

Scotty's Junction

Andrew Arthur



Dumplingbelly Publishing LLC

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But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.

—2 Samuel 12:23

You seldom read a good novel more than twice, until you write your first.

—Andrew Arthur

Ethan, Leland, Angelina, Eymani

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Prologue

I pull loose the back strap with a clumsy but precise tug, then clutch the bib upward, clearing my head. As I hold the Leon Paul to my side, the bright white lights from the rigging above cause me to squint.

We are now in the direct elimination round, I remind myself. The crowd is cheering in the background. The blinking lights go off. I had earned another point.

This is the third period—I'm at 14 in this bout. My last move was a coupé and then a flick to the wrist. It was worth it. I won the quick point by going above my opponent's blade instead of under his wrist. *That's what you get for getting too close to the Flick Master.*

I chuckle to myself and smile.

Then I begin walking back to the *en garde* line. The sweat starts again dripping down the sides of my face. My mind starts to drift off as I prepare for the next point and, viewing the scene through the pinholes of my mask. I think of how a regular housefly might feel with its dot-like eyes. Or the sympathy for a caged bird flying—the Sankofa bird still confined to its view of the mesh cage. It's perhaps an apt image, but I still have my freedom.

My mind is still wandering. I can't afford to get too distracted, but more thoughts enter my head. During my last match, my teammate collided with her opponent. She hit her jaw on her helmet and had to be removed from the bout. Unfortunately, her jaw might be dislocated. Her opponent also had to be seen by the doctor on duty. The poor guy fell backward off the piste during retreat.

Matches today are definitely not without injury.

I need to stay focused; I need to be absolute. This is for the championship. After a long year of hard work, it all comes down to

one bout and now one point. I need to be better than my opponent, just for this one moment.

I set my feet in first position, then look to my right, to give myself a quick check of the situation. I salute my opponent and then the referee. I don my mask, and I can hear my heavy breathing, along with a slight pulsating—my blood, circulating as it is pressed by the mask pads set tightly against my head. The system is turned on—the adrenaline, the oxygen—and my pupils widen, triggering an increase in my heart rate and blood pressure.

The referee says his final words, “En garde, ready. Allez.”

I start hopping, jumping from center to parry eight low. Then in rapid succession, I move to center three, then five, then eight, high five. My opponent counters, pushing my blade out of the way. I parry, pressing my blade against his, then again leap straight—but no lights. I retreat one and two steps and then recover. He rushes, but I hold.

I’m talking to myself, coaching myself.

“Steady!” I whisper.

My opponent executes a series of feint attacks. He’s going all out, but he makes a bad whipping action with his blade. I successfully parry the motion. He then parries and I repost, establishing the right of way. Stepping forward and advancing with a deep lunge, he counters and retreats. *Keep him moving*, I think. *Keep pressing! Now... go!*

My opponent starts to panic; he’s losing his footing. The next moment, he’s falling. For a split second, my heart doesn’t make a sound... I’ve got him! He’s on his back! Moving purely on instinct before my opponent can defend himself, I execute the kill. I feel a slight pressure on the foil. The red lights begin blinking on my mask.

I’ve made the touch.

PART ONE

Chapter 1

Statue in the Park

I was in a jovial mood, acting out my moves by narrating the events that happened earlier that morning. I was ecstatic—I had walked away with the championship—and the trophy! Using the tip of the trophy as my foil, I acted out some more of my moves, then poked my pops, Sadiri, in his dumpling belly. I could see the glee on his face, an acknowledgment of my accomplishment. “Your mother would have been proud of you too,” he said solemnly. “I’m sure she acknowledges your efforts.”

My father and I walked home that evening underneath a beautiful setting sun. We usually exit the subway one stop before our designated station to pick up supplies at the local farmers’

market. However, today we made an additional stop to visit our friend Noa, a local luthier. I had a separation issue with my violin, which I'd been neglecting for a long time. The violin had an open seam at the rib. We had dropped the violin off a week ago and were scheduled to pick up the instrument today.

“So, Scotty,” my dad said cheerfully, “are you really giving up fencing your senior year while you attend the new school?”

Earlier that morning, we had an extensive conversation about my decision to put my fencing interests aside so that I could concentrate on playing the violin and developing my painting techniques at my new high school. “Yes, Pops. I feel really good ending the year on top, and I really want to develop my art.”

Sadiri and I live in a connected brownstone not too far away from a local park just off the G line in Brooklyn. The locals call the park Pigeon Park because of the concentration of birds that migrate there every year. But today, I thought, whoever had named the park would undoubtedly be surprised by its assorted occupants. The park had attracted an array of fantastically colored birds; it should no longer be considered an exclusive playground for the rock doves. For instance, one day I saw a few fine specimens of New York's state bird, the eastern bluebird, fly by. Then you have the European starling, house sparrow, laughing gull, and even the monk parakeet—all making appearances on the park's wide Brooklyn stage. On several occasions, I was guilty of stirring up a panic by running through the park's main walkway, creating a cloud of flocking birds as their wings flailed the walkway before taking flight in a graceful, synchronized swoop. Hardly anyone visits the park nowadays, and you don't see loving couples out relaxing on the grass with their picnic baskets anymore. But the park has the nostalgia of an old painting, especially during the rainy autumn season.

In the middle of the park stands a statue glowing as if it was left burning in a furnace for hours. It had a refined brass look

of a man who apparently was prominent once, but his name is unknown today, due to the deteriorated condition of the commemorative plaque.

“One day, I’ll find out who this person was and petition the state to renovate the name plate,” I told Sadiri as we walked past the statue that night.

“You do that, Scotty,” Sadiri replied.

An ironic smile carved his face, but I felt passionate about the brass man: I had rested at his foot many hours while enjoying the park’s scenery. He was extremely handsome, dignified, and well-dressed in a ruffled cravat worn at the neck. I had often thought he must have been a privileged aristocrat of the late 1700s; he wore a full-skirted coat. When you stand in front of the statue, he appears to be leaning toward you, waiting to be hugged or even embraced. His foot is stepping forward, and his hands are extended open to suggest a welcoming or a friendship.

Oddly, whenever I leave the park, my plans to find out who the man was fade away as readily as they appeared. Strange, but the statue seems to be a part of my life only when I’m there.

Perhaps, I really think it’s just my ever-changing teenage attention span.

Chapter 2

A Question of Vision

Many people use Pigeon Park as a convenient cut-through to shorten the time it takes them to walk their usual route. Our daily routine was to walk through the park on our way back home. Sadiri would purposely schedule his market run to coincide with the time I would be leaving school. We would walk through the streets holding hands and talking about current events and what, if any, obstacles we were facing that day.

I noticed, however, that when we held hands, we would get our share of curious onlookers. Holding hands was the norm for me as I was growing up, but now, our holding hands surprised many along the way. The soft whisperings and gossip weren't really

annoying; I could see just how they felt simply by watching the expression on their faces. Perhaps it was strange for some people to see us like that:—a man and a teenage boy holding hands without a care. Thankfully, we were never verbally abused, but it's difficult to explain our cultural relationship. Years ago, when I was just a young kid, it wouldn't have been strange for me to see my father and one of his brothers—or another male friend—walking down the road, laughing and holding hands.

But also, there's this oddity: Sadiri has a condition that occasionally renders him blind without warning. His illness isn't like night blindness or flash blindness; it's definitely something else. He suddenly loses vision in one or both eyes, sometimes for hours at a time. He's been examined by several doctors. I can picture each of them with their expensive stethoscopes draped around their necks, saying, "There's nothing in the test results that indicates any of your vessels are obstructed or that you have a neurological disturbance, but here are some medications you can take to help."—They all came to the same conclusion.

Sadiri is unable to keep a predictable schedule because of his illness. But he believes he's been given a gift—that the blindness is not an illness, only an inconvenience. It doesn't seem too problematic for him because in the mist of his darkness, internal light sheds another view, maybe even another world.

At least, that's what Sadiri once told me.

However, I oft notice a change in his vision, but his pride prevents him from asking for assistance. He occasionally bumps into a piece of furniture or trips over a stool or steps on whatever items happen to be on the floor. When we hold hands and walk in public, he doesn't have to give up his pride or individuality, and no one is the wiser.

"What famous artist do you think of when you look at this beautiful park?" he asked as we continued along the path.

"Monet."

Sadiri smiled. "Predictable."

I began to question myself. The only reason I had said Monet was because I could come up with only two—or maybe three—famous paintings of a memorable park scene that I had studied during all my years of schooling. Even so, I knew that the famous park scene envisioned by Monet didn't actually resemble our park. Still, it was a way to appease Sadiri, and by mentioning a famous artist, I was hoping to show my depth and knowledge of nineteenth-century art.

"Hmm." He scratched his chin.

"I can name more nineteenth-century artists, if you like, or even later?" I said. "Pierre-Auguste Renoir..."

He stopped me and began talking in his rich, jovial voice. "Considering Monet, Renoir, or even Seurat is not a bad idea—"

"Well," I replied, a bit agitated, "I'm not sure what you want—"

I started to think about his question again to see if there was actually a good answer. I remembered my pops had told me that not all questions require an answer, especially certain questions about perceptions. Just then, he put a halt to my rambling thoughts.

"Don't be alarmed, Scotty, there's nothing wrong with the painter you selected. But perhaps I can sway your opinion toward a more appropriate selection—a selection as seen through the eyes of the living." He paused for a moment, gathering his thoughts. "What about Mark Bradford, Stephen Wiltshire, Peter Young, Leonid Afremov, Jeremy Lipking, Adam Miller, or Alyssa Monks—just to name a few?"

I shot him a look of puzzlement.

"Never thought of these people, hmm?" He laughed again. "That's because they are all still alive and doing great things in the art world." He continued, "Sometimes we need only look to the present to find a great artist, but in your case, perhaps you should also look at the future. Engage your eye and everything around you

will become a beautiful park scene. That's the true essence of my question. We all experience art differently so what you see as *park* and what I see as *park* are different. Therefore, there is no real park scene. Just dimension."

Chapter 3

Choose Education

We suddenly switched subjects again. We were almost home, so the conversation would necessarily be short.

“Neo-feudalism,” Sadiri said. “The widening of the wealth gap means more poor people could be excluded in the future. You can see this more in Russia and even in South Africa.” His voice seemed to go off into the wind. Ahead of us, I could see the glimmering reflection of the ceramic stars and moon that hang in our window. “We find now that normal people, such as you and I, are progressively controlled by business corporations.”

Not again, I thought to myself. Sadiri had majored in political science, with a minor in economics. He earned his MS

from NYU. But in his early twenties, he met my mother, Ealasaïd, in a judge's chamber. They were both scheduled to attend the swearing-in ceremony to become American citizens. When they met, it was love at first sight; it was the master passion or so Sadiri claimed. They lived together in Brooklyn for a few years and then moved to Europe. Sadiri continued his education while they lived in Hamburg, earning a second master's degree, this one in astrophysics from the University of Hamburg. During that time, he married my mother and soon after, my older brother was born. I was born forty-two months later, and I lived in Germany for about fourteen years before relocating with my pops to NYC. All that time, I knew nothing about economics or political science, for that matter. Anyway, both topics sounded boring. So, in regard to Pop's comment, I needed to do something quick. But we were already very close to the house.

I intentionally tried to throw Sadiri off by changing the subject. "Hey, Pops, I always wondered why you never pursued your PhD." I gave him a moment before continuing. "You certainly talk like a professor," I said, teasing him. "You could be like W.E.B. DuBois and teach history."

Sadiri made a slapping sound with his tongue and then smiled. "You know, Scotty, there's a great quote from General Petro G. Grigorenko. He was fighting for something that is universal—something like human rights for all—and he said, 'Concealment of the historical truth is a crime against the people.'"

What the heck, I thought. A general's quote? I don't want to know about some general!

Sadiri continued anyway. He said, "I actually had the chance to talk with him in New York before his death in 1987. Anyway, we first need to get the historical truth, which has proven to be allusive, and sometimes you must dig up the truth yourself."

I decided to float another possibility, hoping to narrow down his answer to my initial question. "You could be a college

professor at Howard University or Morehouse College in Atlanta. You could teach there—just in case I decide to be part of the HBCU legacy.” I mentioned Morehouse in particular because I was interested in applying there after high school.

“My opinion,” he stated as he widened his eyes, “for me, a PhD is a waste of time. I would end up spending too much money just to be boxed into one professional scheme. My degrees allow me to wander and venture into many facets of concentration without the burden of being typecast. I’m no authority or expert in any one area. I like the freedom to shift into different areas if my mind allows.” He shook his head and chuckled quietly. “Also, I feel insulted by the fact that so few students are aware of their world.” He said this while shaking his finger at me, apparently indicating his strong conviction.

“What do you mean, Pops? Many of us are aware of our world and our surroundings.” I was referring to young people today. My reply was meant to question his evaluation that awareness was beyond our ken. I felt he was simply saying young people possess neither an intelligence related to the world they live in nor an understanding of that world. I was slightly offended, and it showed on my face.

“There is a certain degree of knowledge that is tainted,” he said with a slight smile. “Filled with misinformation, misguided thinking, and misleading information based on pseudoscience that inundates our systems of belief.” I didn’t fully comprehend what he was saying; I simply raised one eyebrow in reply.

“Don’t get me wrong, Scotty,” he said briskly, seeing my dissatisfied expression. “I’m not trying to discourage anyone or accuse anyone of wrongdoing.” He smiled warmly at me. “It takes a great deal of independence, self-discipline, ‘wordsmithery,’ and intellectual curiosity, to name a few traits to transform yourself into a critical thinking PhD-verified professor. This is by no means a simple task. However, one needs to subscribe to the school of

freethinkers who chase the truth, not debatable facts.” He pointed to a billboard conveniently advertising a local college. “You really don’t have to go to school to be smart or intelligent, you know. Actually, it might be the opposite: School might make you dumb.” He laughed delightfully. “I’m slowly recovering from years of schooling, myself,” he muttered under his breath.

Pops waved his hand, greeting a friend across the street who was passing through the other side of the park. “Shalam,” he said, exchanging greetings, then returned to our conversation.—“I would like to reach out to the young minds of tomorrow,” he said. “Only then would I change my professional journey. For me, teaching means enjoying spiritual fulfillment while transferring consciousness to students. We need our memory to be restored. Personal enjoyment would be one reason for me to change my plans, not simply to teach in a school my son is attending.” He ended abruptly.

This isn’t going too good here, I said to myself. Let’s try another subject.

“Do you remember Shelby Johansson from Berufsschule? She played cello.”

He nodded. “Yes, I believe I do remember her—she and her mother both—from the concerts.”

“Well, she texted me saying that she believes herself to be a child of Mars or Venus. I can’t exactly remember which one.”

“Really?” Sadiri asked. “Interesting, but what does that mean?”

“I don’t know, but she has convinced herself of it. I told her I don’t follow the zodiac or understand how she was using it.”

“You said that?”

“Yep.”

“Okay—what was her response?” Sadiri asked in a curious tone.

“She said I didn’t agree because I’m a Capricorn.”

Sadiri smacked his palm against his forehead. "Why didn't I think of that?" he replied sarcastically.

"Don't get astronomy and astrology mixed up, Son," he said, turning more serious. "I think most skeptics will readily agree that astrology is pseudoscience, which is general and open to interpretation. I know quite a few people who use astrology as the basis for how they start their day, or even as the foundation of their relationships. And kudos to those who dig even deeper than the daily newspaper's horoscope. I'm talking about those people who do a magnificent job creating complex synastry reports, or star charts, or who devote themselves to planetary tracking. It's truly amusing." He raised one eyebrow. "However, it may have a placebo effect. For example, if you read your horoscope early in the day and you're able to convince yourself that your board meeting later that day will go well, then guess what? Abracadabra! It does. Moreover, the Sumerian's devised the zodiac."

He took a deep breath—he normally does this—then let it out slowly. Then he pulled out two sticks of chewing gum from his pocket. He passed one stick of gum over to me and held his stick of gum between his fingers, waving it back and forth before bringing it to his mouth.

"There's a big difference, I think. Astrology is an excellent source of entertainment, and we love the zodiac when it predicts positive outcomes. Unfortunately, the descriptions can apply to anyone. Astrology is strictly about self-gratification, which isn't astronomy by any stretch. Rather, pure masturbation."

My desperate attempts to steer the conversation into friendlier territory had backfired. In fact, they had failed miserably. I could feel the conversation moving into yet another facet of his expertise as he tapped me on the shoulder.

"Remember when I was adamant about teaching you how I believed civilization began?" He waited for me to reply, and I acknowledged by nodding my head. "Your first at-home history

lessons started with astrometry, the Seven Tablets of Creation- the Enuma Elish, and H.G. Well's *The Outline of History*. I started there so you could ask yourself the bigger questions of how you and I are to understand the genesis and how to prepare yourself for life's battle. Remember that this future battle can be taken either way, literally or figuratively. Whichever interpretation you prefer, we will battle fiercely over this same subject."

He rubbed his hands together like someone readying themselves to engage in a fight. "Let's look quickly at astrometry and technology."

"Many great modern-day achievements can be attributed to the underrated Nikola Tesla, from developing the light bulb to detecting echoes signals from the Black Knight satellite. But if we delve deeper into Mesopotamia's Parthian Battery, the ziqqurat, Göbekli Tepe, or the first nome Ta-Seti in the land of Kemet, we'll find that Tesla's technology was present thousands of years earlier—I might even suggest circa 36,000 years. Tesla and others attributed many insights to duplicating what was already known—what was already transcribed on some of these megalithic structures. Imhotep is a good example. He was an architect, priest, scribe, poet, vizier, and was perhaps the world's first doctor. We are just rediscovering what was here already." He continued with his flight of ideas.

"I know of a kemetologist who would suggest that we are now in the period of darkness or the hidden period which is representative of the nighttime. This is the last stage, Amun, of the five stages of the sun. In this fifth stage we are dominated by greed, darkness, and fear. We live as a cycle Son, with no beginning and no ending.—And we will repeat the cycle as the Kheper stage, the dawn the innocence, comes and will reveal or provide enlightenment to what was hidden."

I kept listening even though I felt my attention would soon break. He switched back again.

“And what if we consider historical context? For example, some entries in our history books are the result of poorly done research or misinterpretation of historical data, or else the authors simply failed altogether to get it right.” This last he said in a deadpan voice. “Inconsistent information is included in our study materials, and the clones—the good, persuadable students—pay big money simply to become male budgerigars—mere parrots—in order to recall what they have learned and repeat *birdie, birdie, birdie*—in classrooms where they are institutionalized. And for what?” His question was purely rhetorical; anyway, he didn’t wait for an answer. “To regurgitate a flawed history that includes a lot of bullshit. Don’t be fixed in a certain perception of yourself or you might suffer an identity quake.” He looked over for confirmation. “You mean like cognitive dissonance, right?” He smiled at my response.

“Yes,” I said, pushing to get a word in. “I understand how history can be problematic, but I don’t get your point. Do you disagree with compulsory education, or what, Pops?” I gave him a few seconds to think it over, and then I continued, “You were exacting about what you wanted me to learn; you were also very strict regarding the number of hours I was allowed to watch television. I don’t know... maybe by limiting outside influence you thought—what, exactly?” I continued politely, recalling that I had respectfully disagreed with his strict policies—maybe even paranoia. I said, “I think I was allowed to watch TV for one or two hours a week, and the program always had to be preapproved.”

“What about books?” he asked elegantly.

“Yes, Pops,” I acknowledged, “there were no restrictions on reading material.”

“Well, you see I wasn’t really that bad. You were still given a way out.”

He kept his eyes lowered; I had reached him at a visceral level. He raised his chin slowly upward and fixed his eyes on me.

“I was forced to be that way, Scotty.” He paused, looking away, then returned his gaze to me. “As a parent I had to exercise my fundamental ‘liberty interest’ based on what I thought your education should include.”

There was a slight interruption in our conversation at this point. We were passing our local bodega, Douglas & Clyde Deli Grocery, and we clearly heard two young boys skylarking by the large glass door entrance. I’m guessing they may have been eleven or twelve years old. What caught our attention was the profanity coming from their mouths as they exited the store. We slowed our pace, and Sadiri kept a wide berth of the boys. We still glanced over our shoulders. They appeared to be harmless. One boy was dressed in a white T-shirt with the words EXECUTIVE ORDER SECTION 230 on the front, but a red circle-backslash symbol tore across the words, repudiating its legitimacy. Both boys were clean in appearance and, yes, laden with swag. They wore large adult-sized pants that collapsed below their backsides. The boys’ movements must have made Sadiri anxious; we were about two yards away from them.—He extended his hand to me, gripping his fingers in mine before continuing the conversation.

“I had two educational models to choose from—one that emphasized command and obedience and another that was driven by compulsion and conformity. You learned better at home, at your own pace, because you were generally interested in what you were learning. Ultimately, time will decide.”

He began to smile again. “I filtered out the nonsense so you could focus on the most important aspects of self-development.” He raised his head, looking straightforward with pride. “And now you’ve learned values and how to use your initiative.”

Chapter 4

For the Record

My mood suddenly changed. I could relate to what Sadiri was saying because once, in my occasional hours of idleness, I had come across a conflicting record of events in a questionable history book.

“I agree, Pops,” I told him. “I was reading a printed record of the Atlantic slave trade between the 1500s and 1800s. This book was actually a textbook used in the educational system. It described slaves as ‘workers’ when it discussed immigration at the time.”

He looked at me quite surprised. “Transatlantic slaves... economic migrants....” He let out a laugh, deeper than normal.

“Forgive me for a little bit of history. But there are many inconsistencies throughout history, and many more can be found today, in all aspects of our lives,” he proclaimed calmly. “Many mentally divide and enslave us all. However—” He began to shake his head in agreement with his own assertion. “Perhaps the statement about workers—workers, *not* migrants—would be correct if the book had been describing the Aboriginal Anishinaabe, or the Niiji Indian, originally referred to as the copper-colored race of Turtle Island.”

When he said those words I could clearly envision a Powwow with beautiful people dancing dressed in the old style jingle regalia. Then I heard the highs and lows blue note music of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor’s *Hiawatha Overture* playing in my head. Sadiri continued.

He stared at me intensely and said, “Remember, Son, choose good people and ideas to represent.” He stressed the last word—*represent*. “Because many others out there choose to *misrepresent*. Also be engaged and be prepared to vote the squalid mortals out if they do not represent the people! Do you still have that book I gave you a few years ago?”

“That’s too vague, Pops,” I said curtly, “you’ve given me many books in the past.”

He giggled in agreement. “You’re right. I was referring to the book *Lies My Teacher Told Me*.”

“Yes,” I replied dryly. “But that book makes me kind of sad, Pops. It’s filled with so many principles and facts that it made me realize how differently some people learn from the ways I learn, and how the lessons that teachers teach as truth can control people’s minds.”

Sadiri nodded, fully agreeing with me. “And the savage inequalities in the school system. But there is good news that we should herald. People are waking up now and not just meditating over their aging bodies. We’re not in the Dark Ages anymore.

We're talking about the "Poison Squad" and questioning more and more things like how and what we eat. We're able to openly discuss different conspiracies and debunk them, if necessary, and we're rediscovering past knowledge and uncovering further enlightenment in technology and science. I believe its time," he said.

"I honestly think we, as a society, are ready to deal with the uncomfortable, ugly, and somewhat scary discussions about our true history. And, on the subject of critical discourse analysis, there's another good person out there teaching good stuff. Ijeoma Oluo's book *So you want to talk about race* offers a contemporary take on the issues. Another person, Dr. DiAngelo wrote an awakening book about *fragility* and how it relates to the status quo. But moreover, she explores what it means to be self-aware. I gave you two examples."—In comfort, Sadiri lightly stroked his beard.

"The world is changing, Son. Embrace it, and remember to carry on with life. *Always* carry on with life... and when you're challenged, find people who understand you, who can be part of your support group."

A light breeze began to blow the leaves on the ground in a circular motion. Sadiri stopped and focused his gaze intently, as if he were reading the wind. Then, we continued walking. We were fast approaching our house. Sadiri looked again at me.

"When you do, do it for the group and not for yourself." He added. "A famous socialist named Eugene Victor Debs, who lived in the 1860s, was a testament to people who want to change this place and make it better for all, even if it means going to jail." Sadiri quoted from one section of Debs's speech,—“I would be ashamed to admit that I had risen from the ranks. When I rise it will be with the ranks, and not from the ranks.””

I was a bit puzzled by the message, but then again Sadiri seemed to have an uncanny way of delivering his allegory lessons by using history as a reference. His messages seemed to hint at

reality without fully exposing its depth and meaning. It was like a secret message hidden inside a professor's mundane lecture.

We arrived at the house. I was relieved! I enjoy my conversations with Sadiri, but sometimes I feel he only enjoys our conversations because they allow him to voice his opinions. I also know he misses Mom and that he would have enjoyed his conversations more if he were speaking with a person of equal life experience and wisdom.

We stopped just before the short metal gate to the entrance that leads to the stairway. He turned again and looked at me.

"Today was dinner... tomorrow we'll talk dessert," he said with a satisfying grin.

"You mean *macaroons haute couture* and *La Madeline au Truffle* shavings and, ah yes, Half Baked Ben and Jerry's on the side?"

I made a gesture with my left hand in a divine praise, which is commonly used by the French, by pressing my two fingers and my thumb and together slowly raising my fingertips to my lips, kissing the tips mildly, then blissfully flinging my fingers upward into the air.

He giggled with charm and delight. "No, Scotty. Tomorrow for dessert, we'll be talking economics."