

The Crystal

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Exposition

Gordon Brooks turned over for what seemed the fiftieth time. Again to look at his wife's hair tumbling down over the pillow and flowing invitingly on to the sheet that lay between them. He looked with great longing and sadness at her exposed shoulders and upper back, silvery in the moonlit room, but dared not touch her. Twice already she had brushed away his hand from her shoulder, the last time, he was convinced, even while she was still asleep.

He felt like the loneliest man on the planet, and as was usual at such moments, he looked for someone to blame. "That blasted kid. I'm convinced he was put on this Earth to torment me."

His wife stirred, and he realised he had spoken out loud. Rather than face Joan's wrath, he slid out of bed, grabbed his dressing gown and quietly went downstairs. He poured himself a generous glass of milk and made his way into the sitting room. He flicked on the light as he entered the room and sat down on the settee. The bloody thing was there in front of him, on the glass-topped coffee table.

He sipped the milk and looked at it. He remembered Joan's words as he'd taken it out of the shabby cardboard box the boy had delivered it in.

"My God! That is beautiful! Where did you get it?"

He'd told her. Form 4 had submitted their personal end-of-term physics projects to him that afternoon, and for a reason that had entirely escaped him, he'd picked 'that' boy's object and brought it home with him.

He'd been dismissive "It was submitted by one of the boys - can't see the point of it really"

He noticed she held the article delicately - balanced just with the fingertips of her finely-boned right hand, as if she didn't want to mark it's polished surfaces by touching any part other than was necessary. He also noticed she made no remark about how heavy it was, or the odd 'sticky' sensation he'd felt when he had handled it.

She had twirled it around in a quarter circle with her fingers, and he had seen her eyes flashing with pleasure as she watched the coruscating reflections off it's multiple facets. Instantly he had felt insanely jealous. Nothing he had done for a long, long time, had lit up her face in such a way. She flicked the object clockwise, then anti-clockwise, over and over. As she did so, the smile on her face grew wider and wider, until suddenly she exclaimed "Look! The centre is moving!"

He stared at the object which she now held steadily, and the central crystal in the object was revolving, taking the light in the room and throwing it in all directions in a bewildering set of patterns that never seem to repeat. She held the object in front of her until the momentum finally died and the centre of the object stopped revolving.

She put the object on the table and turned to him, repeating his words "You can't see the point of it?" she paused, but before he could speak again she continued "It's a masterpiece of form and substance. Could *you* make anything as beautiful?"

Her words cut through his heart like cold steel. He was on the defensive "But it's supposed to be a physics project, not an object d'art - as you would say"

She flashed her eyes at him warningly. "Yes, I'm merely an artist, but you must be totally blind not to see that this object could only have been made by someone who truly understands our physical world."

She paused, awaiting his reply, but he could say nothing. She picked up the object and held it in front of him "Tell me what you see!" she commanded.

He started to describe the object. "Well it's essentially a cube which has had it's centre and most of each face removed, with a diamond shaped inner object that appears to be supported at it's up-most and bottom-most points by indentations set into two corners of the cube."

He paused, and she said "Is that it? Is that what you see?"

She carefully placed the cube on the glass surface balanced only on the tiny facet at one of the cube corners. She looked at him, then

slowly and purposefully picked up the cube and balanced it on every other corner in turn. At each position she turned and looked at him. Finally she asked “What does that tell you?”

He felt like one of the 1st years in his own classroom. “It's perfectly balanced.”

“Yes” she murmured, and reaching down deftly spun the object with a quick flick on two corners with her middle finger and thumb.

Again the intense coruscating light poured from the object, and this time something more. A hum, slight at first, that grew in intensity and frequency until it sounded like a chorus of angelic voices, only to ebb away again to silence as the object again came to rest.

She looked again at him “And what does that tell you?”

He felt crushed. He stared at the cube and began stumbling out his reply, but it was to an empty room. She had left for bed.

He had finished his milk, but sat staring at the object. Finally he leaned forward and picked it up. It felt so heavy. He tried to perch it supported by just his fingertips as Joan had, but it's mass caused his fingers to shake, and he gave up and put the object down. He tried standing the cube on one of it's corners, as his wife had done earlier, but the material the cube was made of seemed to stick to his fingers, and instead of balancing crashed heavily onto the glass of the table. The stickiness made him feel uneasy. It wasn't tacky like glue - more like the attraction of opposite poles of a magnet. The closer his fingers were to the object, the more he felt the attraction.

Finally he gave up. He sat back in the settee and planned his grilling of the boy in the morning physics period. Plainly the boy had obtained the object from someone else - Brooks didn't believe for one second, that he had manufactured it. Eventually, at long last, his eyes closed and he fell asleep.

Transition

“Gordon! You're late!” She was shaking him roughly by the shoulder. He looked up. She was fully dressed, coat on, and ready to leave. He sat up to greet her but she ignored him. Bending down, she picked up the cube, stood it on one corner and spun it. A brief flash of pleasure crossed her face as the light tumbled out of it, then she looked at him and scowled “I'm going to be late tonight - don't wait up” and with that she turned and left. Brooks watched the cube until its revolutions died, then cursed as he looked at his watch, and jumped up to get dressed.

Downing turned the cube over, his face showing the same pleasure Brooks had noticed in his wife. “It's absolutely beautiful, Brooks, but I'm not surprised, the boy is a genius.”

They were sat together in the staff room after the first period, and Brooks had wanted to sound out his head of department before confronting the boy. “But did he make it himself?”

Downing laughed “Well, yes and no!”

“You knew about it?”

Downing smiled. “He's been making weekend visits to the High-Energy Labs, and assisting Alfred King.” He was watching Brooks for his reaction.

“The quantum physicist?”

“The very same” continued Downing. “I'll come clean with you. “ he said apologetically “Alfred King wrote to me a while ago after receiving copies of two of his own papers which had been 'corrected' by Simms, together with a marked-up and corrected copy of King's latest book.”

Brooks felt angry. “Why wasn't I told?”

Downing's face was now stern. He looked across at Brooks over the top of his spectacles. “I had hoped you would work it out for yourself. Instead, you seem to be simply giving the boy a hard time.”

"If I'd known..." Brooks began.

"Listen, there are huge gaps in the boy's general knowledge of physics, apart, that is, from his savant-like grasp of quantum mechanics. You have a lot to offer him in that respect, but apparently you can't accept having what you say tested by him when he disagrees. Well, I understand. You're just a teacher, and this is a totally new situation for you."

Brooks was crestfallen. The words cut like a knife. "Just a teacher.." he thought. How dare he say that.

He was aware Downing was watching him closely, and obviously expecting a positive response. His shoulders drooped. He asked despairingly "What should I do?"

Downing showed his annoyance very quickly. "For God's sake man, stop wallowing in your own problems, and grasp the wonderful opportunity you have in front of you. The boy is probably destined to be one of the greatest physicists the world has ever known!"

Brooks stared at him.

Downing bent down and picked up his brief case. He pulled out a book and handed it to Brooks.

"Take great care of that. It's the copy of King's book that Simms has marked up, and I wouldn't like to lose it. You won't understand most of it - I didn't either, but what you *will* do after studying it, is to understand a little about the immense talent you are dealing with." With that Downing rose and left the staff room, and it was time for Brooks to take Form 4 for their lesson.

He stared long and hard at the page in front of him, the carefully typeset original print surrounded by hand-written arrows and contradictions supported, he assumed, by the theoretical formulae neatly presented down each margin of the page, and continuing along the head and footing.

He had scanned nearly to the end of the book, and almost every page had been annotated in the same way.

Most of what he read was completely meaningless to him, but he recognised that the boy's comments were made with confidence and an assumed authority. He put the book down and sat back in his chair to think of Downing's parting comment this morning. He also thought of the numerous times he had brushed aside with irritation, the boy's

frequent questioning of his assertions, and he cringed inside. He had abandoned his confrontation of Simms in the morning period, and was now sat in the empty lab, gratified at last, for listening to, and acting upon, Downing's wise counsel earlier today.

He took the cube out of the box and held it in front of him. Strangely, it didn't feel quite as heavy, though the mildly disconcerting attraction for the skin of his hand still remained. He successfully balanced the cube on one of its corners on the bench top, and pondered.

Gently applying pressure to the uppermost corner with his right hand, he gave the inner crystal a quick flick with the index finger of his left. Reflections from the Lab lights danced over his face and around the room, accompanied with the chorus of sound he'd heard the night before, as he timed the duration of the revolutions.

He picked up the cube and measured it fully, then weighed it, making neat notes of his findings.

Walking over to the Lab safe, he unlocked the heavy fire-proof door and removed the Lab's prized possession - a medium-power gas laser. He mounted the unit on the bench, plugged in the power supply, and stood the cube exactly 1 metre away from the laser aperture. Focusing the laser with the 'dry' white light facility, exactly on one of the facets on the central crystal of the cube. He set the power level to 5 milli-watts and switched on the beam.

At first not much happened, the micro-fine beam of the laser bounced off the crystal and focused in a small, weak spot on the wall opposite him. He was about to turn up the power when he noticed that the spot was starting to move - very slowly at first, but with definite acceleration. He removed his hand from the power control knob and watched in fascination and awe as the centre crystal turned, faster and faster, using only the minuscule power of the photons of light emitted by the laser as a driving force. Eventually the centre crystal stopped accelerating, but continued to revolve at a constant speed, reflecting some the laser light, and that of the Lab lights around the room, at the same time emitting a slight but distinct chorus of sound.

His heart beating faster, Brooks donned a pair of safety goggles, and turned up the laser power to 10 milli-watts. The inner crystal accelerated and the chorus of sound increased in volume, the whole

Lab alive with the dancing light bouncing off it.

Brooks opened a cupboard and removed a sound pressure-level meter from the top shelf. The meters were all calibrated for the Lab's 'ambient' sound level and the instant he switched the unit on, it registered 44db. His heart missed a beat. He picked up his pencil and scribbled on his notepad, checking the result with his calculator. He shook his head, it must be wrong. So he re-calculated. It wasn't. Too excited to think now, he switched off the equipment and wandered down to the now-empty staff room to make himself a coffee.

It couldn't be possible. Even with his rough and ready calculations the crystal was generating nearly 100 times as much power as the laser light he had directed at it. That meant... He shook his head. He must be mistaken. He must re-check. Suddenly he felt very tired. The badly-disturbed night before had taken its toll on him. And he was hungry. He drained the remainder of coffee from his mug, and dumped it in the sink.

Back in the Lab, he unplugged the equipment, and putting the cube back into its dirty little box, stuffed everything into his large holdall. He locked the Lab behind him and left the building. Putting the holdall in the boot of his car, he made his way home.

Recomposition

He felt her breath on his neck and heard her soft exclamation in his ear.

“Wow” she said, nipping his ear gently with her teeth. She dropped her coat and bag on the floor as she walked around the couch and sat down beside him. Her eyes were bright as she looked at him, and she took his left hand in hers and turned to look at the cube on the table.

She could just make out the needle-fine beam of the laser aimed directly at the central crystal, and she sat - almost as he was - hypnotised with the chorus of light and sound emanating from the cube. There was a perceptible modulation in both speed and intensity of the almost human-sounding harmonies, that was both soothing and strangely erotic. Joan turned her face up to his and kissed him.

“That's beautiful. When did you discover it could be driven with light?” His voice was a whisper “This afternoon, at school.”

“Watch” he added, and leaning forward, turned up the laser intensity by another 20 milli-watts. The chorus became perceptibly louder, the modulation deepening, and the light spilled over their faces in a thousand different tiny beams reflected from the facets of the crystal.

She looked again at his face. His eyes were bright and alert, his right hand still holding his pencil, and his copious notes were scattered over the surface of the table. All at once she again recognised the man she had married. She felt a stirring within herself, a deep feeling of love and affection for him, and most of all, a yearning to have him inside her.

She reached up with both hands either side of his face and kissed him again, this time driven with the fire in her belly. He dropped his pencil and wrapped both arms around her. The kiss was long and deep, both

of them intense in their desire to please one another. She pushed him back on the couch and undid his trouser belt and zip, and after ripping off her panties climbed on top of him. They moved together, sometimes in time with the rhythm of the hypnotic chorus, sometimes in counterpoint to it.

As Brooks felt the surge building inside him, he reached out one hand and turned up the power of the laser. The angelic chorus ebbed and flowed, the harmonies at once building with yet more sustained voices, at other times the voices leaving, only to return to sound a new chord that was both complex, yet completely at one with their love-making.

Joan looked down at his face below her and saw again his deep and tender love for her. She felt the moment growing within her, but this time it was very different than at any time before. The pleasure grew and grew within her, and though she wanted to let go, she couldn't. Her breathing turned to great sobs of pleasure, each breath ending in a shudder of her whole body, a cry of "Yes, Yes" escaping from her mouth.

They moved together slower now - exquisitely slow, so that each millimetre of his movement within her evoked multiple waves of pleasure, so that she shuddered almost uncontrollably.

He watched her above him, with an insight to her inner reactions he had never known before. He had complete mastery over his own previously short journey to fulfilment, and simply allowed himself to be guided by his new knowledge of her, following her lead, as each beautiful, wonderful minute of time seemed stretched to infinity. He felt the waves of pleasure from her transmitted through his groin, at once to augment and amplify - not compete, with his own.

Then there was harmony between them - a matching of movement, mood and the waves of pleasure, which became part of the now vibrant space around them. Then her scream. A scream that matched the power and intensity of the chorus emanating from the crystal. A scream that vibrated through him and came from his throat too.

Her head was back and shaking from side to side, her lovely waves of

hair joining the dance of light within the room. Then she stopped. Convulsions gripped her and she moaned and twisted above him in exquisite agony, before finally falling forward and smothering his mouth in kisses that felt like fire on his lips. His arms went around her back and he felt himself ejaculating over and over again deep inside her with a force and pleasure he had never imagined existed, as she fiercely thrust her groin into his with each of his contractions.

Slowly, the passion left them. Only the love and tenderness remained. The sounds from the crystal seemed softer, the harmonies more resolved, as they lay in each other's arms.

She whispered in his ear. "I love you Gordon. I'm so sorry, I've been such a pig to you."

He ran his hand through her lovely silky hair. "Joan, I love you. And I'm sorry I've been such a self-obsessed fool."