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Krazy Kat

A NOVEL IN FIVE PANELS

JAY CANTOR

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KRAZY KAT

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“*Krazy Kat* twinkles, is simply delicious.... Cantor is a first-rate cultural historian, and what fun he has with all the kitsch.... Superb.”

—*The Nation*

Jay Cantor

KRAZY KAT

Jay Cantor is the author of two other novels, *The Death of Che Guevara* and *Great Neck*, and two books of essays, *The Space Between: Literature and Politics* and *On Giving Birth to One's Own Mother*. A MacArthur Prize fellow, Cantor teaches at Tufts University and lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with his wife, Melinda Marble, and their daughter, Grace.

ALSO BY JAY CANTOR

FICTION

The Death of Che Guevara

Great Neck

ESSAYS

On Giving Birth to One's Own Mother

The Space Between: Literature and Politics

KRAZY KAT



A Novel in Five Panels
JAY CANTOR



VINTAGE BOOKS

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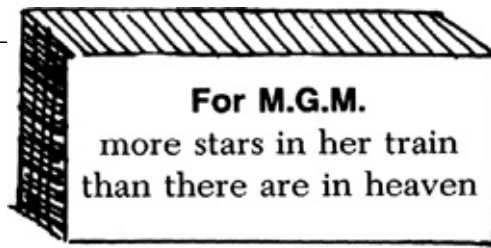
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For M.G.M.
more stars in her train
than there are in heaven



'Tis a gift to be simple
'Tis a gift to be free
'Tis a gift to come down where we ought to be
And when we're in the place just right
We will be in the valley of love and delight.

Chorus:

When true simplicity is gained
To bow and to bend we will not be ashamed.
To turn, to turn will be our delight
'Til by turning, turning we come round right.

—“Simple Gifts,” Shaker hymn

It's a gift to be Clever
It's a gift to be Smart
It's a gift to Ignore
The Promptings of your Heart
And when we've attained our truly proper Size
We'll be marching up to get our Nobel Prize!

Chorus:

When true Artistry is gained
To Plot and to Plan we will not be ashamed
To Crow and to Boast will be our proper Sound
Till by Scheming and Dreaming we come out ROUND!

—“Clever Gifts,” by Ignatz Mouse

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The Panels

The Gadget: In which Krazy and Ignatz watch the first atomic test, and Krazy becomes *very* depressed.

The Talking Cure: Ignatz's attempt to cure—and transform—the Kat is revealed in his letters to his new “colleague,” the Pup.

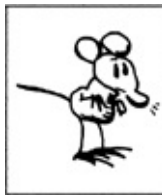
The Talking Pictures: In which our cast, its leading lady ready to work once more, goes Hollywood.

The Possessed: We will get the rights to ourselves—by any means necessary!

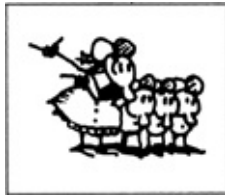
Venus in Furs: In which, as always, fantasy makes reality.

Our Town

KRAZY KAT was the headliner of a comic strip—a long lyric delirium of love—that ran each day for thirty years in William Randolph Hearst’s many newspapers. Against the desolate backgrounds of Coconino County, a landscape that changed from moment to moment—mesquite turning into trees into tumbleweeds—Krazy, too, transformed, being somedays he-cat and sometimes she. What didn’t change was the plot: Daily & Sunday Krazy sang her aria of love and longing for IGNATZ MOUSE. And endlessly clever Ignatz, as if he spurned and despised the adoring Kat, spitefully delighted in hurling bricks at Krazy’s bean. In her imagination—through Krazy alchemy—the brick-bruises bloomed as bouquets, proof to her of mouse love. Lawman OFFISSA BULL PUP, the Kat’s steadfast admirer, arrested the abusive Mouse and marched him to the clink. From which Ignatz escaped next morning to give our Kat her daily brick.

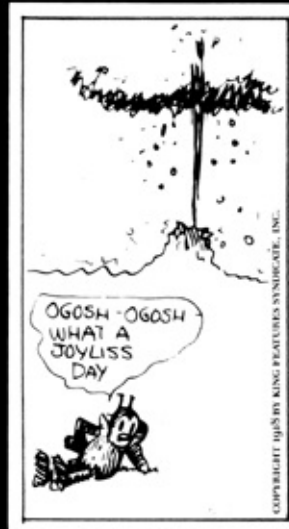


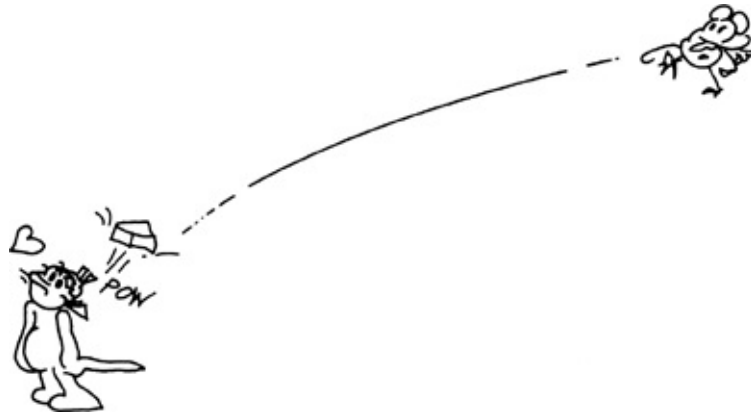
Krazy’s unexpected retirement has put the entire cast out of work: KWAKK WAKK, the gossiping duck who sang out Coconino’s dirty linen, has no one to tattle on. JOE STORK, a lean deceiving creature who brought the babies and the mail from Outside, is a nearly dead letter man, for his fickle fans no longer want to get in touch. DON KIYOTI, native-born long-eared snob, lacks an audience to lord it over. BEAU KOO JACK, the black rabbit of thumping paws, finds fancy tracks falling off at his grocery store. KOLIN KELLEY, who fired the bricks that Ignatz threw, cleans and recleans his cold kiln, knowing that if Krazy never works again he is cursed king of useless rocks. And MRS. MICE, Ignatz’s big-footed spouse, with MILTON, MARSHALL, and IRVING, her Joe-delivered progeny, bicker pointlessly, Dad out of work and time on their hands.



Why did Krazy, they wonder, suddenly shy from the spotlight? And if only she would work again ...

THE GADGET





Morning. Krazy rolled up the rice-paper screens on the windows near her breakfast table and surveyed her world, her hemi-demi-semi-sandy paradise, her Coconino. This A.M. the harsh light transformed desert rocks into huge cacti, the cacti into tall church spires, split a mesa in the background into triplets, turned the triplets into maroon bells for the spires, and left only the Jail (empty now since their retirement) unchanged eternally itself, the Pup said, like the Law. She no longer knew if the light was her friend or her enemy; not that the light played tricks, but that others, she now knew, could play tricks with the light, could make a light brighter than a thousand suns. Once she had used simple like tricks, all tricks, unsuspectingly, indiscriminately (but the Mouse's especially, of course). No more. Standing by the window, stretching lazily, she stared at the raggedy edges of the sun, as if to force it to tell her the truth—*feel me at a distance and you live*, it said. Inside the sun she saw a smaller more compact ball of flame, falling inward into itself—*come too close me and you die*. Her stomach turned. Was it others only that made mischief with the light? Since that day at Alamogordo, Krazy felt that she, too, might be rotten. But *she* hadn't done anything. (Had she?) Anyway, uncertain about herself, she had had to quit the strip, for her act, like a moral trapeze, required singleness, and even one drop of guilt was gum-in-the-works. (But she *was* innocent!)

She waited for her insides to settle to the point where breakfast was imaginable, and turning away from the light and its constant gifts of metamorphosis, she looked around her house. She loved her one large room, the five windows, the whitewashed walls. She liked her house's bareness, its "japonaise" quality: five translucent tan-colored screens, with wide spaced bamboo ribs; one square, thin-legged, low wooden table (almost mouse height) that reminded her of Japanese furniture, its sense that things were neither overwhelmingly solid nor foolishly fragile, but rather that their existence was a miracle; one Hopi rug, where she also slept, its delicate earth colors and sun pattern eccentrically perfect—the daub *here* rather than *there* making all the difference, though no one could have predicted it before the daughter was made. Plus one set of Zuni eggshell-blue tea things, the small Indian cups broken and patched, and broken and patched again, the more precious the wider their tracery of lines showing all the life they'd experienced together. She didn't have many things, but what she had was, as Tracy said about Hepburn's body, "cherce." In, olden, pre-ettom days, her furniture had been overstuffed chairs you trustingly sank into, and lampshades with

burlesque braided tassels. Then, one afternoon she had thought, This stuff is in bad taste cooperatively, her disgusting things had disappeared, and these new spare items had moved in. (Only her plumbing had remained old-fashioned. Just as well, she would have hated for anyone, even an unknown force, to have gone into her private place, her toilet.) Letting suddenly seemed like lots, and next to nothing was best of all. *Stay close to the ground. Don't show yourself.* Before the bomb, Krazy thought, I didn't spit things out, I didn't have taste. Still, she loved her new house because it was *hers* alone; and she hated it, because its emptiness could become too vast, too echoing—hers *alone*. Bareness or barrenness? Time for some tea? She heard the Lawman's kindly voice: *No*.

So she picked up a pile of newspapers and magazines and brought them to her breakfast table. Maybe, she thought, she would even have a gander at *Variety*, *Billboard*, and the *Hollywood Reporter*. She still (though she pretended indifference when the Mouse was around) pondered the comic pages, still studied the entertainment section, where their strip, moved from the funny pages, had, to Ignatz's and her mom's delight, run for its last ten years, placed alongside articles and reviews about the couples who she, too, liked to think were their colleagues—Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, Laurel and Hardy, Buck and Bubbles, Babette Snooks and her dad, George Burns and Gracie Allen (Oh, them especially!). It wasn't that like Ignatz, she had gone high-hat—after all, his aspirations were much mightier. And hadn't been *her* doing when suddenly, in 1933, their work had begun to appear on the entertainment page not just in one paper, but in every paper that Mr. Hearst owned. It hadn't been her doing, but she had immediately understood and accepted it: the move, she thought, had been a simple recognition on Someone's part (could it have been Mr. Hearst, himself) that their art—hers and Ignatz's and the Pup's—was as legitimate as George and Gracie's. Surely in a fate so consistent one might fairly see a god's judgment at work? (Perhaps, she considered, in finding them her colleagues, in making a mental home for herself halfway between the panel and the stage, she was only accommodating herself to the world's choice as she had always done—for she knew that the more popular strips had remained on the comic page itself. And some, she knew, had said that accommodation itself was her *true* art—the art, anyway, of her relationship with that difficult Mouse and his endless arsenal of well-aimed bricks.) But really she was no snob, she loved the comics as much as she loved vaudeville, or movies, loved nothing more than to lie on the floor, stretched out, and press her nose close to Snuffy Smith, Terry and the Pirates, and the beautiful pajamaed adventures of Little Nemo, whose exploits in Slumberland were more perilous, more vertiginous, more imaginative even than Terry the flyboy's go-rounds with that awful—yet seductive!—Dragon Lady. (Little Nemo! That was a long time ago. Does anybody, she wondered, still remember Little Nemo? Does anybody, she thought with a pang, still remember Krazy Kat?)

Seating herself as comfortably as she could (the table was closer to mouse than cat size and her knees had to be scrunched beneath), she turned to *Variety*. She brought her paw to her mouth to put a little saliva on the soft rubbery gray pad. To turn the entertainment bible's pages she needed some extra leverage; Krazy lacked Ignatz's almost human dexterity with her claws; besides she didn't like to let those menacing, almost ... mechanimule things show. Distracted, she went on licking the fur around her paw, and up her arm, for a cat—even a crazy one—is a clean sort. Strands came loose, but didn't form hair balls; special stuff, dissolved on her rough, pebbly tongue, leaving black spots, like freckles. She turned

Variety's second page, wanting to see how her friends were doing at the box office and with booking agents, to keep in touch (but why did she want to keep in touch? It wasn't as if she had been excluded. Stopping had been *her* choice—though choice was hardly the word, it had been so instinctual, almost intestinal; she *just couldn't* anymore). Still—when she was sure, and now, that Ignatz couldn't see her—she checked the grosses of the various acts in the various media. She would admit freely that she liked to read gossip, and grosses were, to her, really just another kind of gossip—the numbers spoke of romances, poisonings, and Queen Audience's whimsical favors. Ignatz read reviews, read the critical essays about them, rummaged through novels looking for plots—towards the day (which, by the by, only he imagined) when Krazy would be ready to work again. But Ignatz, too, checked receipts. He said that they were a form of criticism, the judgment of the marketplace. The Pup was the only one who didn't care about the numbers. He read history, read big books of philosophy and moldy-oldy blue-bound works of theology. He said that all serious work was a vision of the Law—the enduring reality beyond the changing fashions (by which he meant the box office) that only the small cared about (by which he meant Ignatz).

And the numbers, nowadays, did just add to Krazy's confusion. Over the years Krazy had watched uncomprehendingly the slow shift from vaudeville to motion pictures, to radio, to television ... and next? computers? video games? How would the next generation tell its stories? She knew she wouldn't be a part of those stories. But would she even understand them? She felt forlorn. Was it too early, she wondered weakly, for a little of that delicious dangerous tiger tea? Pup warned—and she heard his kindly voice in her ear—that she was drinking too much tea, that it would build up in her blood and might cause hallucinations. His large face, his sorrowful eyes loomed in the air in front of her—proof, she thought, that affection, too, could cause hallucinations. But she supposed she could postpone her next drink a little longer. Till dark anyway.

It was Ignatz's influence, she decided, as she turned to the list of this week's top ten video games in *Billboard*, that had made her so conscious of the box office—but she knew that that was a lie as soon as she thought it; she tried to say that it was Ignatz's influence, and, of course, the words wouldn't form properly in the air in front of her. It wasn't in her nature to blame others; and she still, no matter how much else had changed, couldn't say what wasn't in her nature. Anyway, it wasn't as if the box office were her god, that whatever-sells-is-right attitude that she sometimes felt lurking behind Ignatz's spiteful judgments on other performers, the outward show on his part of what was really an inward biting sense of her—*their*—insufficiency. *Her* insufficiency, he would end up saying, after working himself up into an angry little snit; her blithe, unrealistic lack of concern for the marketplace, for what the audience wanted. Why wouldn't she vary the plot? he would scream. Why must she always forgive him? Then the black cloud settled round his shoulders: it's my fault, he'd say, that we're so flat and insipid. Followed by: the world is a dung heap. But even to make him happy, she couldn't vary the plot. Ignatz showed his love for her by beaming her with a brick. Offissa Pup drew his valentine for her by arresting Ignatz. And the readers adored her by reading about her. The plot was she herself! Her art had been what she was—how could she have been otherwise? done otherwise? But in his rage Ignatz forgot the essence of her heart—the very axis of their work. For only the Mouse, of all of them, gnawed at by some deep dissatisfaction, could dream that anyone could even imagine changing his nature. (Did Ignatz

spinning about in his discontent like a Comekissthedoor, almost have sides? Was *that* why she loved him?)

Ignatz had often ended up taking out his anxieties on her; he couldn't help himself. Why couldn't they do sex in the strip—as if it were her fault that neither of them knew what was. Well, why couldn't they have insides, have souls, like *high artists* did?—naming two more impossible things before breakfast. She shrugged, motoring him to fury. For it galled him that they had never won the Pulitzer *or* scored the big killings, the enormous *Gone With the Wind* grosses, even in their cartoon days, their Hollywood years. She had chided him about his envy of others' big money and prestige. "Frankly, Krazy, I don't give a damn," he had said for a week. (He loved to do voices; though every voice ended up sounding like his. It was a joke, supposedly. But it hadn't been a joke. He *did* give a damn. And, of course, because it was a lie, it had never found its way into the strip.

Yet it wasn't the shifts of the marketplace that most upset her—their slow fade from the public memory that was measured out in the widening disparity between their slowly diminishing (now quickly diminishing) royalty statements and the much larger figures next to other, newer names. That, that, that didn't bother her. (*Did* it?) No, most upsetting these last years were the comic pages themselves. *They* depressed her. Cartoon cats today were just as popular as in her time, perhaps more so—some of the cats, she noticed, even got top banana position, the upper right-hand corner of the daily page, the first strip in the Sunday supplement. But those cats were *cute!* In her art she had instinctively revolted at this sickening state. (If she worked again, though, she felt that every sinew of her imagination would have to fight off cuteness like the simpering disease of the spirit that it was. For now she would *want* to be cute! Why? Was it to say that little bitty innocent kitty couldn't have done nothin' bad? Or was it the Fall Out! in the drinking water that made both audiences and actors want what wasn't good for them?) Think of it! To have so little dignity that you threaten yourself like an infant on people's mercy, their protectiveness towards the bitty itty thing—tenderness that was only another face of their unconsidered overweening power. There was no deep involvement in such feeling. *That* kind of tenderness was one more cream puff of self-congratulation spooned up by already overfed burghers.

Burgher? she thought. Sophisticated word! Can I *say* that? (She no longer knew for certain what she could and couldn't say. No longer knew, from moment to moment, if the charm that *was* her still held, if she could not now suddenly send herself awry from her most basic nature.) Stroking the tips of her whiskers with her paw, she tested: She tried the word aloud.

"Burger!" She laughed to hear what had become of the sound. She saw Wimpy chasing a fat German down the street, trying to trap him in a fluffy bun. The boorshow as food. Not where he eats, but where he is eaten!

Was she a radical, she wondered, anti-boowash? Or did she really covet the big audience the new cats got for themselves? Or was she just irritable because it was time for breakfast? *Have I changed?* she wondered, have I *truly* changed? *Am* I guilty? But of what? She was like a tongue poking about, looking for a black spot in her *lovely* white teeth that hadn't had a day of cavity in their lives. Well, *now* I'm capable of worrying my motives, finding them as mixed up as a ball of yarn! In the old days she would just have acted, and known what was important to her from what had shown up in the morning paper, read the true gist of her thoughts from what had appeared in the next day's strip. She put her jaw down to the table.

and rubbed it across *Billboard*, making the tablecloth slide askew and putting a black streak on her white front fur. But no, she decided, the disdain she felt wasn't *her* problem. It wasn't hunger, and it wasn't envy! Cats today *were* servile. They acted like wise guys, certainly, but that was the most slavish position of all, aping the pet owners while pretending to yourself that you were mocking them, and so—like all ironic court jesters—leaving everything just as it had been before. Those cats never created a true realm of the imagination, a world elsewhere, as she and the Mouse and Bull Pup and Kolin Kelley, the brickmaker, and Mr. Kwakk Wakk, the tattler, and Don Kiyoti and Joe Stork and Beau Koo Jack Rabbit had done. They were Cute Cats, not Krazy Kats, sentimental Hallmark cards of cats, tasting cardboard sentiments cooked up on assembly lines by anonymous hands, each one of them indifferently adding a saccharine word to a feeling that no one had ever had! Krazy lifted her paw into the air, as if saluting herself.

And with all this sentimentality, she thought, came its ghost, its ugly shadow—hardly its opposite!—obscenities like a book (she looked at the best-seller lists, too, for, after all, they had once been collected into a book) ... a book ... a book ... she could hardly bear to think of it ... *a book of things to do with a dead cat*. Sail it like a boat (a cat with masts coming from its stomach). Or make it into a lamp (a bulb stuck in its mouth, a shade over its head). Why a lamp? There was nothing funny about that image, with its truly disgusting overtones, nothing wittily contiguous about lamps and cats. She shuddered to think of the repulsive history behind that whimsy, the terrible unacknowledged hatred that here found disguised expression, the Cat here substituting for the Jew. (Krazy wondered again why she could *think* of smarty words like “contiguous,” but couldn't *say* them. They belonged to Ignatz and Puro. When she spoke, the word would come out—if it came out at all—as nexa eek udda; her own inimitable patois.) It was a sick, jaded audience that wanted—as these moderns did—either to drown in sugar, or to drink small amounts of strychnine ... strychnine ... poison ... mixed with amyl nitrate; it was a dead audience that confused the galvanic kick of its limbs with dance steps. Dead cats! At best it was a child saying poo-poo, mocking its own emotions. More and more of the culture pages had become, since the day of the Bright Light, like a child saying poo-poo. She felt giddy thinking the word. She wondered if she could say it. “Poo-poo,” she said aloud. It was fun. It sounded just the way she had imagined it. Poo-poo. It was fun, yes, but there were some kinds of pleasures one mustn't allow oneself, even if one *could* have them.

What did Ignatz think of dead cats turned into lamps? She thought she had heard him chuckling the day they'd first talked about it, as they had walked up a mountain that became a tree on the horizon (so they would comically find themselves dangling from a branch at the end of all their climbing). Ignatz laughing: that would be too much. (But how many times had she thought *that*, only to find her heart mysteriously turned towards him again?) For one terrible instant she saw herself in his eyes, dead, a light bulb screwed into her mouth. She heard, as if it were outside her window, his high lispy laugh, and it was like an icicle in her heart.

The icicle became a snowflake, just as it always did with that Mouse's meanest gesture. She thought, *He loves me*. She tried to say it. She couldn't. The snowflake melted and left nothing in her heart but a puddle of confusion.

It really was too much.

For a moment she thought she actually did hear that *dear* laugh, that *terrible* laugh (the contrary feelings warred inside her and made all thought of breakfast anathema). She *had* heard it. It *was* his high, lispy laugh outside her window. He had come by, as he often did, for breakfast. She closed up *Variety* and pushed it under the tablecloth before—she hoped—he could see her reading it and reopen the old debate between them: when could they go back to work? (Though his little eyes were keen; they didn't miss much.)

"Where's breakfast?" Ignatz asked, swaggering into her adobe. "Where are my soft-boiled eggs?" He spoke in a mock-gruff sort of voice, not his own squeak.

Krazy felt flustered, for she was sure he was looking at the bulge of newspaper under the striped Navaho tablecloth.

"Your eggs," Ignatz said, in a falsetto voice, "will be ready in six minutes."

"Six minutes," Ignatz said wonderingly, his voice rasping again. He looked bemused, yet certain that something entertaining was about to befall him. "Why, Gracie, do two soft-boiled eggs take six minutes?" He waited, staring at Krazy, as if he could conjure words out of her with his stare. She looked at the ground, tears forming in her eyes, unable to speak. She knew now what he was doing: It was a Burns and Allen routine, one from the moving picture "Yes," Ignatz as Krazy as Gracie said—recovering from the real Kat's real silence, and carrying on as if playing a scene with oneself were the most natural thing in the world (for Ignatz's sense of timing had always been impeccable). "Of course it takes six minutes, George, silly. I'm boiling two three-minute eggs."

Ignatz (as George) smiled at the krazy answer. (As Ignatz he wouldn't be smiling. It would have been brick time! But he always stayed in character—though somehow all his characters were Ignatz, the way Bogart was Sam Spade was Philip Marlowe was Bogart.) "Gracie," he said, "I'll bet you never finished the fifth grade." He looked over at the Kat again, cheerfully expectant, waiting for her to say Gracie's line.

Why didn't he stop? she thought, weeping now. Couldn't he see what this did to her?

"George!" Ignatz said in Krazy/Gracie's falsetto, as if shocked, but showing, too, that she didn't mind George's insinuation one bit, that she couldn't be insulted, that it was George's problem, not hers. "How can you say that! I spent three of my happiest years in the fifth grade!"

Ignatz smiled; then, the routine over, he scowled, the Mouse once more. He pulled up a seat at the table. Krazy drew a paw across her eyes. She had always especially loved doing the Burns and Allen numbers with Ignatz.

But she couldn't, hadn't for years, been able to play her part in them, in anything. He *knew* that. He had done "The Six-Minute Eggs" because he knew how much that would hurt her; it would remind her of her incapacity; and so she wept. But even her tears weren't simple comfort anymore; for to weep at his meanness reminded her of the joy she had once felt in the very same brick-brats; crying was another sign of her problem.

"What's for breakfast?" he said again, this time in his own high-pitched squeak.

She shook her head back and forth, back and forth, lost still in her confusion—not zaniness, not craziness, but a childish sullen bafflement that was like drowning in six inches of water.

"What's the matter?" he said. "Kat got your tongue? ... Kat got a tongue?" His voice had a musing, stroking quality that she hadn't heard for a while. He was tasting alternative lines, shaping a new routine.

Shaping a new routine! Suddenly a sharper, more bitter pain stabbed at her heart, WHAT IF

WAS PRACTICING BOTH PARTS BECAUSE HE PLANNED TO DO A SINGLE? She saw his new title, in some wild style of lettering that only half-recalled the old antic headline that had once been theirs. IGNATZ THE MOUSE! it would say, and then it would add, beneath the title, in *much* smaller letters FORMERLY OF KRAZY KAT. No, she thought. Impossible. Unimaginable. But it wasn't. She could see her life turning into *A Star Is Born*, and her in the wrong part, the Norman Maine role, sliding into sullenness and loss as Ignatz ascended to the firmament. *A Star Is Born* without even the touching last moment; there would be no heart-rending acknowledgment of her importance for Ignatz, no graceful "This is Mr. Krazy Kat" for him.... But ... but ... but hadn't he sounded too ridiculous doing both parts, as if he were his own ventriloquist's dummy! Was that the sort of thing people *liked* nowadays? A mirror looking at a mirror, endlessly delighting in itself, as if there were no world outside, no world elsewhere? Would moderns want that? Did critics now prescribe it? It was the kind of question she usually asked Ignatz. She looked over to the Mouse, who grinned at her slyly, as if he knew her fear, had *meant* to provoke it. She couldn't ask him. She felt her loneliness, her own arctic isolation. Then, as always these last forty years, the narcotic of depression came over her, and the sticky black lassitude spread from her limbs upwards to her brain. *What did it matter anyhow? Let him go.* The six inches of water became a warm dark lake, gravity itself, endlessly inviting her downwards. All she wanted now was for the Mouse to leave so that she could sink into that inner shadow and sleep.

The Mouse, she knew, saw the light leaving her eyes. His sly smile turned angry and disappointed. He shook his head disgustedly. "Say good night, Gracie."

She said nothing, of course, so he put the final nail in, replying to himself in falsetto—Gracie making George's command silly by obeying the letter of it: "Good night, Gracie," s/he said. Then Gracie smiled warmly. Ignatz smiled meanly. And Krazy lay down to sleep.

■ ■ ■

Lay. Or fell, with her paws in the center of the blue sun design of her earth-colored carpet, her head on her paws, her backside in the air. And she dreamed. Or remembered? Since the strip stopped she had had a hard time finding the difference. She remembered dreams as if they were waking events; and vice versa, she thought, and versa versa too; also vice versa.

Memory had once been so simple. Each morning she had read the strip in the paper, and the cloudy melange of the previous day's events developed for her, clarified like a picture suddenly smiling up from its chemical bath. The strip had been her memory—not transcribed but made clear; she found out there the truth of her day, all that she needed to remember, and that she did—at the moment she read it—remember. Maybe if there was a gap between the panels, well, perhaps she sometimes constructed a little continuity between. But the fixed points were sure, were certain. But now it had been forty years since depression had made her quit the strip; forty years that her memory had been a tossed salad, some uncertain producer cutting and recutting the story of her life.

One afternoon Ignatz had come by. That much she was certain of. The day always began that way, as sure as once upon a time. His lips had curled up in a close-mouthed mirthless smile. He said he had seen something, and Krazy had to see it too. It wasn't like anything else, the thing that he'd seen.

“How is that, dollink?” Krazy had asked, pleasantly, deliciously, confused.

“Just tell me what it is, and I’ll figure out the profit, huh? Well, you couldn’t do it, sir,” Ignatz said. “Nobody could do it that hasn’t had a world of experience with things of that sort and”—he paused impressively—“there aren’t any things of that sort.”

Ignatz, she knew, was working in a bit of the Fat Man’s dialogue from *The Maltese Falcon*. Nineteen forty-five was tough-guy time for him—a response to the war perhaps, or his conclusion as to what fickle Dame Public wanted. In those days—before insomnia had clamped her leg in its trap—she hadn’t had much use for that kind of story, hadn’t been able to find a role for herself among the grifters, and the pretty deceitful women who double-crossed their playmates, the hard-boiled dicks.

She stared. Ignatz was patting the air in front of himself, turning his paw in half circles as if stroking the ether, a hypnotic gesture that nearly made her swoon it was so sweet.

“Where is it?” she asked, for that stroking motion had intrigued her.

He sneered. For “where?” was a silly question in Coconino. The mountain you walked towards became a building as soon as you stepped on/in it. Ignatz—like Bud Abbott—explaining wheres with whos—said, “The boys that built it call it the Gadget.”

“Oh, a gadget!” Krazy smiled. Gadgets Krazy knew about from the comics. Each week in the Sunday color pages, Rube Goldberg—a nice-looking man with a big nose and a straight moustache of ten independent bristles—demonstrated one of his new gadgets, in a block diagram. That very week she had learned about a labor-saving device that helped your wife with her girdle. (What was a girdle precisely? Krazy wondered. What was it made from? Would Ignatz like it if she served him one?) The gadget had involved a bowling ball, a unupsettable bowling pin, weights, pulleys, ropes, a dog, a Chinese screen, and a shoe attached to the wall. Krazy liked having her mind pulled through one of Goldberg’s gadget drawings. He was a real artist; he had a vision. She knew, because after contemplating his drawings she saw *her* own life *his* way. What were the umbrellas, the cactuses, the Pup, even the other Coconino characters, but a way to get Ignatz’s lovely brick in contact with her yearning noggin, and so—like Mr. Goldberg with his devices—fulfill her heart’s desire?

So she had set off happily across the hot desert to see the thing that wasn’t like anything else, giving little skips in the evening air from the high spirits that bounced inside her like Mexican jumping beans. They walked briskly, watching the homeward heat rise from the sand in waves, and Krazy shouted phrases from her favorite songs, big-band numbers that were buoyant with hope and pleasure, even in wartime, lifting the nation above the news and chaotic swells. “Strut it out!” Krazy sang to no one in particular, her heart filled with unreasoning glee. Jazz was surely the brave strain of American life, that endless improvisation in existence, where all that held things together was the riff, a few chords, the daily plot (the dear Mouse’s brick, her “He loves me!”) and within that you had to ring fresh changes every day, making it new, yet still the same. “Oh mess around!” she shouted. The departing sun was big and orange and round. She leapt into the air and dove head first into the sand. Ignatz watched indifferently. “It’s tight like that!” Krazy exclaimed as she pretend swam-rolled a few strokes across the desert floor—a warm sand bath was a good way to dust the fleas from her fur. “Mmmm, mmmm, it’s tight like that!” She rose and let the silica drip from her head like water.

The Gadget, Ignatz said, was in New Mexico, which was a part of Arizona this evening.

They had to be going.

“Play that junkyard music!” Krazy sang, holding her paws aloft. “Play it now!” She capered forward a few steps on her toes. Ignatz rewarded her with a lusciously mean smile.

Around the next rise the sand ended; they came to a flat plain, with low brown scrub on it called Alamogordo. A tower stood in the distance.

When she saw the tower she was certain that it was the Gadget: a tall rectangle—almost a cone—made of crossed pieces of black steel; a platform three-quarters of the way to the top; a series of chain pulleys holding a football-shaped metal object. O joy! Immediately, she knew: *The Gadget was an amazing new device to deliver a brick to her head!* How would it work? she wondered sensuously, stretching herself upwards, curving her chest outward towards the tower. What other elements of the world would the Gadget draw into its loving plot? A flock of crows? The wind? A donkey that loves marshmallows? People on other continents? Had Ignatz, she wondered, imagined this all by himself? The dollink! She stared with wonder and delight at the tower, the embodiment of Ignatz’s affection for her, and she looked back beneath long lashes at her mouse. He was as wonderful as the Gadget he had built for her, this natural extension in mixed materials of his steadfast love. He and the tower and the brick it would undoubtedly drop were all of a piece, an identity to her loving eyes. Poised, delicate, yet strong and homey, too. Ignatz, she saw, peered away from her, to her right, his little head turned to one side, his mouth a crooked line. His upper lip was raised and his sharp front teeth bit half his lower lip inward. Just the way he looked before bricks launching! His right arm swung backwards and held itself poised, as if about to send forth a spectral missile! Hot joy flooded the Kat’s heart. This device was the most complicated delivery system he had ever devised for her!

Was it, she wondered, a little, you know, too much? Perhaps love shouldn’t require appliances? (Ignatz had had some odd ideas lately, ones from novels she didn’t even want to hear about.) Was this tower like playing dress-up? (The only ornamentation she ever had was a parasol.) Or wearing leather, or dildos? (She had meant to ask Ignatz what kind of birds dildos were.) But how could there be any harm in such a beautiful-looking Gadget!

Krazy looked to her right, following Ignatz’s intent stare, and she saw four cacti that bent to the sun’s rays oddly, creating a glow around themselves. The cactuses soon had heads; the heads developed the shoulders, arms, and legs of men; and the men, too, looked up at the tower expectantly.

As the sun started to set and the beams no longer blinded her, she saw the men more clearly, and once she saw them she couldn’t look away. Oh, would that she hadn’t seen them! There was something luminous about their shape, even without the sun behind them, a glow that still remained. Her eyes wanted to gaze all along their surfaces. She wanted to scurry up and run about them, but she knew—for wherever she is is Coconino County; assimilated into its air, she never will be out of it—that if she took a step towards them it would as likely land her on a mesa miles away. And why “scurry”? she wondered. She was no one’s pet! She walked on two legs, just as they did! (Is this what it means, she had thought for the first time, “not to feel oneself”?) And why did she want to go up and walk around them at all? Because, she realized, these were real men, not pictures, not movies, but actual men, the first she had ever seen! And she wanted to walk around them because there was more to them

than met the eye!

This part the Pup hadn't had to explain to her. She had known it immediately, with the force of sight. *There were more sides to them, sides that were hidden by the sides she saw.* They had backs, and not just in a way, like her and Ignatz. Their sides weren't flickery, here and gone like the ones in Coconino, or the people she saw in movies, where you felt that if you could just walk into the screen, but of course you couldn't, so you just settled back down into your seat. Anyway, watching Ignatz or watching the screen, it was all kind of there. It was implied. But with these men—one of them in a business suit, two of them in jeans, one, the most beautiful, in khaki pants and a blue work shirt, open at the collar—the backs weren't flickery implications. These sides were permanent. That was the glow to them; the roundness gave them their aura, as if each were a planet unto himself whose gravity could bend rays of light. How beautiful it all was, and how deeply mysterious! They could be hiding something behind them—a nice surprise for her! Their backs might be different from their fronts, and even more lovely. They could even put something inside themselves; and unlike her and Ignatz, who could never keep a secret for long, they could do it forever. What there could even be another person within, different from the one you saw!

Without any thought, her hand moved in the air, curving in its motion, shaping something just as Ignatz's had when he had first told her of the Gadget. She wanted to draw her hand across them, feel their surfaces. Ignatz, she saw, was doing it, too. One wanted to pet them. Helplessly, the growly sound—that awful humiliating purring—began in her throat. She hoped to God they couldn't hear it.

"O, wonder!" Krazy exclaimed. "How beautiful men are!" In her joyful surprise she forgot that her words might make Ignatz jealous. "And what a brand-new desert that's got good-looking stuff like this on it!" The world itself seemed brave and beautiful to her; for a lovely thing always just burnished the whole place up.

"New to you, Kitty-Kat," Ignatz said.

The poop, she thought. So what that he had seen them first; why harp on that before such sights as these?

And *this* part she was sure the Pup must have explained to her later because she still didn't understand what it meant. The New Clear scientists—for those, she had learned, were the onlookers—were rounder than she, just as she had thought; they had more dimensions. And the ideas that allowed them to make the bomb, the Pup said, depended on their knowledge about lots of dimensions—including time.

"Ah," Krazy said, ever agreeable. For she knew that kindly Pup, his face like a good baked potato, meant these explanations not—like some Mice she could mention!—as a way of showing off, but as a bouquet, an act in his impossible, never-to-be-resolved courtship of her. Which was almost a game really; for Pup *knew* that her heart belonged to Ignatz. (If, she thought sadly, it belongs to anyone anymore. If it even exists.) Pup, she thought, was like the father she had never had. (Pup, Ignatz said, was like the father he *did* have.)

The more dimensions you know, the Pup had continued, the closer your comprehension is to God's own—for the Pup's faith was strong, and God was something he brought into almost

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