

Peni: Extracts

Working Holiday

I transported Penelope as soon as she settled, and greeted her arrival. She looked a little flustered. I enquired, “Are you OK?”

“Jackie dear, it’s fine, although I don’t think I will ever get used to this means of travel. It is so bizarre, especially when you are not expecting it. Anyway, I am here now, and I would like to spend some time here studying your incredible machinery. I will be ready in thirty-five minutes and will stay for ten days. Is that acceptable?”

“That’s fine. Although we are rather busy with the end of the world right now.”

Her head tilted for a moment, before she appeared to remember, and batted back, “Oh that Gaia thing, yes; it is a nuisance isn’t it. Now, I am hoping it is OK if my sister Phœbe comes with me, as she is great with computers and well; we both fancied a working holiday. Good. See you here soon, now how do I get back?”

“Peni, bring whatever you need. Do you need an office or a laboratory?”

“Ah yes that, well it is all the same thing really, except quite different you know.” She stilled for a moment, as her mind worked quickly, “Will ten days be long enough?”

I was sure this was going to be a lot of fun, and replied with humour, “How long is a String Theory?”

She looked at me intensely for a moment before retorting, “Precisely.”

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Kids

The Sun and the Moon became mere memories; it was difficult to tell the difference between day and night, so horrendous was the atrocity and our place within it. A new generation was born only to know darkness. The air continued to cool, and each day became like the dread of winter, as wind-borne icy fingers dug within our marrow, dooming us to be frozen alive. Miles of deep black clouds

had taken the Sun from us, and the general foreboding was that it would only get worse.

One morning I breakfasted at the University, and seeing Weid Noi and Ali chuckling about something, intended to go over and share the joke. However, Peni called me over to join her; “Jackie dear. My problem is that I begin to understand, and then I don’t. Gangling is lovely, but ... distracting at times, overly helpful when I need to concentrate. Can you teach me the language of the Ancestors, it is becoming my imperative.”

“Yes, and No. I can either send you to the island school, or you could try interfacing with the Core’s language programme, which I strongly advise against—it cost Kay and me years of our lives, comatose.”

“Oh! I don’t like the sound of that one bit. No matter, back to school it is then; I recently took a vocational course in origami, so it should be no problem; it keeps my fingers occupied when my mind is working. Where?”

“Peni I...”

“And I also need to move here; that means I will be working with you constantly, won’t that be nice. We’ll make great progress, what do you say? Great! I’ll send word to my husband to prepare the house for transfer and ... the pets? ... no-no, the goats?...”

“The kids, dearest sister.”

“Ah yes, the children, that was it. Well they really miss me, don’t they Phœbe.”

“If you say so, sister dearest.” Phœbe added, “Same here, with my things Jackie, but can I have Miss Priscilla Holloway’s house if it is no longer being used?”

I gawked at Phœbe, Peni cut in, “Jack, the old language, I need to begin learning it today.”

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The S Word

I stood, intent on leaving immediately, but Phœbe spotted Ramone, and soon they were hugging and gabbling, clearly long-lost friends. I looked at Peni, “Explain please.”

She looked at me, looked askance, and remembered, “Ah. Ramondo, he, they had a thing in college. They better not end up doing it all over the place again, when I have serious work to do.”

I looked at n'Gnung, and found all my trusty team were listening intently, as Peni added, "The last straw was when they did it in the fountain, although fortunately they managed to keep most of their clothes on that time. Then Daddy bawled them out, and I never saw Ramondo again until just now."

"Peni, what exactly were they doing in the fountain?"

I heard sharp intakes of breath all around, but Peni nonchalantly replied, "Perfecting a device for wireless underwater camera signals of course, why do you ask?"

I noted that extremely clever particle physicists may not actually orbit our real world. But she surprised me by saying, "Ahha! You were thinking of the *S* word weren't you? Silly me: Note to self: I must be careful with words when speaking to non-academics. You are all naughty minded children, and we will enjoy working with you. Phœbe, stop teasing the poor guy. Come."

Her statement elicited a mass exodus to luncheon, as not only did I leave with my trusted team, the scatty scientific sisters, but also the magmanic Mexican's...

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Apple Pie

Peni came to us some time later. "I've just finished my first cookery class at the University, what do you think?"

She laid before us a large, round apple pie, and serving, gave us each a large slice. It was heavy, as stodgy as she was flaky. We all politely tried the concoction.

n'Gue took a large bite, and tried to swallow, "Interesting." He pulled a spice from his mouth and added, "Peni, why are there small trees in this?"

"Oh. Sorry, those are cloves, and you're not supposed to eat them. They give great flavour, don't they?"

"Pungent. Is there custard, or cream to help it slip down?"

"No, we learn that next semester: Eggs are a binary system, but I need to understand the relativity."

"Speaking of relativity, why is there a pastry square on top?"

"That's my signature, and also my little joke about squaring the circle. So, what do you think?"

"The top crust is crispy, burnt; the taste is great, but the pastry base is a bit stodgy, undercooked; you didn't use bottom heat?"

“Why of course not, I’m a top-down person.”

I dropped the slice of pie on my plate and said, “A brick.”

“What’s that?”

“That is British English Peni. A brick is a great person. I think you should share this with others; share the feast.”

Peni departed to inflict her formative culinary arts upon others. We all heaved a sigh of relief, “The taste was great,” “Heavy,”...