

## Moving Day

By Michele Dutcher

Sudafy and her father sat in the common area of their home, facing the holo-cube. The image of the five-bedroom house at 1437 S. 3rd Street hung before them in midair.

“That piece of property should have been ours by divine right,” Louie Monroe said, punching his right fist into his left palm for emphasis. “It’s been in our family for nine centuries! We have maintained it, keeping it historically viable for almost a millennium!”

“I know you’re right, papa,” comforted Sudafy, “but the bidding on these real estate parcels has been so intense. It would be almost impossible to get a slice of the Earth at this point.” She rose slightly, putting her arms around Louie’s shoulders.

“I just wish the authorities would contact us and tell us we got it. I hate all this suspense.”

Sudafy squinted slightly as the image on the cube broadened. They could see the entire neighborhood now, or what was left of it. Three huge craft hovered over the block, proceeding methodically, dematerializing the Earth one acre at a time.

“Ours is next, Sudafy. I guess I didn’t bid high enough or they would have contacted us by now. If only I had been given more time.” Louie buried his gray, stubbled face in his hands. The house next door, 1432 S. 3rd Street disappeared, being replaced by a square hole.

“They couldn’t wait, papa. The moon will be in final decay in three days. By that time, all of this moving business has to be finished. There are still a handful of human beings on the surface, overseeing the completion of the project. Their safety has to be of the utmost importance.”

A craft was directly over the Monroe estate now. Louie could see clearly the two Bartlett pear trees out front, the gas light, the columned porch. The image grew bright and disappeared.

“I should have bid more, Sudafy. I’m just always so careful with my resources.”

Sudafy rose from her chair and walked to a glass wall. She smiled. “Papa, don’t be depressed. Come see, come see!”

“Just give me a moment to recover, sweetheart.”

“No papa, come see, come see.” The young woman motioned happily to him.

Louie drew himself up and went to her side. Outside the glass wall, there on the surface of Cadmium 3, stood the Earth house, not even two hundred meters away.

The loving daughter giggled. “We bought it for you, papa: Charles and I. Happy birthday!”

Louie felt lighter than he had in six hundred years. After kissing his descendant, he found himself running towards the mansion. It was exactly as he remembered: one moment he was kicking up the blue dust of a moon in the Horse Nebula, and the next he was knee high in green grass and dandelions. He was climbing the concrete stairs, jumping onto the brick-lined porch. He pulled a metal chair away from the front of the house and seated himself happily. Even the purple glow of an alien star didn't seem so unusual now. He was finally home.

"It's exactly as they promised," his daughter told him while happily sitting on the steps. "The company transported every atom, every ohm of electricity, every molecule of atmosphere. The surface dirt is guaranteed to go to a depth of sixty feet. We own every worm, every clot of dirt, every ounce of H<sub>2</sub>O, every drop of chlorophyll in the leaves."

"Thank you, my sweetest heart. It is amazing." He closed his eyes for a moment, breathing deeply. "She and I lived here, you know. Nine hundred years ago."

"Celeste, your first wife."

"Yes, yes. We would sit on this very porch at night and watch people pass by on the street, taking in the night air. I still miss her, everyday."

"Was there never anyone else, papa?"

"Never. Not like her, not in all that time. There were other wives, of course. Eventually, I could have children without a mate, which is how you were born."

He smiled at her again. "But there was never anyone, in all those years, who took her place in here," he pointed to his chest.

"She must have been very special."

"She looked very much like you, in fact. I suppose that's why you're my favorite. After Celeste disappeared, I lost the courage to truly love again."

A quiet buzzer vibrated inside of Louie's arm.

"That's odd. What would the Fledglors want this late in the season?" Louie began to stand.

"Well, we had better find out. We don't want to insult the indigenous lifeforms by seeming to be indifferent."

"Papa, I left the sensors in the common area. We'll need to go back to the house and get them."

Outside their 30th century home, Louie and Sudafy placed the sensor helmets over their heads. Now they could see the few dozen Fledglors floating in the space between the glass wall and the old house.

“Fellow Cadbiums, I am surprised and delighted by your visit,” began the elder statesman. “How may I be of service to my neighbors?”

One of the electronic entities moved forward, separating itself from the others. “My neighbor, we are surprised you have brought a new entity into our shared environment without alerting us first.”

The Earth people looked at each other with puzzlement. Then Sudafy smiled. “You must mean the house, my friends. This is merely an object my companion and I bought. It has no life of itself.”

“We are not without intelligence, Louie and Sudafy. We are not surprised by the artificial habitat, but we are surprised by the entity who stands there now, before our very eyes.”

The entire assembly turned towards the brick home. Louie saw her now, standing there, waiting for him.

“It’s her. It’s my wife. It’s her...ghost.” He was running towards her: across the blue sand; through the grass; pounding up the concrete stairs.

He stopped dead at the edge of the porch. “My love. It is you.”

“Yes, Louie, it is I.”

He could see her through the visor, inching ever closer to him. “I have been confined to this house since you left me here, so long ago.”

“I never loved again, Celeste. My heart kept its promise to love only you, forever.” He could see her long red hair now, her frail arms, her deep eyes and her lips. He fell to his knees in front of her as the hem of her dress faded through his fingertips.

“Where am I, Louie?”

“This is a moon in the Horse Nebula, my love.”

“And who are these beings?”

“They are the Fledglors. These are the electronic life forms whom originally settled this world.”

Celeste gazed at the small crowd and smiled. “They are like me, Louie. At last I shall have others to talk with.” She began to float towards the welcoming crowd.

“Celeste, my love. Come back to me. Don’t leave me again,” begged the man made of flesh and blood, following the spirit past the green boundary.

“I’ll be here, among my new friends, if you want to visit me.”

“But Celeste, I have loved no one but you for nine hundred years.”

She turned one last time to look upon Louie’s bent and crying figure. “You’ve loved no one in nine hundred years, Louie? I suppose that is penance enough. I forgive you for killing me.” Celeste vanished into the atmosphere of a small moon, circling an unimportant star, within the Horse Nebula.

The End