thought this over, and then he said loudly, so a lot of people could hear him, "What kind of a man would turn his daughter into an outboard motor?"

◆ And now comes the spiritual climax of this book, for it is at this point that I, the author, am suddenly transformed by what I have done so far. This is why I had gone to Midland City: to be born again. And Chaos announced that it was about to give birth to a new me by putting these words in the mouth of Rabo Karabekian: "What kind of a man would turn his daughter into an outboard motor?"

Such a small remark was able to have such thundering consequences because the spiritual matrix of the cocktail lounge was in what I choose to call a *pre-earthquake condition*. Terrific forces were at work on our souls, but they could do no work, because they balanced one another so nicely.

Trout Crosses the Stream of Death

Chapter 20



While my life was being renewed by the words of Rabo Karabekian, Kilgore Trout found himself standing on the shoulder of the Interstate, gazing across Sugar Creek in its concrete trough at the new Holiday Inn. There were no bridges across the creek. He would have to wade.

So he sat down on a guardrail, removed his shoes and socks, rolled his pantlegs to his knees. His bared shins were rococo with varicose veins and scars. So were the shins of my father when he was an old, old man.

Kilgore Trout had my father's shins. They were a present from me. I gave him my father's feet, too, which were long and narrow and sensitive. They were azure. They were artistic feet.

→ Trout lowered his artistic feet into the concrete trough containing Sugar Creek. They were coated at once with a clear plastic substance from the surface of the creek. When, in some surprise, Trout lifted one coated foot from the water, the plastic substance dried in air instantly, sheathed his foot in a thin, skin-tight bootie resembling mother-of-pearl. He repeated the process with his other foot.

The substance was coming from the Barrytron plant. The company was manufacturing a new anti-personnel bomb for the Air Force. The bomb scattered plastic pellets instead of steel pellets, because the plastic pellets were cheaper. They were also impossible to locate in the bodies of wounded enemies by means of x-ray machines.

Barrytron had no idea it was dumping this waste into Sugar Creek. They had hired the Maritimo Brothers Construction Company, which was gangster-controlled, to build a system which would get rid of the waste. They knew the company was gangster-controlled. Everybody knew that. But the Maritimo Brothers were usually the best builders in town. They had built Dwayne Hoover's house, for instance, which was a solid

Trout announces himself to Milo Maritimo



➤ And it is in order to acknowledge the continuity of this polymer that I begin so many sentences with "And" and "So," and end so many paragraphs with ". . . and so on." And so on.
"It's all like an ocean!" cried Dostoevski. I say it's all like cellophane.

➤ So Trout entered the lobby as an inkless printing press, but he was still the most grotesque human being who had ever come in there.

All around him were what other people called *mirrors*, which he called *leaks*. The entire wall which separated the lobby from the cocktail lounge was a *leak* ten feet high and thirty-feet long. There was another *leak* on the cigarette machine and yet another on the candy machine. And when Trout looked through them to see what was going on in the other universe, he saw a red-eyed, filthy old creature who was barefoot, who had his pants rolled up to his knees.

As it happened, the only other person in the lobby at the time was the beautiful young desk clerk, Milo Maritimo. Milo's clothing and skin and eyes were all the colors that olives can be. He was a graduate of the Cornell Hotel School. He was the homosexual grandson of Guillermo "Little Willie" Maritimo, a bodyguard of the notorious Chicago gangster, Al Capone.

Trout presented himself to this harmless man, stood before his desk with his bare feet far apart and his arms outspread. "The Abominable Snowman has arrived," he said to Milo. "If I'm not as clean as most abominable snowmen are, it is because I was kidnapped as a child from the slopes of Mount Everest, and taken as a slave to a bordello in Rio de Janeiro, where I have been cleaning the unspeakably filthy toilets for the past fifty years. A visitor to our whipping room there screamed in a transport of agony and ecstasy that there was to be an arts festival in Midland City. I escaped down a rope of sheets taken from a reeking hamper. I have come to Midland City to have myself acknowledged, before I die, as the great artist I believe myself to be."

Milo Maritimo greeted Trout with luminous adoration. "Mr. Trout," he said in rapture, "I'd know you anywhere. Welcome to Midland City. We *need* you so!"

"How do you know who I am?" said Kilgore Trout. Nobody had ever known who he was before.

"You *had* to be you," said Milo.

Trout was deflated—*neutralized*. He dropped his arms, became child-like now.

"Nobody ever knew who I was before," he said.

"I know," said Milo. "We have discovered you, and we hope you will discover us. No

I Bring You More Of The Same

not eat her because of her unusually large head. They thought what she had thought when she was alive—that she must be diseased.

And so on.

◆ Kilgore Trout had to change into his only other garments, his high school tuxedo and his new evening shirt and all, right away. The lower parts of his rolled-up trousers had become impregnated with the plastic substance from the creek, so he couldn't roll them down again. They were as stiff as flanges on sewer pipes.

So Milo Marithno showed him to his suite, which was two ordinary Holiday Inn rooms with a door between them open. Trout and every distinguished visitor had a suite, with two color television sets, two tile baths, four double beds equipped with *Magic Fingers*. Magic Fingers were electric vibrators attached to the mattress springs of a bed. If a guest put a quarter into a little box on his bedside table, the Magic Fingers would jiggle his bed.

There were enough flowers in Trout's room for a Catholic gangster's funeral. They were from Fred T. Barry, the Chairman of the Arts Festival, and from the Midland City Association of Women's Clubs, and from the Chamber of Commerce, and on and on.

Trout read a few of the cards on the flowers, and he commented, "The town certainly seems to be getting behind the arts in a great big way."

Milo closed his olive eyes tight, wincing with a tangy agony. "It's *time*. Oh God, Mr. Trout, we were starving for so long, without even knowing what we were hungering for," he said. This young man was not only a descendant of master criminals, he was a close relative of felons operating in Midland City at the present time. The partners in the Maritime Brothers Construction Company, for instance, were his uncles. Gino Maritime, Milo's first cousin once removed, was the dope king of the city.

◆ "Oh, Mr. Trout," nice Milo went on, there in Trout's suite, "teach us to sing and dance and laugh and cry. We've tried to survive so long on money and sex and envy and real estate and football and basketball and automobiles and television and alcohol—on sawdust and broken glass!"

"Open your eyes!" said Trout bitterly. "Do I look like a dancer, a singer, a man of joy?" He was wearing his tuxedo now. It was a size too large for him. He had lost much weight since high school. His pockets were crammed with mothballs. They bulged like saddlebags.

"Open your eyes!" said Trout. "Would a man nourished by beauty look like this? You have nothing but desolation and desperation here, you say? I bring you more of the same!"

"My eyes *are* open," said Milo warmly, "and I see exactly what I *expect* to see. I see a man who is terribly wounded—because he has dared to pass through the fires of truth to the other side, which we have never seen. And then he has come back again—to tell us about the other side."

◆ And I sat there in the new Holiday Inn, and made it disappear, then appear again,

Dwayne Hoover opens the book

to double up their friends and relatives with laughter, they, too, learned how to imitate the birds.

The craze spread. Black people who had never been near the Keedsler mansion could imitate the Lyre Bird and the Willy Wagtail of Australia, the Golden Oriole of India, the Nightingale and the Chaffinch and the Wren and the Chiffchaff of England itself.

They could even imitate the happy screech of the extinct companion of Kilgore Trout's island childhood, which was the Bermuda Ern.

When Kilgore Trout hit town, the black people could still imitate those birds, and say word for word what Fred's mother had said before each imitation. If one of them imitated a Nightingale, for instance, he or she would say this first: "What adds peculiar beauty to the call of the Nightingale, much beloved by poets, is the fact that it will *only* sing by moonlight."

And so on.

➡ There in the cocktail lounge, Dwayne Hoover's bad chemicals suddenly decided that it was time for Dwayne to demand from Kilgore Trout the secrets of life.

"Give me the message," cried Dwayne. He tottered up from his own banquette, crashed down again next to Trout, throwing off heat like a steam radiator. "The message, please."

And here Dwayne did something extraordinarily unnatural. He did it because I wanted him to. It was something I had ached to have a character do for years and years. Dwayne did to Trout what the Duchess did to Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. He rested his chin on poor Trout's shoulder, dug in with his chin.

"The message?" he said, digging in his chin, digging in his chin.

Trout made no reply. He had hoped to get through what little remained of his life without ever having to touch another human being again. Dwayne's chin on his shoulder was as shattering as buggery to Trout.

"Is this it? Is this it?" said Dwayne, snatching up Trout's novel, *Now It Can Be Told*.

"Yes—that's it," croaked Trout. To his tremendous relief, Dwayne removed his chin from his shoulder.

Dwayne now began to read hungrily, as though starved for print. And the speed-reading course he had taken at the Young Men's Christian Association allowed him to make a perfect pig of himself with pages and words.

"Dear Sir, poor sir, brave sir," he read, "You are an experiment by the Creator of the Universe. You are the only creature in the entire Universe who has free will. You are the only one who has to figure out what to do next—and why. Everybody else is a robot, a machine.

"Some persons seem to like you, and others seem to hate you, and you must wonder why. They are simply liking machines and hating machines.

"You are pooped and demoralized," read Dwayne. "Why wouldn't you be? Of course it is exhausting, having to reason all the time in a universe which wasn't meant to be reasonable."

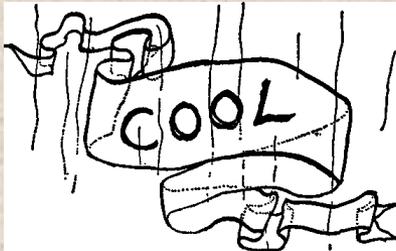
Dwayne Loses It

book assured him that he had already been killed twenty-three times. On each occasion, the Creator of the Universe had patched him up and got him going again.

Dwayne restrained himself in the name of elegance rather than safety. He was going to respond to his new understanding of life with finesse, for an audience of two — himself and his Creator.

He approached his homosexual son.

Bunny saw the trouble coming, supposed it was death. He might have protected himself easily with all the techniques of fighting he had learned in military school. But he chose to meditate instead. He closed his eyes, and his awareness sank into the silence of the unused lobes of his mind. This phosphorescent scarf floated by:



➡ Dwayne shoved Bunny's head from behind. He rolled it like a cantaloupe up and down the keys of the piano bar. Dwayne laughed, and he called his son "... a God damn cock-sucking machine!"

Bunny did not resist him, even though Bunny's face was being mangled horribly. Dwayne hauled his head from the keys, slammed it down again. There was blood on the keys—and spit, and mucus.

Rabo Karabekian and Beatrice Keedsler and Bonnie MacMahon all grabbed Dwayne now, pulled him away from Bunny. This increased Dwayne's glee. "Never hit a woman, right?" he said to the Creator of the Universe.

He then socked Beatrice Keedsler on the jaw. He punched Bonnie MacMahon in the belly. He honestly believed that they were unfeeling machines.

"All you robots want to know why my wife ate Drano?" Dwayne asked his thunderstruck audience. "Ill tell you why: She was that kind of machine!"

➡ There was a map of Dwayne's rampage in the paper the next morning. The dotted line of his route started in the cocktail lounge, crossed the asphalt to Francine Pefko's office in his automobile agency, doubled back to the new Holiday Inn again, then crossed Sugar Creek and the Westbound lane of the Interstate to the median divider, which was grass. Dwayne was subdued on the median divider by two State Policemen who happened by.

The Epic Confrontation

► Dwayne Hoover was now hustled aboard *Martha*— through big double doors in her rear, just ahead of the engine compartment. Eddie Key was in the driver's seat, and he watched the action in his rearview mirror. Dwayne was swaddled so tightly in canvas restraining sheets that his reflection looked to Eddie like a bandaged thumb.

Dwayne didn't notice the restraints. He thought he was on the virgin planet promised by the book by Kilgore Trout. Even when he was laid out horizontally by Cyprian Ukwende and Khashdrahr Miasma, he thought he was standing up. The book had told him that he went swimming in cold water on the virgin planet, that he always yelled something surprising when he climbed out of the icy pool. It was a game. The Creator of the Universe would try to guess what Dwayne would yell each day. And Dwayne would fool him totally.

Here is what Dwayne yelled in the ambulance: "Goodbye, Blue Monday!" Then it seemed to him that another day had passed on the virgin planet, and it was time to yell again. "Not a cough in a carload!" he yelled.

► Kilgore Trout was one of the walking wounded. He was able to climb aboard *Martha*, without assistance, and to choose a place to sit where he would be away from real emergencies. He had jumped Dwayne Hoover from behind when Dwayne dragged Francine Pefko out of Dwayne's showroom and onto the asphalt. Dwayne wanted to give her a beating in public, which his bad chemicals made him think she richly deserved.

Dwayne had already broken her jaw and three ribs in the office. When he trundled her outside, there was a fair-size crowd which had drifted out of the cocktail lounge and the kitchen of the new Holiday Inn. "Best fucking machine in the State," he told the crowd. "Wind her up, and she'll fuck you and say she loves you, and she won't shut up till you give her a Colonel Sanders Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise."

And so on. Trout grabbed him from behind.

Trout's right ring finger somehow slipped into Dwayne's mouth, and Dwayne bit off the topmost joint. Dwayne let go of Francine after that, and she slumped to the asphalt. She was unconscious, and the most seriously injured of all. And Dwayne went cantering over to the concrete trough by the Interstate, and he spat Kilgore Trout's fingertip into Sugar Creek.

► Kilgore Trout did not choose to lie down in *Martha*. He settled into a leather bucket seat behind Eddie Key. Key asked him what was the matter with him, and Trout held up his right hand, partly shrouded in a bloody handkerchief, which looked like this:

Kilgore Trout in the hospital

Epilogue



The emergency room of the hospital was in the basement. After Kilgore Trout had the stump of his ring finger disinfected and trimmed and bandaged, he was told to go upstairs to the finance office. There were certain forms he had to fill out, since he was from outside Midland County, had no health insurance, and was destitute. He had no checkbook. He had no cash.

He got lost in the basement for a little while, as a lot of people did. He found the double doors to the morgue, as a lot of people did. He automatically mooned about his own mortality, as a lot of people did. He found an x-ray room, which wasn't in use. It made him wonder automatically if anything bad was growing inside himself. Other people had wondered exactly the same thing when they passed that room.

Trout felt nothing now that millions of other people wouldn't have felt—automatically.

And Trout found stairs, but they were the wrong stairs. They led him not to the lobby and the finance office and the gift shop and all that, but into a matrix of rooms where persons were recovering or failing to recover from injuries of all kinds. Many of the people there had been flung to the earth by the force of gravity, which never relaxed for a second.

Trout passed a very expensive private room now, and there was a young black man in there, with a white telephone and a color television set and boxes of candy and bouquets of flowers all around. He was Elgin Washington, a pimp who operated out of the old Holiday Inn. He was only twenty-six years old, but he was fabulously well-to-do.

Visiting hours had ended, so all his female sex slaves had departed. But they had left clouds of perfume behind. Trout gagged as he passed the door. It was an automatic reaction to the fundamentally unfriendly cloud. Elgin Washington had just sniffed cocaine into his sinus passages, which amplified tremendously the telepathic messages he sent and received. He felt one hundred times bigger than life, because the messages were so loud and exciting. It was their noise that thrilled him. He didn't care what they said.

Trout meets the Creator of the Universe

Company. The company's monogram and motto hung in the night sky behind Kilgore Trout, whose eyes were wild. The motto was this:

PROGRESS IS OUR MOST IMPORTANT PRODUCT

◆ "Mr. Trout," I said from the unlighted interior of the car, "you have nothing to fear. I bring you tidings of great joy."

He was slow to get his breath back, so he wasn't much of a conversationalist at first.

"Are—are you—from the—the Arts Festival?" he said. His eyes rolled and rolled.

"I am from the *Everything* Festival," I replied.

"The what?" he said.

I thought it would be a good idea to let him have a good look at me, and so attempted to flick on the dome light. I turned on the windshield washers instead. I turned them off again. My view of the lights of the County Hospital was garbled by beads of water. I pulled at another switch, and it came away in my hand. It was a cigarette lighter. So I had no choice but to continue to speak from darkness.

"Mr. Trout," I said, "I am a novelist, and I created you for use in my books."

"Pardon me?" he said.

"I'm your Creator," I said. "You're in the middle of a book right now—close to the end of it, actually."

"Urn," he said.

"Are there any questions you'd like to ask?"

"Pardon me?" he said.

"Feel free to ask anything you want—about the past, about the future," I said.

"There's a Nobel Prize in your future."

"A what?" he said.

"A Nobel Prize in medicine."

"Huh," he said. It was a noncommittal sound.

"I've also arranged for you to have a reputable publisher from now on. No more beaver books for you."

"Urn," he said.

"If I were in your spot, I would certainly have lots of questions," I said.

"Do you have a gun?" he said.

I laughed there in the dark, tried to turn on the light again, activated the windshield washer again. "I don't need a gun to control you, Mr. Trout. All I have to do is write down something about you, and that's it."

◆ "Are you *crazy*?" he said.

"No," I said. And I shattered his power to doubt me. I transported him to the Taj Mahal and then to Venice and then to Dar es Salaam and then to the surface of the Sun, where the flames could not consume him—and then back to Midland City again.

The poor old man crashed to his knees. He reminded me of the way my mother and Bunny Hoover's mother used to act whenever somebody tried to take their photographs.

As he cowered there, I transported him to the Bermuda of his childhood, had him

Bon Voyage!

contemplate the infertile egg of a Bermuda Ern. I took him from there to the Indianapolis of my childhood. I put him in a circus crowd there. I had him see a man with *locomotor ataxia* and a woman with a goiter as big as a zucchini.

◆ I got out of my rented car. I did it noisily, so his ears would tell him a lot about his *Creator*, even if he was unwilling to use his eyes. I slammed the car door firmly. As I approached him from the driver's side of the car, I swiveled my feet some, so that my footsteps were not only deliberate but *gritty*, too.

I stopped with the tips of my shoes on the rim of the narrow field of his downcast eyes. "Mr. Trout, I love you," I said gently. "I have broken your mind to pieces. I want to make it whole. I want you to feel a wholeness and inner harmony such as I have never allowed you to feel before. I want you to raise your eyes, to look at what I have in my hand."

I had nothing in my hand, but such was my power over Trout that he would see in it whatever I wished him to see. I might have shown him a Helen of Troy, for instance, only six inches tall.

"Mr. Trout-*Kilgore*-" I said, "I hold in my hand a symbol of wholeness and harmony and nourishment. It is Oriental in its simplicity, but we are Americans, Kilgore, and not Chinamen. We Americans require symbols which are richly colored and three-dimensional and juicy. Most of all, we hunger for symbols which have not been poisoned by great sins our nation has committed, such as slavery and genocide and criminal neglect, or by tinhorn commercial greed and cunning.

"Look up, Mr. Trout," I said, and I waited patiently. "Kilgore-?"

The old man looked up, and he had my father's wasted face when my father was a widower—when my father was an old old man.

He saw that I held an apple in my hand.

◆ "I am approaching my fiftieth birthday, Mr. Trout," I said. "I am cleansing and renewing myself for the very different sorts of years to come. Under similar spiritual conditions, Count Tolstoi freed his serfs, Thomas Jefferson freed his slaves. I am going to set at liberty all the literary characters who have served me so loyally during my writing career.

"You are the only one I am telling. For the others, tonight will be a night like any other night. Arise, Mr. Trout, you are free, you are *free*."

He arose shamblingly.

I might have shaken his hand, but his right hand was injured, so our hands remained dangling at our sides.

"*Bon voyage*? I said, I disappeared.

◆ I somersaulted lazily and pleasantly through the void, which is my hiding place when I dematerialize. Trout's cries to me faded as the distance between us increased.

His voice was my father's voice. I *heard* my father—and I *saw* my mother in the void. My mother stayed far, far away, because she had left me a legacy of suicide.

A small hand mirror floated by. It was a *leak* with a mother-of-pearl handle and frame.

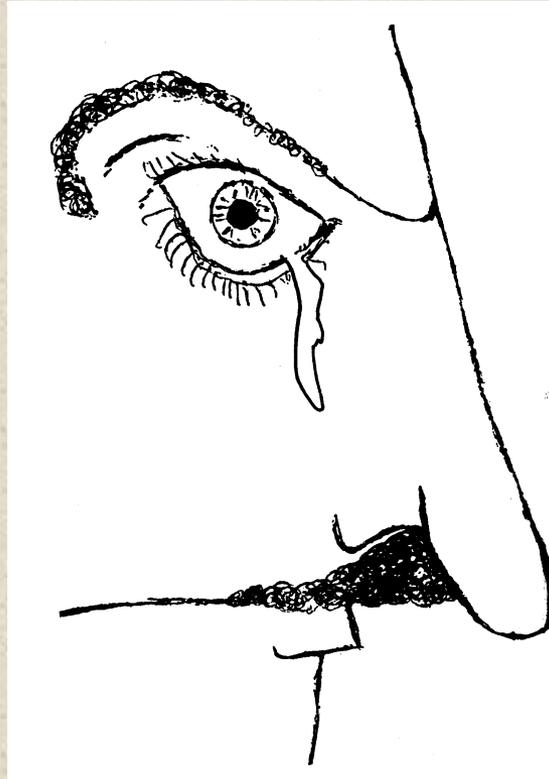
ETC.

I captured it easily, held it up to my own right eye, which looked like this:



Here was what Kilgore Trout cried out to me in my father's voice: "*Make me young, make me young, make me young!*"

ETC.



◆ Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., is the son and grandson of Indianapolis architects. They were painters, too. His only living sibling is a distinguished physicist who discovered, among other things, that silver iodide can sometimes make it snow or rain. This is Mr. Vonnegut's seventh novel. He wrote it mostly in New York City. His six children are full-grown.